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Negotiating ethnicity in diaspora: 'Our children are the best'. A case of academic achievement of Latvian pupils in England

Introduction

Human beings have always moved around, however with the creation of national borders and nation-states this move can be more challenging to both individuals and countries. The European Union has made formal side of migration within the EU countries easy; nevertheless, there are still social, economic, demographic and identity consequences for both individuals and countries. There is also a global trend of increasing movements across national borders and the issues of immigration and emigration are passionately debated not only by politicians, but also by mass media and lay people.

People on the move find themselves at the intersection of multiple, sometimes conflicting, subject positions. While identity is a complex issue for all individuals, it is particularly complicated for those who reside between two or more cultures. Experiences of these people provide a unique context for the study of identity production, performance and transformation. Therefore, 'what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on ... "in-between" spaces ... that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation ...' (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1–2).

In this paper I focus on experiences of Latvians in England attempting to maintain a connection with other members of their ethnic group and with the country of origin and also find their place in British society. I explore how Latvians in England position themselves in relation to their 'home' country Latvia and English people and other migrant and ethnic minority groups in their 'host' country when discussing the study that claimed that Latvian children in England are underachieving (Cara, 2015; Strand et al, 2015). Identities in this paper are seen as social constructions (Hall, 2014) that are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. I also use the concept of diaspora as a stance (Brubaker, 2005) in relation to identity production that allows simultaneous exploration the relationships between the two worlds - homeland and host country in the context of broader political, economic, and cultural transformations. The central point of this paper is investigation of the negotiation of Latvian diaspora identity through the implicit patterns of meaning drawing on the analysis of the discursive repertoires (Wetherell et al, 2001).

Dynamic identities in Diaspora

Ethnicity as a social phenomenon can be perceived as a specific form of collective identity that is formed by a specific historical situation (Comaroff, 1996) and that is defined by the shared characteristics, particularly the cultural traditions and languages, of an entire ethnic group. The subjective dimension of ethnicity refers to ethnic identity and group formation processes through construction, maintenance and reconstitution of socio-psychological boundaries, that is defining the relationships of inclusion (similarities) and exclusion (differences). In this paper I am mostly concerned with the interaction between these two processes in production of one's ethnic identity.

The oldest approach in social sciences suggests that ethnicity derives from the kin and clan structure of human society, and is something ascribed or fixed at birth, and for this reason is rather rigid and enduring (Geertz, 1963; Isaacs, 1975). Ethnicity can be seen as one of the assumed 'givens' that exists prior to all experiences or interactions (Geertz, 1963) that gives people a sense of belonging and self-esteem because one cannot be denied or rejected (Isaacs, 1975), and ethnicity cannot be taken away.

The primordial approach has been widely discussed, criticised and opposed (e.g. Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1974; Eller and Coughlan, 1993; Eriksen, 1993; Comaroff, 1996; Brubaker, 2002), above all the apriority and ineffability of ethnicity it advocates. Eller and Coughlan (1993) argued ethnicity is negotiated in social interaction and it should not be dissociated. Moreover, ethnicity is not fixed; on the contrary people construct it and then question and reconstruct in different contexts. Although some primordialist (Isaacs, 1975) acknowledge the dynamic and changing nature of ethnicity, the approach itself cannot explain the changes or how they arise.

Despite the limitations of the primordialist view on ethnicity, it is useful to remember its very core - the value and the emotional attachments of ethnicity and the subsequent power that it creates through affectivity. It needs to be acknowledged that even if ethnicity is not a given, most people still believe it to be so. Ethnicity is experienced as a guarantor of eternity and continuation that connects generations (Smith, 1981) that gives them a sense of belonging, feelings of pride, continuity with the past, and survival beyond the self (de Vos, 1995); here the blood ties or assumed ties of Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community' govern as the most powerful motivation of humankind.

Later approaches to ethnicity focusing on its socio-psychological nature suggested that ethnicity is a matter of perception and experience of 'us' and 'them' (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1978; Fishman, 1989; Steinberg, 1981; Eriksen, 1991; Comaroff, 1991; Eller and Coughlan, 1993; Brubaker, 2002; Hall, 1996; 2014). It is not that all objective aspects of ethnicity have been now rejected, but they are viewed as associated with experiences and contexts. Moreover, as any of the characteristics of ethnicity are not fixed or easily measured, as a concept it is vague and ever-changing and needs to be understood as a dynamic social process that involves individual and group decision making rather than a static 'given' position.

Barth (1969) was the first to suggest that ethnic boundaries are psychological boundaries created by individuals rather than solely relying on existing cultural

differences. Moreover, he also argued that the social interaction not only does not erode the boundaries, but actually helps to maintain them. The similarities and/or differences that are used for positioning are only those that individuals perceive as important in specific historical and social context (Steinberg, 1981; Comaroff, 1991). Consequently, ethnicity is situational and experiential, not innate (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1978).

However, Barth's approach was criticized (Eriksen, 1991) for being ahistorical and only accounting for human agency in the form of individuals and groups, not considering social structural aspects as set by wider social and historical processes. Ethnic myths (Steinberg, 1981) that people use for creation and maintenance of ethnic differences and similarities must be unpacked and deconstructed (Steinberg, 1981; Eller and Coughlan, 1993) considering situational and broader structural factors (Wimmer, 2008). Ethnicity is a historically specific response to social context and interactions between ethnic groups, although this is not to say that once formed it is not experienced as real and objective (Comaroff, 1996; Cara, 2013).

Moreover, social groups provide their members not only with social identification, but also the emotional and value significance of such membership (Tajfel, 1981) and help to maintain a positive self-concept, that is derived largely from group identification, by favourably comparing their in-group to out-groups (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Social identities according to this theory are socially constructed according to situational pragmatics. Brewer (1991) in her work argued that social identification for individuals satisfies two main needs: to belong to a group, while maintaining distinctiveness.

As Brubaker (2002) suggests ethnicity is not a thing in the world, but a perspective of the world and needs to be explained in relational, processual, dynamic and eventful terms. In this way ethnicity exists only through our perceptions, interpretations, categorisations, representations and identifications. It is not enough to say that ethnicities are constructed; we must also explore how they are constructed, how people identify themselves, perceive others and interpret the world in ethnic terms.

Although some earlier theorists perceived ethnicity as primordial, an 'assumed given' (Geertz, 1963; Isaacs, 1975), current approach views ethnicity as subjective and acquired (Comaroff, 1992; Hall, 1996; Brubaker, 2002) and focuses on the fluid, situational and conditional nature of ethnicity (Jenkins, 1997; Shukla, 2003; Shi, 2005; Lukose, 2007; Wimmer, 2008; Dzenovska, 2013; Hall, 2014; Burton et al., 2010). In this paper ethnicity is regarded as a socially constructed (Hall, 1996) discursive system of classifications used to assign people to groups (Cohen, 1978) to maintain 'satisfied' and superior individual self-concept (Tajfel, 1981) that is derived from knowing that they are members of a particular ethnic group. Since ethnicity is situational and experiential, not innate, ethnicity has to be thought of in relational, dynamic and eventful terms rather than as a substance, an entity of individuals or groups (Hall, 1990; 1996; 2014; Brubaker, 2002). Ethnic identity in this paper is approached as a contextual and relational *positioning*.

Before I proceed to the context of this study, it is important to note that I am using term diaspora rather than migrants or transnational community in relation to Latvians in England. The use of this term fits with the focus of the study and with the overall

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Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

approach and view of ethnicity as something fluid and relational. I am following the suggestion of Brubaker (2005) and view diaspora 'not as a bounded entity but as an idiom, stance and claim' (p12).

The use of the word diaspora has three aspects that are central and enduring (Brubaker, 2005). First, diaspora entails dispersal of a population across physical space and across nation-state borders. Second, of central importance is an orientation to a "homeland" as a significant source of value, legitimacy, and/or identity. Finally, a diaspora framework often emphasizes boundary maintenance with respect to the host country.

The concept of diaspora in this paper is approached as a type of consciousness and social structure that involves a certain mode of cultural production (Vertovec & Cohen, 1999). One way of thinking about "diaspora" in relation to identity production and formation is that this term combines the two worlds of homeland and host country and allows exploration of the relationships between the two in the context of broader political, economic, and cultural transformations that take place. While terms immigrant and emigrant usually focus more on the move and just one of the points that of a destination or that of an origin. While there is a greater overlap between "diaspora" and "transnationalism", these two terms still have different emphases. The term "transnationalism" tends to focus on social action across national boundaries in the form of networks, whereas the term "diaspora" is more focused on the imaginative worlds and identity productions (Shukla, 2003), whether migrants actually and continually cross these physical and symbolic boundaries, after initial move, or not.

Diaspora studies, by thoughtfully exploring hybridity and demonstrating creativity and the possibilities of new cultural and national identity formations, has helped to reveal that identity formation in diaspora does not always results in an assimilation. Migration research tend to focus too much on the one-sided relationship between home and emigrants or host and immigrants where diaspora offers a more open approach to explore complexities of non-binary world. Notions of hybridity are used to demonstrate that diasporic identities are produced through difference, a difference situated between the "here" of the host country and the "there" of origin (Bhabha 1993). Diaspora wants to be different from 'them' here and 'there' and yet strives to be like both of 'them', too. Latvians are not a traditional diaspora but looking at Latvians through the lenses of diaspora as a category of practice, a stance and a claim (Brubaker, 2005) allows for acknowledgement of ethnicity as becoming and producing rather than just being out there as a linear development of discovery, but still accepting affective positioning of one's ethnicity.

When Hall (2014) talks about diaspora he suggests, there are at least two distinct ways how to approach 'cultural identity'. The first positions 'cultural identity' as a sort of collective 'one true self', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common and that provides us with constant and continuous frames of reference and meaning in the world that is constantly changing. This 'oneness' is the truth that each member of that group must discover to construct their identity. However, as Hall (2014) suggests maybe one needs to think not about the discovery but the production of identity by retelling the ethnic story rather than rediscovery of something what is already out there written by somebody else.

This second position recognises unique aspects of dynamic diasporic identities and look beyond point of similarities between home and diaspora but explore critical points of difference which creates 'us' and tells 'our story' of 'what we have become' (Hall, 2014). When we talk about identities of diaspora we need to recognize the crucial role of all the ruptures and discontinuities that are linked to 'becoming' as well as to 'being' with positioning oneself in the narratives of the future as much as in the narratives of the past. As Hall (2014) points out:

It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'. (p 226)

This second view of ethnicity is much more disturbing, but also exciting to explore identities of diaspora as not proceeding in a straight line from some fixed origin of 'home' to eventual 'host' country identity, but engaging with the infinite postponement of meaning, the endless repositioning that is continuing to unfold as one speaks. Furthermore, as Hall (2014) points out, we all write and speak from a particular place and time; always 'in context', positioned.

The creation of ethnic identity when living outside one's country of origin can be seen as an ongoing process influenced by changes within the ethnic group itself and in relation to others as "neither culture nor ethnicity is 'something' that people 'have', or indeed, to which they 'belong'. They are, rather, complex repertoires which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows" (Jenkins, 1997, p. 14).

Always in process, identities constantly transform and are increasingly fragmented, constructed across very different and often even opposed discursive practices and positions (Hall, 1996). Paradoxically, as people move across borders, ideas of ethnically distinct places become even more prominent and relevant (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Diaspora members, living on borderlands, form ethnic communities clustering around remembered or imagined 'homelands', practise 'authentic home cultures' that are even more authentic than in home countries, to fix and stabilise their floating lives to make sense of their continually shifting subjectivities.

Latvian Diaspora in the UK

In 2018 Eurostat stated that Latvia had the third steepest decrease in population across all EU countries mostly due to net migration. Latvia, with a current population of 1.96 million, has lost about 25 percent of its residents since regaining independence in 1991. From the point when Latvia joined the EU in 2004 its population has decreased significantly. The UN predicts that by 2050, it will have lost an additional 22 percent of its current population. Not only Latvia has negative natural change, its population is one of the most mobile in Europe.

Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention,
Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

According to statistical data largest Latvian diaspora reside in the United Kingdom. Although there is no exact data available, according to the official data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs there were 76,816 Latvian nationals who declared their residency in the UK in January 2019. The actual number is most probably higher as many people do not declare their residency and are still registered in Latvia.

Even though, the rate of emigration has slightly decreased in recent years it remains very high (Mieriņa, 2015; Hazans, 2018) and reimmigration rate is very low. While Latvian politicians think that improvement of economic situation could make many Latvians return home and diaspora policy makes emphasis on return, existing evidence suggest that there are many other non-economic factors that are in play here.

One of the crucial factors mentioned by many representatives of Latvian diaspora is the quality of work and life they can expect to do when and if they return (Zača et al, 2018). Some Latvians, indeed return, but most are making home in their host countries. Most emigrants do not plan to return, mainly because they are satisfied with their lives abroad more than they used to be in Latvia (Hazans, 2016a; 2016b). Moreover, in recent 10 years annually thousands of children with both or at least one parent being Latvian national are born outside Latvia. For example, Latvian Embassy in London report accepting around 2,000 applications to register newborns as Latvians citizens comparing to around 20,000 children born in Latvia every year. So, it is important to research how Latvians settle in other countries and how they position themselves in their host countries and how they reconstitute their relationships with Latvia and form diaspora identity.

When exploring construction of the identity of Latvian Diaspora it is essential to place it in the context of the Soviet legacy of understanding what ethnicity is. As many researchers (Motyl, 1990; Hosking, 1992, 1999; Slezkine, 1994; Martin, 2000; Suny, 2001) Soviet ethnic engineering created salient and united nations by fostering and promoting ethnic and national particularism (Slezkine, 1994) through korenizatsiia (indigenisation), affirmative action and territorial delineation (Martin, 2000) as well as naming, census categories, statistical enumeration, mapping, passportisation and many other every day practices fixed the more fluid distinctions among people of different ethnicities. The awareness of ethnicity was privileged and encouraged in the Soviet Union (Slezkine, 1994). This encouraged the Soviet population to believe that one's ethnicity was inherent, fundamental and a very important attribute of all people.

At the same time, unlike in America, Britain or Australia, 'Soviet' was never considered an ethnic or national identity and was ineffective in attempts to serve as an identification at all-Union level (Roeder, 1991; Suny, 1993; Slezkine, 1994; Brubaker, 1996). This incongruity between national territories of the Soviet Union and individual ethnicities coupled with the failure to create civic identities, has had a great impact on understandings of ethnicity in the post-Soviet period.

This view of ethnicity, while possible in theory, in reality, in our ethnically mixed and very mobile world, can provide a challenge and require employing some specific performative repertoires to support the idea. In the case of Latvia, for example, largest ethnic minority group – Russians – are often portrayed in discourse as part of an

Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention,
Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

enemy nation which wants to destroy the Latvian nation (Lieven, 1993; Pabriks & Purs, 2001; Muzergues, 2004; Golubeva, 2010; Golubeva & Kazoka, 2010). While the 'Other' could be included in civic nations, they cannot be incorporated into ethnic Latvian nation since membership of this community is considered to be fixed and hereditary and one can only be born into it. Here, the residency is less important than blood lineage to be accepted as loyal members of the Latvian nation and legitimate members of Latvian society.

However, now when Latvians themselves reside in many other EU countries, it is interesting to investigate how this understanding of ethnicity and nation plays out in their own identity construction. If one's legitimacy in a particular territory can only be claimed by their ancestors born there and the nation is understood as an ethnically homogeneous people how Latvians can narrate their position in their host countries and disruption, if at all with their inherited and potentially indestructible relationship with Latvia. This is the context in which the production and positioning of Latvian diaspora needs to be understood.

The paper will examine how ethnic identity is negotiated using area of education as an example. Education has a central role in the process of identity reproduction in any nation and in case of diaspora and their multi-positionality in and between two cultures turns education into a field of identity redefinition (Salt, 1985). Additionally, educational opportunities and achievement also has a strong influence as inclusion into the host state's education system contributes to the defining of the relationship between the diasporans and the host country (Loewenberg and Wass, 1997).

As my final remarks in the introduction part of this paper I would like shortly discuss the position of Latvians as diaspora in the UK and other countries. While in the world the use of the word 'diaspora' is not new at all (Brubaker, 2005), in Latvia it first appeared in public discourse only in 2004. When the Programme for support of Latvian diaspora 2004-2009 was developed and approved. In 2012 the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012-2018 were developed as government document which defined cooperation with diaspora as one of the action lines for Latvian government to follow. Then the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research at the University of Latvia was created in 2014. It is funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs for most of their research to focus on Latvian Diaspora. Finally, on 1 November 2018, Latvian Parliament supported in the final reading the adoption of a new Diaspora Law to strengthen the diaspora's ties with Latvia, their sense of belonging to Latvia and maintain active and mutual cooperation.

The legislation also provides for tangible measures intended to promote remigration and support those emigrants who want to return to Latvia. The Law defines the diaspora as a community of Latvian citizens, nationals and other individuals, including their family members, permanently residing outside Latvia. The law also defines diaspora organisations and remigration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is tasked with developing and coordinating the implementation of the national diaspora policy. The Diaspora Advisory Council, which is a consultative institution established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to coordinate development, implementation and assessment of diaspora policy. However, the Latvian situation is far not unique in this

sense as diaspora programmes are becoming increasingly common tools of governments across the world (Gamlen, 2014).

As Brubaker (2015) notes diaspora is a stance and a claim and the specific definition and use of the word diaspora not only in public discourse, but also in the legislation of Latvia positions the development of the identities of Latvians abroad in a certain way. It is interesting to note that while some researchers (Kolsto, 1993; 1996; Shlapentokh, Sendich and Payin, 2016) use this term when discussing position and identities of Russians or other ethnic groups in Latvia, it has almost never been used before by Latvian state and Latvians prior to the Great Departure (Dzenovska, 2013) to address Latvians who reside abroad.

The use of the diaspora concept could suggest a significant reconfiguration of how the nation is thought and practised in modern-day Latvia, however, there are no current studies that would fully address this issue. Surprisingly little is written about Latvian diaspora in academia. Most of existing studies come from an anthropologist Dace Dzenovska (e.g. Dzenovska, 2005; 2013) and a social scientist of geographical mobility Aija Lulle (e.g. Lulle, 2011; 2014; Lulle et al., 2015; Lulle & Bužinska, 2017) and some research carried out by the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research (e.g. Hazans 2016a, 2018; Mieriņa 2016a; 2016b; Mieriņa et al, 2018). However, despite numerous studies by the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Research none of those questioned how Latvian diaspora make sense of their lives, but rather investigate why people left and what would bring them back.

Less numerous, but more in-depth studies by Lulle and Dzenovska focused on individual stories, transnationalism and performative identities, with Dzenovska (2013) calling for a 'meticulous tracing of relations and practices of emplacement and displacement within national(ist) interpretive discourses, and this is the emerging problem-space (Dzenovska, 2015) where the current study is situated.

Methodology

Production of identities are not explicit and straightforward, but rather involve arguments, opinions and attitudes that often are contradictory, and discourse analytical approach can provide an explanation of how identities come to be; how they are performed and interpreted. Here, identities of diaspora are not approached as cognitive representations of relevant and distinguishable features of groups, but as social representations (Moscovici, 1984) in the form of situated discursive practices (e.g. Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1991; Rapley, 1998; LeCouteur, Rapley, & Augoustinos, 2001) following the tradition of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1993; Billig, 2009).

The broad term 'discursive psychology' draws on a variety of different approaches to the study of language, one of them being the argumentative and persuasive nature of language (e.g., Billig, 1987 and 1991) to examine what language users are doing discursive contexts. This approach has a very pragmatic view on language and invites to study the ways that people use language, and discourse and social interaction are central concepts here (Edwards, 1997).

Representatives of discursive approach to language (Billig, 2009) argue that language-based phenomena cannot be understood in terms of inner cognitive processes. While one can study identities by paying attention to what someone says about themselves and people around them, but these words do not represent the inner, cognitive structure (Billig, 2006; Glucksberg, 2001). When speakers use words those are not merely a sign of the underlying cognitive process of schematizing and categorizing (Billig, 1987; 1991; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) but need to be seen as a stance in a debate.

When exploring diaspora identities that are a stance (Brubaker, 2005) this discursive approach allows exploring how people position themselves on different issues where they know there is difference between 'here' and 'there'. In this way, people's opinions take their rhetorical meaning in opposition to their counter-opinions (Billig, 1991), in case of diaspora expressed by host country and homeland. As identities are a matter of positioning, then they must be understood in terms other positions they relate or oppose. The assumption is that meanings are not the stable properties of groups but are constructed, maintained and transformed through language in social contexts; therefore, identities are of performative nature as they are constructed and enacted in interactions (Abell, Stokoe, and Billig, 2004).

This methodological approach suggests that we observe not only direct words people are using, but what speakers are doing when they are using these words (Billig, 2009) while engaging in complex social activity. People do not have just an individual stance, they engage with general beliefs and shared ideas; they engage in social representing through interpretative discourses or accounts (Wetherell, 1998; 2007; 2008). As people produce their identities through interpretative discourses in social situations they gain their meaning from the rhetorical activities of those situations (Billig 1987, 1991, Edwards and Potter 1993b).

This study of Latvian diaspora identities involves examining how Latvians express their opinions on a specific topic and what they do in terms of their positioning in relation to Latvians in Latvia and British society when giving their account of the situation. In this respect, this study is of production Latvian diaspora identity, not of a 'given' category lying behind the activity of accounting.

There are now a variety of approaches in the discursive tradition, ranging from the detailed analysis of the sequential organization of talk as in conversation analysis (e.g. Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996), to identifying broad patterns of culturally available patterns of meaning, as in critical discursive work (e.g. Billig, 1987; Wetherell, 1998). The current paper is informed by the latter approach and aims to identify the 'argumentative threads' or interpretative accounts (Wetherell, 1998; 2007; 2008 Augoustinos, LeCouteur, & Soyland, 2002; Bekerman, 2002) that Latvians in England use in their discussions of academic achievement of Latvian children in England.

As the virtual world has become the current platform for diasporas across the world reflecting their transnational life, my material consists of comments from Facebook and draugiem.lv to the publication of the results of a study focusing on the academic achievement of children with Latvian as their home language in schools in England. The research first came out in 2015 (Cara, 2015) and an additional interview

explaining the study was published in 2017 after Minister of Education visited England. As the study was seen as controversial there were many comments with Latvian diaspora expressing their views and sharing their experiences of education in England. The data source of the analysis are four online discussions prompted by the study and the interview: 3 discussions took place on Facebook in 2017 and produced overall 444 comments and one discussion took place on draugiem.lv platform in 2015 and yielded 308 comments.

The comments on social media are often quite expressive and in some ways extreme compared to generic views that can be expressed in a less anonymous situation, so they represent the most provocative views (Danet & Herring, 2007). This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting any online computer-mediated texts. Nevertheless, these texts also provide naturally formed material formed in a social space without interference from the researcher. (More references on limitation and advantages of this type of research)

This study accounts for how Latvians use language to convey their diasporic identities. I analyse their comments to explore implicit patterns of meaning to locate discursive (Wetherell et al. 2001) or interpretive (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) repertoires of Latvian diaspora identities. These repertoires are patterns of meaning which evaluate experiences and narrate events from a personal view-point, but which are always ideological and social, that is, constructed according to the values of the writer to present oneself to the readers. By re-reading on numerous occasions of the comments I tried to locate issues and themes, which shaped these repertoires. When reading the material, I was focusing on a common language which includes accumulated ideas and associations that are 'codes' that make sense to writer and reader because of the established interconnections of meanings and associations that create an identity through recurrent themes (Foucault 1972) among Latvian diaspora. In the case of diaspora themes in this study were mainly concerned with difference (van Dijk, 1993; 2002) and those themes which discussed similar issues I then assembled into a number of discursive repertoires. In the findings section, I briefly account for the repertoires that were found, and how they were constructed.

Findings

Similarly, to existing research ((Strand, Malberg & Hall, 2015) the study in the centre of the debates (Cara, 2015) demonstrated that the academic achievement of Latvian children in England is well below average across all levels of compulsory education and also compared not only to those with English as their home language, but also to overall group of pupils with English as additional language. As further analysis of the data suggested Latvian children were disproportionately present in specific local authorities where there was a higher than average proportion of individuals with low qualifications and those in low qualified jobs as well as a relatively high proportion of low-quality schools.

The study focused on children with Latvian as their home language in state-maintained schools in England and used quantitative data from various English administrative datasets. The main data came from the National Pupil Database, that is a census type

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Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

of data that is controlled by the Department for Education, based on multiple data collections from individuals age 2-21 in state funded education in England. Data are matched and linked using pupil names, dates of birth and other personal and school characteristics, to pupils' attainment and exam results over a lifetime school attendance.

The results of the study were seen as controversial and not trustworthy among Latvian diaspora and many people provided their views in social media, to demonstrate why the results are 'wrong' and do not reflect the 'real' situation of Latvians in England. Over 700 comments were reviewed for this study, but not all of them were relevant to the topic; as it is often with comments on social media some steered off into other less relevant or completely irrelevant topics.

The focus of this paper is a discourse around the claim made by individuals from Latvian diaspora that Latvian children, because of their Latvian descent, achieve better (contrary to the findings from the study in the centre of the comments) than native English children. However, concurrently the same comments focused on how the results of the study were tweaked or fabricated by Latvian government to present a negative picture of Latvian diaspora lives in the UK to stop people leaving Latvia. Finally, there was another interpretive repertoire used that compared Latvian and English education systems in some cases to present English system as a better one, but in some other cases arguing a completely opposite view of Latvian system being better.

In the following three section I will consider each interpretative repertoire separately and explains the themes and issues that form the repertoire and what Latvian diaspora identities they produce.

[How they can write this? Our children even surpass English children](#) 😏

Our children are the best and we all know this better than anyone else

'Oh my God, such nonsense!!!! Our children, Lithuanians and Polish children are the best in their classes! Many are moved a year up because they are too advanced! I have lived here for 12 years that is why I know it very well! How somebody can just lie like that?'

'You can hear across all different countries and you will know that Latvian children have much higher grades than local English, Irish or Swedish children.'

'I know many migrants, but I do not know any Latvian, Lithuanian or Polish [person] that had bad grades. We have a great sense of responsibility and Latvians above all. Just assessing a child and knowing that a child is an immigrant without knowing where they come from, teachers can guess that a child is Latvian. My older children were told in a college straightaway that they are certainly Latvian because they surpass everybody. Yes, and English are really lazy in their learning and very rarely they want to study. They just go to school and after school they struggle with English grammar.'

Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention,
Columbia University 2-4 May 2019

'Such a disgrace! How somebody can write this. It is completely opposite. I have met many immigrant children – Latvians, Hungarians and Poles – and they achieve the highest grades. They are also very hard-working and diligent. My daughter is in Year 7 and she has been elected to School Council. She has been here since the age of 5 and she speaks and writes in both languages.'

'Just lies, lies, lies. Most of English children do not study at all and even at the age of 20 their spelling and grammar is bad, and they cannot calculate simple things without a calculator. They have to stop lying.'

Our children get recognition of their achievement by teachers and local schools

'My friend's daughter gets different diplomas and prizes more than English [children] and when I see the results my daughter gets from her tests I am very proud of her. I think there many Latvians like that here.'

'Very bad research. I really would like to know where they got the data for this study??? My grandchildren study very well and go to school with great pleasure. My granddaughter speaks in five languages. Every week we get an email from school where teachers write how well she is doing, and her behaviour is excellent. She got into the best school with no problem at all.'

'This is stupid, according to statistics Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish children in the UK are achieving higher than English children. My daughter's teacher came to the exactly same conclusion.'

'My son is the best in his class in maths and, as teachers say, natives should English from him.'

'I know many of our children who are high achievers and even teachers have told me that immigrant children study very hard and are much better than native English children.'

Our children are better because of our special situation

'I have not heard any bad account of our children here in the UK. On the contrary, teachers are surprised about the achievement of our children and often admit that they could not study in other language. For sure they could not pass the test and get an A !!! And if anything, our children are the one who get praised for their diligence.'*

'This is just rubbish! My children and other Latvian children in England stand out because they are the cleverest of all. Even when they come here and do not speak English, they learn English very quickly and continue their studies in English and catch up with their peers. And that English have better grades is just pure lies. English are the laziest and do not think about learning at all. Later when they get into colleges or other training and have to deal with English grammar, they [English] cannot do it.'

'My daughters have a 100% better achievement than all English [children]. I want to see and English person who learnt Latvian in 3 months. There is nobody like that, this person does not exist. And they say that our children underachieve...'

Language as an issue, but still our children are better if not in English than in maths or overall intellectual ability for sure.

- *'I think it is just language issue and that is it. Even very young nursery age Latvian children are more knowledgeable than any English child of the same age'*
- *'There are very different circumstances, some children are born here in the UK and then there are some children who came here, and they had to learn English very quickly. You cannot compare these children. For sure there are higher results in maths compared to natives, but certainly not in language [English].'*

Even if they do not speak Latvian language, they are still better, just because they are Latvian. Own experience is the best

'It is all just loads of rubbish that immigrants struggle at school because of language. Those children who even do not speak Latvian anymore, they still stand out due to their good memory and quick learning and they are well above their peers. I know all of it from my own experience and not from somebody else. It makes me just angry, who is responsible for these tales. Where in the UK do these studies take place? I have many Latvians in my town, but I have not heard that anybody asked them about those things.'

Maybe British people have fabricated the data

- *'British researchers are worried that Brits are low achievers compared to Europeans in their schools ...'*
- *'There are no studies about Latvian children (as they are a very small migrant group), but there are plenty of studies that demonstrate that children from A10 countries (including Latvians) push the results of local schools up. '*
- *'It is possible that that information is somewhat twisted ... Can you imagine how this [if true] would look in the eyes of English people? How could it be that children from some Latvia are the cleverest and the most hard-working.'*

Our children are decent, well-behaved and mannered, they are hard-working, that is why they cannot underachieve

- *'Latvian children can and want to learn! In addition, ours [children] are well brought up, decent and polite'*

Education in Latvia

Education in Latvia is worse than in the UK

'In any case, these are all lies that are published. You cannot assess education here using 'peasants' measures. Pass or fail. You do not have grades or points here. There are percentages and learning coefficients. And exactly Latvian children are not failures here. Moreover, UK universities do not want accept graduates from Latvia because the education system in Latvia halts compared to European system.'

'I know Latvians who finish schools in Latvia struggle to get anywhere for further studies outside Latvia.'

It is much harder to study in Latvia

'Here, it is easier for children to study; it is much harder in Latvia. I do not think that your children would get same good grades in their motherland compared to here.'

'Actually, there are many children who come here and learn here quicker and their grades improve and are better than those of natives because in Latvia there is higher workload at school and way more homework.'

'How here grades can be low if curriculum is much easier???Lies!'

'Many [people in Latvia] think that schools are like kindergardens in England. I still have not managed to persuade my mother-in-law to allow my daughter to study here.'

'I do not know any children who have arrived from Latvia finish school year with low grades (including my own child). They usually know content at least a year ahead.'

Latvian Diaspora vs Latvia

Generic 'They' in Latvia

'They make our children look like idiots. It makes me angry this Latvia and their fabricated studies.'

'If they have nothing else to write then they should not write at all and leave us in peace. We should take them to court for damages to our honour and dignity.'

'This is just cheap propaganda with an aim to get us back. If their lies about Brexit did not work, now they just produce another set of lies.'

'LV writes purposefully bad articles about us who live here. This is such a defamatory and insulting article. What are Latvians in Latvia going to think about us and our children after reading this. There has been nothing good said about Latvians in the UK, ever!!!'

'Sometimes I think we should not give them in Latvia any info about Latvians in the UK. It is like if they know less about your fortune the less envy you experience.'

Government more specifically

'We all can think what we want, but I do not believe it. This is just yet another lie from the [Latvian] government!!!'

'This is just fake news for Latvians in Latvia to not even think of coming here. Immigrant children, not only Latvians, are the best in their schools.'

'It is just awful, just leave Latvians abroad in peace. I have not heard anything anything good. They are not interested in reading anything good as all the remaining people [in Latvia] will run away.'

'Recently when I read anything about Latvia I am so angry and upset. What a nightmare, when people can live a normal life and not just try to survive. When there will be a day when these 100 fat bastards that feed from people somebody overthrows. I think there are many people who would want to live in Latvia, but they just cannot feed their family and then they choose to stay here and not live in Latvia. If I had enough money I would choose Latvia without thinking as it is my birth place.'

Mass media in Latvia

'The problem is that Latvian mass media lie and they are rude. They want to set panic among those who left. It is interesting why they focus just on the UK...'

'I am not interested because they set panic based on lies. It is clear to me that you cannot trust any word of what Latvian media produce and publish. Everything is fake and tendentious. They are not going to influence the future of my children.'

'It is so sad that mass media present these lies. They throw us out of our home and now they lie. They invite us to go back to our motherland, but who needs us there? Do they honour us and our children there and value our skills and education?'

Discussion and conclusions

Diasporic life is inherently diverse and contradictory (Ma, 2003; Shi, 2005), the Latvian diaspora members in this study gave conflicting, or at best paradoxical, accounts of their perceptions of themselves, their lives 'here' in the UK and their link to homeland, Latvia. Their answers demonstrate an increased level of identity complexity, and confusions that they often experience. Moreover, the boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference.

The complexities of Latvian diaspora identities exceeds the simple, binary oppositional structure of 'them/us'. At different places, times, in relation to different questions, the boundaries are re-sited. Latvian diaspora both is and is not 'Latvian'.

On most accounts, boundary-maintenance is an indispensable criterion of diaspora (Brubaker, 2005). It is this that enables one to speak of a diaspora as a distinctive 'community', and as this paper demonstrated Latvian diaspora are held together by a distinctive solidarity and common experiences and position themselves in relation to Latvians in Latvia and English people in England to produce their unique identities. With respect to the accounts of Latvian diaspora, there is a special ideological dilemma

(Stanley & Billig, 2004) Latvian diaspora struggle to claim themselves simultaneously to be both Latvians and British. As such, being Latvian diaspora, and the activity of accounting for oneself as such, cannot be a simple being Latvian, nor being British.

There is a tension in the diaspora and identity literature between boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion. The analysis suggest that these two processes are linked and Latvian diaspora produces and maintaince their boundaries through constant redefention of boundaries. They break their ties with Latvia, but simultionslu produce their identities based in the pain of this 'break up'. It is like a child is defined through their relationships with their mother, ever changing, but constantly there. Clifford resorts to oxymoron, referring to the problem of the 'changing same', to 'something endlessly hybridized and in process but persistently there' (1994, p. 320).

There is a moral link (Dzenovska, 2012) to the Latvian present in Latvian diaspora views. They left as the state failed to fulfil its function, so there is disappointment and bitterness. However, if people feel that they are hurt or angry they show that the link is still there, the affective link. This very affective register of the comments about Latvia evidences that the relationship between Latvia and Latvian diaspora is very important in production of their identities. They have this dream of going back: 'We would; they just do not want us back.' This is painful process of producing oneself through disconnect and difference.

This generation of Latvians is also trapped between willing to return, but not able to and willing to integrate, but not able to because of nonexistence of civic understanding of nation and belonging. They are never going to be British (English) because they were not born that way. It is interesting they use English rather than British more often to indicate their comparison group in the UK. Of course, next generation can be very different and integration struggle are very common and expected from the first-generation migrants. Latvia hopes Latvians will return one day, but it is only possible on a larger scale if Latvian diasporic identity is continuing. The questions is when the painful relation between Latvia and Latvian diaspora stops what is left over?

To conclude, however, the actual lives people live not only involve situated conversations and debates, but also moments of relatively simple evaluations of certain constructions of a complex reality. These analyses are important in themselves but also restricted; they do not tell us whether specific rhetorical constructions actually have specific effects on people. In textual deconstructions, the emphasis tends to be on 'unmasking' ideological consequences, and the extent to which devices and constructions visibly affect people's evaluations and actions is often left largely unexamined. Furthermore, in this line of work, it is often difficult to determine which particular aspects of discourses affect people's reactions.

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