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THE BRONZE SOLDIER: IDENTITY THREAT AND MAINTENANCE IN ESTONIA

Martin Ehala

Keywords: identity threat; intergroup processes; war memorials; Estonia

The relocation of the monument to those killed in WWII, located in the center of Tallinn, on 27 April 2007 triggered the first large-scale ethnic riots in Estonia since 1980, when a punk rock concert mobilized ethnic Estonian youth to riot against Russification. Unlike in 1980, the rioters in 2007 were predominantly Russian speakers.

The monument, the ‘Bronze Soldier’, was erected in 1947 by the Soviet authorities, and was ritually used in Soviet identity politics. However, it escaped the removal that befell many Soviet statues in Estonia during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the issue was usually raised prior to elections, no serious attempts were made to remove the monument until 2006.

The crucial question in this context is why the presence of a statue that had been accepted for 15 years suddenly became such an annoyance that it needed to be relocated, and why the relocation of a statue which for years had been visited by a decreasing number of elderly war veterans suddenly incited young people to commit acts of vandalism on the streets of Tallinn.

The answers to these questions require an analysis of the shifts and changes in ethnic identities in Estonia that have occurred during the last 15 years. These shifts are a response to the transition of Estonia from a post-Soviet country to an EU member state, as well as to the growing prominence of Russia in world affairs during the last eight years. Thus, the tension around the monument reflected the threat to identity that changed social circumstances have caused in both major ethnic groups in Estonia.

The Context of the Relocation of the Bronze Soldier

The relocation of a statue of both cultural and historical significance is certainly a statement. As such it can be seen as a communicative act governed by the principles of pragmatics (Austin 1961; Habermas 1979). According to these principles, the meaning of each communicative act depends on both the message and its context. The context involves the time and place of the utterance, as well as the sequence of previous utterances by communicators. To understand the specific meaning of this event, therefore, contextual factors need to be taken into account.

Revolutionary changes in a society often trigger the removal of monuments which carry the messages of the overthrown ideology and symbolize the domination patterns of the past. In the case of Estonia, the twentieth century was synonymous with radical changes of power, almost all of which were accompanied by the removal or destruction of ideologically charged monuments. Thus, after Estonian independence was recognized in 1920 by the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty, the monument to Peter the Great in the center of Tallinn was removed. The myth goes that its bronze was used to mint the smallest Estonian coin, the one cent piece.

To commemorate the fallen in the 1918–1920 War of Independence, around 200 monuments were erected throughout Estonia, usually financed by local communities. In 1940, after the annexation of Estonia, most of these monuments were destroyed by the Soviet authorities. During WWII, when Estonia was occupied by Nazi Germany, many of them were restored, but not for long. After the end of the war, the Soviet regime destroyed them again. Most of these monuments were finally re-erected after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Bronze Soldier in Tallinn has been subject to a somewhat similar fate. In April 1945, several fallen Red Army soldiers were reburied on Tõnismägi and a simple wooden memorial was placed on the square. On the 8 May 1946, two schoolgirls, Ageeda Paavel and Aili Jürgenson, demolished it in revenge for the demolition of the monuments of the Independence War. Ageeda Paavel recalls:

Our beloved monuments started to disappear one after another. They had to be paid back somehow and the so-called Liberators' Monument on Tõnismägi was picked. It was situated in the square of the current 'bronze man' on the side facing the church. It was about a meter high wooden pyramid, which was only about 20 centimeters in diameter; it was of a plain blue color and its top was decorated by a red tin pentagon. . . . Juhan [Juhan Kuusk] gave us the explosives and instructions. There was nothing really difficult about it. (Kaasik 2006, p. 21)

A year later, on 22 September 1947, on the third anniversary of the re-instatement of Red Army control over Tallinn, the Bronze Soldier was unveiled in the same place in Tõnismägi, where it remained for a long period of time, and became the most representative war memorial in the city (Figure 1). It was actively used as a site for Soviet rituals until the Singing Revolution in the late 1980s.

The area around the monument was modified after the Soviet Army left Estonia in 1994 in order to reduce its ideological weight. The hollow for the eternal flame was removed, and the central position of the monument on the square was reduced by replacing the direct access paths to the monument with a diagonal sidewalk across the



FIGURE 1 The WWII monument in Tõnismägi in 1999 (fragment). *Photo:* Peter Van den Bossche.

square and by planting new trees to close the square. The commemorative text on the statue (*Eternal glory for the heroes who have fallen for the liberation and sovereignty of our country [Igavene au langenud kangelastele, kes on langanud meie maa vabastamise ja sõltumatus eest]*) was replaced by a more neutral one (*For the fallen in the Second World War [Teises maailmasõjas hukkunutele]*) (Smith 2008; Tamm & Halla 2008, p. 43).

There were also several suggestions to redesign the entire memorial, including a design competition held in 1995. The preliminary plan suggested that the existing monument should be balanced by a seven-meter-high steel cross symbolizing Christian values and counterbalancing Soviet power; a black granite pedestal uniting the fallen of all backgrounds, a black granite colonnade separating the adversaries and an oak symbolizing Estonian national identity were also to be added (Kaasik 2006, p. 17).

However, these plans never materialized. The Bronze Soldier remained at its original location for another ten years and attracted little discussion about its redesign or removal. The issue caught the public's attention again in 2004 and the dispute led to the statue's relocation to a site approximately two kilometers away in the Tallinn Military Cemetery in April 2007.

At least partly, the spark for this discussion was provided by the removal of yet another WWII monument. This monument, now commonly known as the Lihula monument, due to its location, was devoted to the men who fought against

Bolshevism from 1940 to 1945, and to the restoration of Estonian independence. The monument was created in 2002 and portrayed an armed soldier in German uniform. It was first erected in Pärnu, but was removed even before its official opening because of its obvious Nazi resemblances. In August 2004 it was re-erected in Lihula and stood for about two weeks (Brüggemann & Kasekamp 2008). It was decisively removed by the Estonian government in September 2004, without notice to the owners of the statue or to the public. The crudeness of this act shocked even those who agreed, in principle, that the symbolic language of the monument was improper.

After this removal, the parallel with the Bronze Soldier in a Soviet uniform became salient and an increasing number of people started to see its presence in the center of Tallinn as an injustice. A number of spontaneous acts of vandalism against Soviet WWII monuments in Estonia took place after the removal of the Lihula monument. Half a year later, on the eve of 9 May 2005, Russian Victory Day, red paint was thrown over the Bronze Soldier. From then until its relocation, the monument became the focal point for identity battles in Estonia.

This was the immediate context of the relocation of the statue, but wider societal, international and global trends also contributed to the setting. Ruutsoo (2008, pp. 117–8) outlines five such factors: (1) the re-emergence of a bipolar understanding of the world as a place of antagonistic struggles after 9/11; (2) the crisis of liberal multiculturalism in Europe; (3) the re-emergence of historicist arguments in international politics, particularly the rebirth of imperialist rhetoric in Russia; (4) the neo-conservative turn in Estonian politics as a response to the emerging New Cold War, in which Estonia stands in the front line; and (5) attempts to remedy the lack of solidarity in Estonian society by nationalism.

As the descriptions of the chain of events that directly resulted in removal of the statue and its subsequent relocation are easily attainable (see Brüggemann & Kasekamp 2008; Lehti *et al.* 2008; Poleschuk 2007; Smith 2008), I will only provide a short account here.

In late 2006, in connection with the approaching parliamentary elections, the liberal party *Reformierakond* (Reform Party) promised to relocate the statue before the next victory day, 9 May 2007. This move helped to give the party and their leader unprecedented popularity among a wide range of Estonians, and as a result they won the elections in March 2007: they became the largest party in the parliament with 28% of the seats and the leading party in the new governmental coalition. Thus, the promise demanded fulfillment.

In the early hours of 26 April, without notice, the monument and its surrounding area was covered by a large tent and surrounded by a fence. According to officials, there were no plans to remove the statue at that point; the intention was simply to carry out the necessary archaeological work for the exhumation of the remains of the buried. Nevertheless, a large crowd of mostly Russophones gathered around the fence that evening. There was shouting – ‘Shame’ and ‘Fascists’ – and empty bottles were thrown at the police. Later in the evening, the police ordered the protesters to leave and pushed them out of the immediate area into the surrounding streets. The angry crowd started to attack property in the surrounding streets, breaking shop windows and smashing the interiors, looting, and turning over cars. At first, the police failed to

respond to the vandalism, but as the night passed, a large number of arrests were made to gain control of the situation.

Arguably, such a large outbreak of vandalism was not expected by the government, which met for an emergency meeting the same night and decided to remove the statue immediately. This was done early the following morning. Although order was restored and the following day was peaceful, the unrest continued for another two nights and, to some extent, also spread to other cities with large Russophone communities. The removal of the statue also elicited a fierce response from political leaders and the public in Russia, cyber attacks on important Estonian websites and a week-long blockade of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow by the Russian youth organization *Nashi*. A drastic decline in Russian oil transit through Estonia and a boycott of Estonian goods in Russia followed soon thereafter. It is ironic that this economic setback was triggered by the identity politics of the same party (*Reformierakond*), which for years had pursued a pragmatic libertarian politics aimed, first and foremost, at economic prosperity.

As the unrest faded, the statue was re-erected in the military cemetery and, on 8 May, the Estonian government and members of the diplomatic corps held a ceremony at the new location, laying a wreath for the fallen in WWII. This was the first time that Estonian officials had ever paid homage to the monument. Thousands of Russophones commemorated the end of the war the next day, covering almost the entire area with flowers. The fact that the strong emotional response to the removal of the statue by Russophones caught the government and the public by surprise indicates a lack of understanding of the complex set of social meanings that the statue embodied. These meanings are crucial in analyzing the psychology of the conflict.

Social Meaning Construction around the Bronze Soldier

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1991), a well-functioning society is based on the use of symbolic power which stems from a shared and consensual understanding of justice. Justice is presented as an ideology that explains the existing status and power differences among the social and ethnic groups belonging to this society. Ideologies, in turn, contain narratives that assign the categories of pride, shame and guilt to different groups within the society (Lawler 2006). If the current social situation is perceived to be just, people are ready to accept the places in the social hierarchy that the ideology ascribes to them. In this way, the dominant ideology legitimizes the power and status relations between the subgroups in the society.

Identity construction is tightly connected to ideological debates in society. There are continuously emerging alternative ideologies to the dominant position within a society, but usually their social base is weak and they do not attract wider societal attention (see Hogg & Reid 2006). If, however, an ideology gains support among several subgroups in a society, this invariably creates tension and opposition in the groups benefiting from the dominant ideology.

In contemporary Estonia, the center of the ideological debate is the interpretation of the events of WWII. Symbolically, the interpretation found its expression in the statue of the Bronze Soldier. Since it is a monument with ambiguous aesthetics, it

could be imbued with a number of meanings, some of which were directly oppositional. Even though the confrontational meanings were supported only by small fractions of the society, the symbolic acts that these meanings provoked emotionally touched a very large part of society, for whom the statue had a much broader and less ambiguous meaning. Thus, this ambiguity allowed groups to use the monument as a tool of social mobilization. The range of possible meanings of the monument may be summarized as follows.

- (1) The layer of meaning of the Bronze Soldier that is shared, or at least openly espoused, by the largest segment of the population in Estonia derives from its commemoration of the fallen in WWII. This most neutral of meanings has provided for some degree of common ground uniting different ethnic groups, and perhaps explains why, in 2006, 29% of Estonians as well as virtually all Russophones were opposed to the idea of moving the monument. A further 18% of Estonians were undecided at this time, meaning that around 67% of Estonia's overall population wanted the monument to be left in its original location (BNS 2006).
- (2) The second layer of meaning of the Bronze Soldier is associated with victory in what is known in Russian culture as the Great Patriotic War, i.e. the part of WWII in which the Russian nation was involved. In contemporary Russia, this victory is a central part of national identity, and constitutes an important source of pride and self esteem. It would be reasonable to assume that, for the vast majority of Russophones in Estonia, this meaning is emotionally significant. However, since Estonia had almost no control over the course of WWII, this emotional significance is understandably not shared by most Estonians, except perhaps for the Estonian veterans of the war who fought in the Red Army.

Even though Estonians may not attach significance to the celebration of victory in the Great Patriotic War, the major contribution of the Soviet Union to the destruction of the Nazis is internationally recognized. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to celebrate the victory on 9 May in Estonia, a day later than the rest of the World celebrates the end of WWII in Europe (WWII did not end for the US and the UK until the defeat of the Japanese in August 1945), and the importance of the Bronze Soldier in these celebrations cannot be disputed. Altogether, one-third of the Estonian population may have a strong attachment to the Bronze Soldier as a symbol of victory.

- (3) For a fraction of Russian radicals, the Bronze Soldier presented the opportunity to signify 'the liberation' of Tallinn and the rest of Estonia from the German occupation during WWII. This is stressed by naming the monument the statue of the 'Liberator' and by celebrating 22 September, the day the Red Army regained control over Tallinn, as the Day of Liberation. This layer of meaning is in strict conflict with the official historical narrative of Estonia, and consequently with the ideological bases of contemporary Estonia.

By depicting the Bronze Soldier as the 'Liberator', the Soviet period in the history of Estonia is implicitly redefined as freedom, whereby the Russophone community in Estonia would be given high status as the liberators of Estonians. Thus, the acceptance of this narrative would set the stage for a radical status

revision between the two ethnic groups in Estonia. While the status of Russophones in Estonia is open to renegotiation, it is obvious that if claims for higher status are based on this historical narrative, they will hardly be accepted by Estonians.

It may be assumed that this layer of meaning has resonance among the segments of the Russophone community which have clear negative attitudes towards Estonia, and which still identify themselves as Soviet people and/or inhabitants of the (former) Soviet Estonia. According to Vihalemm and Masso (2007, p. 83), around 25% of Russophones choose this identification *certainly* or *sometimes*. Differently from some other ex-Soviet republics, where this identification is associated with mild Soviet nostalgia, Vihalemm and Masso argue that it expresses a protest identity in Estonia.

- (4) As a response to the meaning construction of the Bronze Soldier as 'the Liberator', radical Estonian nationalists started to construct an opposing meaning, namely that it was a symbol of Soviet occupation. This meaning was latent until 2004, manifesting itself only occasionally, but without serious emotional resonance. However, the more vivid Russian activists' use of Soviet and Stalinist symbolism in their celebrations became, the more the monument began to irritate Estonians. Still, for quite a long time demonstrations by small radical groups were tolerated quite calmly.

The balance was tipped on 9 May 2006, when two Estonian right-wing nationalists went to the statue while the Russophone Victory Day celebrations were taking place. The Estonian nationalists carried the Estonian national flag and a banner emphasizing Soviet occupation. To prevent clashes, the police removed the two activists. The event was broadcast by the national media. This humiliation created a strong emotional reaction among Estonians and some politicians promised to remove this symbol of occupation from the center of Tallinn. As the removal of the monument was turned into an election campaign promise, active meaning construction of the monument as a symbol of Soviet occupation occurred in the Estonian media.

In this way the semiotic ambiguity of the monument led to an ideological dialogue between the Russophone and Estonian radical activists. If the statue had had an exclusive meaning pertaining to Soviet oppression, its removal would have been justified and it would not have affected more than the most radical fractions of the Russophone community in Estonia, perhaps 7.5% of all Russophones. Yet, the symbol was emotionally significant for the majority of the Russophone community because of its commemorative and celebratory meanings, meanings that are legitimate and humane in nature. For them, the relocation of the monument was perceived as a grave injustice.

Thus, the rich context and the puzzle of meanings of the monument make it clear why its removal created such a discrepant response in the Russophone community (and in Russia as well), but they do not explain why the whole issue suddenly gained prominence in Estonia after ten or more years of relative silence, when it appeared that the controversial history was conveniently being forgotten. To understand this unexpected turn we need to take into account the identity dynamics in Estonia during the last 15 years.

Identity Dynamics in Estonia

According to Todd (2005), a social identity shift is a crucial factor for the success of institutional change. She argues that new institutions are able to create new dynamics of behavior only if the change in institutions is accompanied by changing self-perceptions. Often the identity categories have their own inertia, which is out of phase with structural changes, meaning that imposed political changes and changes in social practices may (initially) fail to bring about changes in the categories of collective identities. On other occasions, subtle shifts in identity content may gradually change the cultural substratum of the identity, which makes the path to radical category change possible.

In multi-ethnic societies these changes may make a difference in who is included or excluded, respected or disrespected, and eventually whether inter-ethnic relations are harmonious or conflictual. This means that the negotiation of intergroup boundaries is one central function of identity dynamics. On the other hand, as Hornsey and Hogg (2000, p. 143) claim, 'intergroup relations are almost by definition a matter of subgroup relations within a superordinate identity group'. Thus it is not only the nature and permeability of lateral boundaries between groups, but also the consolidation of groups under superordinate identity categories, or the dissolution of these categories in favor of lower level groups that shape identity dynamics.

A prime example of consolidation is the emergence of a nation from linguistically and culturally diverse dialects. This new superordinate collective identity unites linguistically and culturally diverse subgroups into one integrated whole, where the previous top-level collective identities are re-analyzed as sub-level collective identities. Thus, consolidation accommodates diversity within the new unity. It reduces its cognitive prominence, but does not erase it.

If the groups are not able to coalesce, and neither is assimilating, their co-existence in one society may become problematic, which in turn could lead to the dissolution of the superordinate identity category. The dissolution of Soviet and Yugoslavian identities as pan-ethnic identities is a good example of this process. Changes in the level of the strongest emotional attachment are also a part of identity dynamics.

Todd (2005) has presented a typology of changes in collective identity categories that may occur in different settings of social practice. As it is useful to analyze the identity dynamics in Estonia using this typology, I will briefly outline these types below.

Reaffirmation is a process that is likely to occur when there is a match between practices and identity categories. This means giving open support to the existing identity categories by making them more salient, distinct and oppositional. Usually one of the groups reaffirms its identity in order to promote change, while the other is opposed to it. Basically, reaffirmation means no change.

Conversion is a process by which an old identity category is abandoned altogether and a completely new identity is assumed. This is quite a radical category change which can happen only after most of the content of the old identity has been gradually eroded and/or replaced by new meanings. Todd (2005) gives the change in South African white identities as an example of conversion.

Assimilation is a process of partial identity change. Some of the meanings fade, some oppositions are rearranged, and some elements from the periphery are centralized. These shifts and changes in identity allow actors to succeed in new circumstances, while they retain continuity with their old identity. As assimilation would in inter-ethnic encounters mean mostly abandoning one's heritage identity in favor of the more rewarding majority identity, in this essay I will use the term integration instead to denote this type of identity change.

All three of these processes create coherence between social practices and identity categories. The next three types create and express ambiguity between social practices and identities.

Privatization is a process by which all macro-social elements of one's identity, including nationality, class, political affiliations and status are marginalized, and only the part of identity which manifests itself in the private sphere is retained. Privatization occurs when institutional change has made the old oppositional categories irrelevant or inapplicable, but the new categories imposed by the new practices cannot be accepted. Todd (2005) refers to identity changes under totalitarianism as a prime example of privatization.

Adaptation is an identity change that basically requires that new practices which come with a new social order are accepted, but are kept separate from one's old identity. Adaptation also means that the new values and meanings that come with new practices are not truly accepted. Adaptation is a kind of double life that was very common for Estonians under Soviet rule: while people cooperated with the authorities, they did not accept its value system. Adaptation made it easy to mobilize for social change when *perestroika* allowed for greater liberties.

Ritual approbation occurs when new practices are made to fit the old systems of meaning, through which they affect each other and mutually make the inherent tensions between them apparent. It is a group-based strategy which is often used officially when nations modernize, but still maintain pre-existing traditions.

These types of identity change are taken as the basis for analyzing the identity dynamics in Estonia during the past 15 years.

The first half of the 1990s: reaffirmation and privatization

The ideological cornerstone for re-establishing Estonian independence was the consensual recognition of the existence and illegitimacy of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. From this, it followed that Estonia did not join the Soviet Union in accordance with its free will but was illegally annexed. This recognition also reversed the status of ethnic groups in Estonia: the Russophone community, which enjoyed the highest status in Soviet Estonia, was assigned immigrant status, because its presence was attributed to an illicit colonization. This institutional change also forced changes in identity categorizations.

In 1993 as many as 59% of Estonian Russophones still considered themselves to be representatives of Soviet culture. At the same time, identification with Russian ethnic identity started to rise: from 85% in 1992 to 92% in 1993 (Kirch & Kirch 1995, p. 53). If we take the results of the independence plebiscite on 3 March 1991 (see Taagepera 1993) as an indirect indicator, it suggests that the 40% of Russophones

who voted against Estonian independence were carriers of a reaffirmative identity. The 30% of nonvoters gives an approximation of the size of the group with a privatized identity. This means that the 30% of the Russophones that did vote for Estonian independence were carriers of integrative and adaptive identities. The size of the group with integrative identity configuration can be further estimated from the number of those who had knowledge of Estonian – around 13%. This leaves the number of pursuers of adaptive identity at around 17%. This means that on the eve of Estonian independence, a large proportion of Russophones held a reaffirmative identity and had the hope that Estonia would have two official state languages, with all permanent inhabitants receiving Estonian citizenship.

Yet, the illusions of two state languages and automatic citizenship faded rather quickly, and this had an effect on identity dynamics as well. As the Russophone Estonian journalist Lilia Sokolinskaja later recalled, at the beginning of the 1990s: 'Estonia turned all of its anger towards the Soviet regime against local Russians, making them responsible for all the troubles' (Sokolinskaja 2000, p. 7). This tendency was aggravated by the ethnic policies of Estonia in the first half of the 1990s, which had the goal of restoring the kind of predominantly Estonian nation-state that had existed prior to Soviet annexation. Estonians hoped that Russians would return to their ethnic homeland, and this process was actively supported. There were plans to adopt a very strict citizenship policy, which would have assigned the status of illegal immigrant to all non-Estonians who had settled in Estonia during the Soviet time period.

Even though this aggressive political rhetoric did not materialize in its entirety, a large proportion of Russophones were, nevertheless, pushed out of state-level politics, which caused their withdrawal from the public sphere in more general terms. At this point, for the majority of Russophones in Estonia, identity privatization was the most natural response to the status reversal.

This trend was reflected by shifts in the value systems of Estonians and Russophones in Estonia. During 1991–1993, the categories pertaining to having positions of power and self-realization fell in the value hierarchy for Russophones, but rose in the hierarchy for Estonians (Vihalemm 1997a, p. 33). At the same time, the importance of family, friends and a comfortable life rose in the value hierarchy of Russophones (Vihalemm 1997a, p. 35). A significant difference between Estonians and Russophones was the importance of national history as a part of their identity: while for the Estonians history played a significant part, for Russophones this feature was rather suppressed: only four out of ten mentioned history as a significant part of their identity (Valk 1997, p. 97).

Another important factor in the identity of Estonians was concern over the survival of the Estonian nation, and this concern was directly associated with the presence of Russophones in Estonia: as late as 1999, more than four years after the Soviet army withdrawal from Estonia, 63% of Estonians considered Russophones to be a national threat (Pettai 2000, p. 95). This threat induced a defensive attitude against Russophones, which is reflected in the parliamentary election results in 1992: the nationalist forces won the elections by a large margin, whereas the three electoral coalitions that included moderate politicians favoring milder treatment of Russophones got only 35% of the votes. For the majority of Estonians the main

identity dynamic during the collapse of the Soviet Union was reaffirmation, which was directed towards increasing their collective self-assurance in Estonia. This strategy was constructive at the time of the destruction of the Soviet Union, and made possible quick and radical reforms that enabled the Estonian economy to achieve rapid growth. However, it started to hinder societal development quite soon after independence was restored.

Some easing of the attitudes and values of Estonians took place in the mid-1990s, when it became apparent that the Russian community would remain in Estonia permanently. The majority of Estonians came to understand the need to integrate the Russophone community into the society: 26% gave their full support to the idea, and 40% agreed that it might be necessary: 'for Estonians this signified weariness of emotional confrontation, and a wish to be more pragmatic' (Pettai 2000, p. 98). Reaffirmative identity declined among Russians, too. According to Kirch and Kirch (1995, p. 47), around 28% of Russophones showed high ethnocentrism in 1993, implying that around two-thirds of the Russophone community might have had a more pragmatic attitude towards inter-ethnic relations.

The late 1990s: honeymoon of integration

The second half of the 1990s appears to have been the most optimistic period of inter-ethnic attitudes in post-Soviet Estonia. By the end of the century, Estonians had become much more tolerant towards Russophones: one-third were willing to actively support integration, and one-third had come to see the Russian-speaking minority as having cultural value. Iris Pettai (2000) considered this a new trend in inter-ethnic relations in Estonia. There were significant changes among Russophones as well. Self-identification as an Estonian citizen and/or member of Estonian society had increased significantly: 47% of Russophones declared that they believed this to be the case (Vihalemm & Masso 2002, p. 188), while a third of Russophones expressed a desire to increase contacts with Estonians and find new friends among them (Proos 2000, p. 113).

With respect to job possibilities, Russophones were in a somewhat weaker position, although ethnic distribution among different job types corresponded quite closely to the ethnic structure of Estonia. Thus, economic inequality was not perceived as having direct and unjust ethnic causes. There was also some homogenization of values: a large proportion of Russophones had come to share the view, common among Estonians, that a good education and hard work were a guarantee of one's well-being in Estonia (Vihalemm 1997a, p. 37).

The recognition that knowledge of the Estonian language provided social capital had risen considerably. While in 1990, only 30% of Russophones in Estonia considered knowledge of Estonian necessary, by 1995 the proportion had risen to 82% (Vihalemm 1997b, p. 249). The significant rise was characterized by the number of those who had acquired a knowledge of Estonian: in 1993, only 13% of Russophones reported that they spoke Estonian fluently or very well, but in 1999 the proportion was 29%. During the same period, the number of those who did not know Estonian at all fell from 42% to 33% (Proos 2000, p. 107). Thus, in 1999, 67% of Russophones knew Estonian at least at a satisfactory level, while in 1993 only 43% were at

that level. Even if these self-reported data do not reflect actual knowledge with perfect accuracy, the data certainly show a broad consensus among Russophones that knowledge of Estonian was necessary.

Noticeably, the value of Estonian citizenship had grown in the eyes of Russophones by 1999. While in 1993 48% wished to obtain Estonian citizenship, in 1999 this was the case for 71% of those polled. The proportion of those Russophones who had actually obtained Estonian citizenship was 29% of the community (Pettai 2000, p. 82). One could claim that, by the turn of the century, the majority of Russophones had accepted the existence of the Estonian state and wished to contribute to its sustainability. This positive attitude did not include Estonian politics, though: 70% of the Russophone community was not interested in the political life of Estonia (Proos 2000, p. 123).

Identity dynamics at the end of the century were characterized by a trend towards increasing similarities in the values, attitudes and practices between some subgroups of Estonians and Russophones. According to Todd (2005), such shifts point to integrative identity dynamics, i.e. to the erosion of some values that are incompatible with current practices and to the emergence of some new shared values between the groups. Quite significantly, this trend was supported by the emergence of the consumerist information society in Estonia (Lauristin & Vihalemm 2004) towards the end of the century.

The data presented above indicate that such integrative shifts in identities may have characterized about one-quarter to one-third of both major ethnic groups in Estonia by the end of the twentieth century. This integrative trend was also supported by the media: group-based portrayals of the ethnic communities were abandoned in favor of more person-centered approaches (Tammpuu 2000, p. 5).

In the Estonian media communication sphere, the construction of reaffirming identity configurations decreased significantly during this period. Opinions that Russians were not a part of Estonia, were disloyal and should return to their historic homeland had disappeared from official political statements by the turn of the century, but these opinions were still voiced occasionally in readers' letters to newspapers (Tammpuu 2000, p. 3). According to Kruusvall (2000, p. 15), there might have been around 15–20% of Estonians who still wished to maintain this confrontation, which clearly points to a reaffirming of identity dynamics.

These trends also occurred in the local Russian press, where reaffirming identity construction was weak and unsystematic. The chances of it becoming popular among the majority of Russophones were rated rather low (Jakobson 2002; Vihalemm & Masso 2002). This does not mean that integrative identity processes involved the whole Russophone community. It rather shows that the Russophone community was internally fragmented, a fact that has been stressed by many researchers (see Laitin 1998; Smith 1998; Vihalemm 1999). Thus, among the Russophone population, integrative identity shifts were taking place only for a limited number of subgroups, whereas others opted for identity privatization or adaptation.

This latter identity dynamic could be associated with having Russian citizenship. Statistically, those Russian citizens living permanently in Estonia were characterized by a weak interest in events in Estonia, poor knowledge of Estonian, low tolerance towards multiculturalism and doubtful attitudes towards the sustainability of Estonia

in the future. By the end of the century, the number of Russian citizens permanently living in Estonia was 18% of the Russophone community; and there was roughly the same number who supported the opinion that Russians should compete with Estonians for political power within Estonia (Pettai 2000, p. 93).

2000–2004: Integration on the basis of consumerist individualism

Good economic growth and widening international communication at the beginning of the twenty-first century promoted the consumerist value system of the Western world in Estonia. According to Kalmus and Vihalemm (2004), this trend particularly influenced the values and attitudes of the younger generation. Much more than the elderly and middle aged, the young were oriented towards pursuing an interesting life and self-fulfillment. Material wealth was a widely desired goal not only for the younger generation. It seemed to be a deficit value, desired more by those who did not have it, i.e. by the poorer segments of society, and by Russophones than by Estonians, a fact that might reflect their weaker economic standing in Estonia. While in the first half of the 1990s Russophones valued power and self-realization less than Estonians, by 2003 these differences had disappeared (Kalmus & Vihalemm 2004, p. 39). This change indicates that Russophones had started to seek the same goals as Estonians: material wealth and an interesting life.

These shifts in values may also indicate the weakening of the privatization tendency in the identities of Russophones and an increase in integrative changes. For Estonians, changes in the value hierarchy were smaller, but the increase in the importance of individualism, personal fulfillment and consumerism meant that the old reaffirming identity trend had lost some of its appeal. According to Laitin (2003), two parallel processes were taking place: Russophones were integrating into Estonian society, while Estonians and Russophones were both integrating into Europe. Thus, shifts were taking place in the identities of both groups and these shifts introduced some common features for both, such as individualism and consumerism. Also, some older values, such as ethnic traditions, started to erode. In this way the changes in the first years of the twenty-first century started to create a basis for a common higher level identity that could be shared by both ethnic groups.

As membership in the EU and NATO became a real possibility, the sense of security increased among Estonians. By 2004, only 11% considered the use of the Russian language, and 16% considered the large number of Russians in Estonia as dangerous for the future of the Estonian culture and nation. Many more considered new immigrants, the extensive use of English and the weakening of their national identity as possible dangers (Kruusvall 2005, p. 48) – an indication that the signs of globalization were starting to be seen as possible threats to the Estonian way of life.

In national conservative circles, these new dangers motivated attempts to strengthen national identity: some organizations were born, such as ‘The Society for the Protection of the Estonian Language’ (1999) and ‘The Estonian Club’ (2003). A goal was set in the ‘Strategy for the Development of the Estonian Language’ (2004) that the state should initiate and finance a program that would promote Estonian national identity. The dangers of weakening ethnic identity were also noticed in the conservative circles of the Russophone community, where they were fueled by the

first signs of what could be seen as a cascade of assimilation. According to Laitin (2003, p. 210), as many as 25% of Russophone parents expressed a wish to choose an Estonian medium school for their children, and 72% of Russophone ninth-graders wanted their prospective children to be educated at least partly in Estonian in the future.

However, the attempts to create ethnic mobilization did not resonate with the public mood, either in the Estonian or Russian community: support for conservative ethnic ideology and groups was very low. The society was involved in achieving economic goals, joining the EU was on the agenda, and the ideology of success was widely supported. Far more than the issues of identity, social inequality problems touched the nerve of the society. This was well reflected in the discourse of 'two Estonias', of the rich and of the poor, in 2002, and in the ensuing attempts to reach a national covenant to overcome the division.

2004–2007: identity threat

According to Hornsey and Hogg (2000), the identity threat caused by obscuring boundary features and low entitativity is a common cause for inter-ethnic conflicts in situations where the conflicting groups have a common superordinate identity category. Intergroup conflict is, in this situation, the most effective path, because it leads to the sharpening of ethnic boundaries and to the clarification of the group identity prototype.

As argued by Saarts (2008), the Bronze Soldier chain of events was an ethnic counter-reaction to forceful Europeanization in the last decade, when Estonia struggled to meet European standards in multiculturalism and political correctness in order to achieve EU membership. Also, as some authors (Lobjakas 2008; Loone 2008; Saarts 2008) note, EU and NATO membership provided the sense of security that enabled the Estonian majority to reinforce its values in the society in such an outright manner as the relocation of the war memorial. However, in 2004, the ethnic situation was far too relaxed for anything of this scale to happen. Yet, as the analysis below shows, it was precisely the feeling of the threat of weakening ethnic identity and the blurring of boundaries between Estonians and Russophones that motivated small right-wing groups on both sides to look for measures to increase ethnic mobilization.

The conflict surrounding the Lihula monument can be seen as an attempt to reinforce Estonian identity and pride; however, it did not create momentum or gain any significant popularity. It was just another attempt at identity politics, in which various political entrepreneurs hoped to mobilize the masses to gain power and influence. However, the monument was a nuisance for the government and its careless removal in August 2004 created significant resistance. In a public poll on the most important events of 2004, the removal of the Lihula monument was placed third, after joining NATO and the EU.

After the removal of the Lihula monument, the fact that the Bronze Soldier still stood in the center of Tallinn created a sense of injustice among many conservative Estonians. This injustice was the basis for the emergence of an 'eye-for-an-eye' type of discourse against the Bronze Soldier. This discourse, in turn, provided a good

rationale for the mobilization of conservative Russophones in defense of the monument.

These developments were catalyzed by Russian identity politics, which had taken the victory in the Great Patriotic War as one of its core elements, particularly in connection with its 50th anniversary. Russian identity politics had also significantly influenced the identity of Estonian Russophones: at the beginning of the 1990s, history was not seen as an important part of the identity of Estonian Russophones, mainly because the communists' crimes were a public issue at that time. This trend changed and the victory became the backbone of Russian national pride.

The more important the Bronze Soldier became for the Russophone community, the more eagerly Estonian conservative circles demanded its removal. However, public opinion was still quite indifferent and indecisive. To change this, it was necessary to have a blow struck against the pride of Estonians. To achieve this, two Estonian national activists went to the gathering of Russophones at the Bronze Soldier on 9 May 2006 with a banner and national flag. As one of them, Jüri Böhm, later admitted, their goal was to let the flag be desecrated in order to awaken an Estonian nation that had been numbed by the welfare society (Liiv 2007). The Russophone activists used a similar rhetoric. For example, one of their leaflets stated that the Estonian elite 'aim to tear away Estonian Russians from their Russian roots, to break their emotional ties to their historic homeland . . . Russians are being made into well-fed slaves of the nationalist elite' (Pöld 2008).

Even though activist groups on both sides were relatively small, their identity dialogue was amplified in the media to a considerable extent. A paradoxical situation emerged in which marginal groups in the society were able to bring about quite significant changes in the values and attitudes of the majority (see Hogg & Reid 2006). In Estonian politics, this was decisive in determining the choice of actions that followed.

The relocation of the Bronze Soldier fulfilled the goals of the ethnic activists: reaffirmation of the old identity distinctions and meanings increased. By comparing different identity orientations among Estonians and Russophones in 2002 (Pettai 2002) and in the summer of 2007 (Lauristin 2008), it becomes apparent that there has been a shift towards the sharpening of the ethnic opposition between Estonians and Russophones. While in 2002 about 19% of Estonians followed the reaffirmative pattern of identity, after the relocation of the statue the proportion rose to 23%. The number of Estonians manifesting integrative attitudes had decreased from 53% to 36%. The proportion of those who accepted the presence of Russophones, but did not want to have contacts with them had risen considerably, in 2002, 28% were in this category and as many as 40% in 2007 (Lauristin 2008; Pettai 2002). This segment of society can be associated with the adaptive pattern of identity; they accept the multicultural practices of Europe, but would certainly prefer a mono-ethnic state. If the inter-ethnic tension grew, this group would most likely turn towards open reaffirmation of their ethnic Estonian identity.

Among Russophones, the number of those manifesting integrative attitudes and values has dropped from 46% (Pettai 2002) to 27% (Lauristin 2008). The number of those who cooperate on pragmatic grounds, but are disillusioned has risen from 20% (Pettai 2002) to 33% (Lauristin 2008). This segment can be associated with the

adaptive identity. According to Belobrotsev (2008, p. 123), the Russophones ‘who previously had sincerely believed in Estonian democracy and justice, have been deeply hurt’ by the government action and the reactions of large sections of Estonians to the ‘Bronze night’ (the common name for the Russophone unrest). As the following year did not normalize the situation, but made it even worse, Belobrotsev (2008) predicts that in the near future, this will lead to the emigration of Russophone specialists. Similarly, it is possible that this group will turn towards the reaffirmative identity. The possibility of the mobilization of Russophones to an oppositional position towards Estonians is stressed by a number of researchers, such as Lobjakas (2008) and Vetik (2008).

It is evident that among Russophones, the number of supporters of the reaffirmative identity has also risen since the Bronze Soldier relocation. However, it is not easy to estimate the size of this group. According to Pettai (2002), in 2002, 21% of Russophones could be categorized as non-tolerant and 14% as discrepant. Both of these categories could indicate a reaffirmative identity configuration. However, it is more likely that, for elderly people, these characteristics indicate a privatized identity. Thus, it would be sensible to differentiate these identity groups on the basis of age. In the first category, 80% of the respondents were younger than 60, while in the second category only 41% were. These two subgroups together would make a total of 22% of the Russophone population manifesting the reaffirmative identity. This would leave the 12% of the discrepant and non-tolerant elderly Russophones as bearers of the privatized type of identity. Using the same method to examine the 2007 data (Lauristin 2008) would give us a 28% share in the reaffirmative identity and a 12% share in the privatized identity.

The identity dynamics in Estonia from the 1990s to 2007, discussed in this essay, are summarized in Figure 2. Each line in the diagram indicates a period that ends with the year indicated. However, as the surveys that the data are based on were not conducted in exactly the years indicated, but during the whole period, the data characterize the period, not the exact year indicated. I also note that, as the analysis is based on indirect features matched with particular identity trends, the percentages in the summary diagram are rough estimations of the size of different identity groups. Thus the summary diagram is a hypothesis that is grounded on empirical data, not an exact result of surveys specially conducted to specify these identity classes.

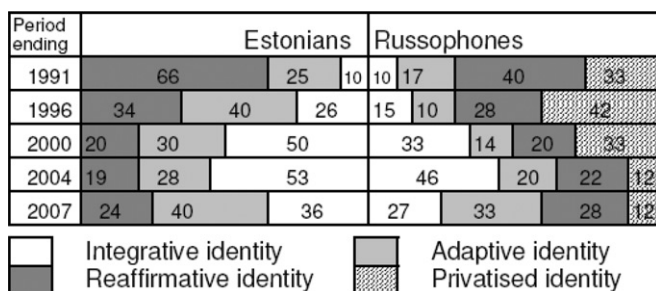


FIGURE 2 Identity dynamics in Estonia 1991–2007.

Despite these cautions, the overall pattern of identity dynamics should be a close approximation of the actual developments.

Discussion: Search for a New Equilibrium

Hornsey and Hogg (2000, p. 148) stress that 'emphasizing a superordinate identity without acknowledging subgroup differences can be threatening to the distinctiveness of the subgroup identities'. The developments during the last ten years indicate that this might well have been the case in Estonia. The speedy integration process with the EU, the over-stressing of specific European values and the emergence of post-modern fluid consumerist identities created insecurity among Estonians, while the over-stressing of Estonian civic identity and values created the same insecurity in the Russophone community. Instead of reinforcing the sense of superordinate identity, this created a negative reaction. To avoid such backlashes, Hornsey and Hogg (2000, p. 149) suggest that, in certain critical dimensions, acknowledgment of subgroup identities and the preservation of differences within the context of an abstractly defined superordinate identity would enhance integrative identity dynamics and strengthen the superordinate identity category.

Such a need is also apparent in Estonia. It is understandable that the Estonian Russophone community strives for positive self-esteem, as does any other ethnic group. Partially, the ideological struggle around the Bronze Soldier can be seen as an attempt by Russophones to claim a higher status and level of self-esteem. As this discourse has a zero sum structure, i.e. more positive self-esteem for Russophones could only be achieved by some lowering of the status of Estonian self-esteem, the removal of the Bronze Soldier was a bold statement that such identity politics would be considered unacceptable by the Estonian majority.

The question remains as to what the response of the Russophone community will be towards this development. The latest research shows that the time may be ripe for a collective demand for some societal recognition and higher status for Russophones in Estonian society. According to Lauristin (2008), two-thirds of Estonian Russophones have adjusted well or quite well to the life and demands of Estonia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many have learned the Estonian language and gained citizenship, but this has not brought about a rise in their status within Estonian society. According to Vihalemm (2008), the values of self-attainment, power and success have risen considerably in the value hierarchy of Russophones and are at present higher than the same values in the hierarchy of Estonians. Recall that in the early 1990s, these values were higher in the hierarchy of Estonians and, by the turn of the century, had roughly equal standing.

This means that the period of identity privatization that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union is over. Quite a large number of Russophones went through an integrative shift in their identities and wanted to be culturally recognized in Estonia. However, the removal of the Bronze Soldier was a powerful sign of rejection of one of those claims.

Whether this means a new round of identity privatization for Estonian Russophones or whether they will still opt for identity reaffirmation on the same

ideological premises, depends to a great extent on whether it is possible to find an alternative ideology for the improvement of the self-esteem and status of the Russophone community in Estonia that will also be acceptable to the majority of ethnic Estonians. Certainly there are some attempts at this being made (see Ehala 2008; Vetik 2008) and the context has changed considerably since the Georgian war – but only time will tell how all this will affect identity dynamics in Estonia.

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