Theme issue
"Multiculturalism: Diversity in Action"

Anu Realo

Guest Editor

Diversity is a fact of life; whether it is the "spice" or the "irritant" to people is the fundamental psychological, social, cultural and political issue of our times (Berry, 1997a:138).

Editorial

Estonia is probably the most successful former Soviet republic in the development of a democratic process and in progressing to a market-based economy. Estonia was the first to adopt its own constitution (June 1992), introduce its own hard currency (July 1992), and hold democratic elections for parliament and president (September 1992). According to the cumulative transition indicators used in the EBRD Transition Reports, Estonia was included, together with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, in the group of the most advanced reforming countries (Carter, Sader and Holtendahl 1996; see also Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997). In recognition of its main political course and progressive radical economical reforms, Estonia was invited to enter into negotiations about joining the European Union by the European Commission in July 1997.

Yet, the picture "is not without a blemish." As formulated by Silver and Titma (1997:1): "The most critical issue facing the Estonian state is the status of the approximately one-third of its population that is not ethnic Estonian." The presence of a large non-Estonian, mostly Russian-speaking community allows us to call Estonia a culturally *plural society*, i.e., a diverse society in which people of different ethnic/cultural backgrounds live together (cf. Berry 1997b). Among several other problems, multiethnic states often face a challenge to building society-wide support for state institutions as well as mutual accommodation among the members of different ethnic/cultural groups. As mentioned by Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997) in their recent comprehensive book of the Estonian transition:

The difficulties relating to the ethnic problems and the steps made by Estonians to peacefully resolve the problems created by the unrestricted Soviet-era Russian migration into the Baltic countries, are often underestimated and misinterpreted. From the position of Western standards and experiences, it seems easy to recommend that Estonians accept a state 'with the multiple complementary identities' and full guarantees for political participation to all Russian-speakers. From the inside, the question of Russian political influence on Estonian policies has a different focus: how legitimate would the state be for Estonians, if it cannot guarantee their independence from Russia and the development of an Estonian-language culture, education and public life in the Estonian state? The strict naturalization procedures in the Estonian Citizenship Law are focused on the knowledge of Estonian language and culture. Their objective is to help Estonians and Russians **overcome a barrier of mutual non-recognition** (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997:118).

While some recent studies have implied a gradual diminishment of cultural distance between Estonians and Russian-speakers in Estonia (Kirch, Kirch and Tuisk 1997; Vihalemm 1997), the results of the "Paths of a Generation" longitudinal survey (1982–1997) suggest that the Russian-speaking population still has little faith in the Estonian state:

The Estonian state appears to be doing a very good job of winning support among Estonians, but it has a long way to go to win over the Russian-speakers. ... The jury is still out on whether the Russian-speakers will effectively assimilate into Estonian society. So far, they have taken a pragmatic approach both in the choice of citizenship and in the learning of Estonian language. Many are now civic Estonians. Few sympathize with the Estonian state (Silver and Titma 1997:17).

Thus, the cultural and political integration of the Russian-speaking minority remains an issue of utmost importance for the future of the Estonian state.

Acculturation strategies

As mentioned above, as a result of immigration during the fifty years of the Soviet occupation, Estonia has become an ethnically/culturally plural society. The central issue to be addressed by ethnic/cultural groups and governments in plural societies is how to manage their ethnic/cultural diversity. While this issue can be addressed from a number of perspectives (economics, political science, law), the importance of psychological processes cannot be underestimated (cf. Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen 1992). According to a conceptual framework for the study of acculturation (evolved over more than 20 years of systematic work in the field) proposed by John W. Berry (1997b) – in all plural societies, ethnic/cultural groups and their individual members (in both majority and minority situations) must deal with the issue of how to acculturate. According to Berry (1997b), the key issues are: cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and

characteristics considered to be important and their maintenance striven for); and contact and participation (to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves). When these two issues are posed simultaneously, a conceptual framework (see Figure 2 in Berry, this issue) is generated that posits four acculturation strategies.

Another related term to pluralism that needs to be introduced here is *multiculturalism* or *multicultural* society. According to Berry and colleagues (1992:293), "a multicultural society is a plural society in which pluralism is valued (by the population generally, by the various acculturating groups, and by government policy) and in which the diversity is likely to remain". In other words, "Multiculturalism is meant to create a sociopolitical context within which individuals can develop healthy identities and mutually positive intergroup attitudes" (p. 297). Obviously, the strategy that leads to a multicultural society, on the one hand, and that can only be pursued in societies that are explicitly multicultural, on the other hand, is *integration*. Integration strategy requires mutual accommodation of both the minority and majority groups, involving the minority group adopting the basic values of the majority group, while at the same time the majority group has to be prepared to adapt national institutions (e.g., education, health, etc.) to better meet the needs of all diverse ethnic groups living together in the same, plural (hopefully multicultural) society (Berry 1997b). Although most European countries have been favoring an assimilationist strategy for a long time, the recent thinking has moved more toward a pluralistic point of view (e.g., Van Oudenhoven and Willemsen 1989). Pluralism and diversity in society (maintained partly by integration), as advocated by Berry (1997b:29), enhance among the other benefits "society's adaptability: alternative ways of living are available in the social system when attempting to meet changing circumstances, due to changes in a society's ecological, or political, context."

Integration of the Russian-speaking population into the Estonian society

During the last five years the focus of studies on integration and the adaptation of Russian-speaking population into the Estonian society has shifted from politological perspectives toward psychological and social processes. In April 1996, the interdisciplinary research group (project *VERA*) was established with an aim to work out the state program on integration of the Russian-speaking population. On the basis of the studies and analyses on the ethnic issues in Estonia, the members of the aforementioned research group generated four possible future scenarios for the development of the Estonian society during the next 15 years. The costs and benefits of four possible scenarios – assimilation, integration, separation, confrontation (based on Berry's acculturation strategies introduced above) – are described in detail by Heidmets (1997; see also p. 269, this issue). At the moment, there appear to be two potential trends: either towards

separation (a culturally homogenous nation-state) or integration (a multicultural open society). The choice between these two strategies takes first and foremost "a public discussion on the options and process of development of the Estonian state and society. It seems like the period of emotional treatment of ethnic issues in Estonia is coming to an end and it is time to call for a rational discussion" (Heidmets 1997:348).

From the political perspective, an important step forward was made by the Estonian Government who adopted the document *Integration of non-Estonians into Estonian Society: The Principles of National Integration Policy* on 10 February 1998. As pointed out by Mati Heidmets (p. 272, this issue), it was the first time since restoring the independence of Estonia in 1991 when the Estonian state defined its position and goals on the issue of Russian-speaking population in Estonia. According to the document, "a national integration [the engagement of persons in all levels of society] programme should be prepared by March 1998 and discussed both by political forces and the public so that it can be implemented as a national development programme, beginning in 1999." Unfortunately, the document received relatively little (if any) attention in the Estonian-speaking press.

Multiculturalism: Diversity in action

With two following aims in mind, first, calling for a rational discussion about the strategies of cultural and political acculturation of the Russian-speaking minority into the Estonian society, and second, to give an overview of a current situation and future developments of the majority-minority relationships and acculturation strategies in Estonia, an international conference "Multiculturalism: Diversity in Action" was held in Tartu on 6 May of 1998. The organizer of the event was the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tartu under the sponsorship of the Open Estonia Foundation. The current issue of *Trames* is the collection of papers that were presented at this conference in the History Museum of the University of Tartu. The keynote addresses were presented by three leading scholars in the field: John W. Berry, Professor of Psychology at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada; Michael H. Bond, Professor of Psychology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Mati Heidmets, Professor of Psychology and Dean of the Social Science Faculty at Tallinn Pedagogical University, Estonia. The keynote speeches were followed by a panel discussion, chaired by Wolfgang Drechsler, Professor of Public Administration at the University of Tartu.

John W. Berry, already mentioned a number of times in this paper, is the author of several influential conceptual frameworks in cross-cultural psychology, including an ecocultural framework (see Berry 1997a; Berry et al. 1991 for overview), a framework positing four acculturation strategies and a general

framework for acculturation research (see Berry 1997b, also pp. 215–218, this issue). His opening article in the current issue deals with social psychological costs and benefits of multiculturalism, illustrated by the results of two national surveys (1974 and 1991) studying the attitudes towards multiculturalism in various cultural groups in Canada.

An article by Michael H. Bond, a Canadian psychologist and a Baha'i who has lived and worked in Hong Kong for the last twenty years, addresses the question of how knowledge from social science can be used to guide the design of a harmonious, multicultural society. As Baha'u'llah says, "My objective is none other than the betterment of the world and the tranquility of its peoples. The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (see Bond, p. 234, this issue).

A comprehensive overview of the current status of ethnic issues in Estonia and a vision of the future – Estonia as an integrated, multicultural, and open society where neither serious legal (Estonian citizenship is dominating) nor language (almost everyone is fluent in Estonian) problems exist and where the cultural differences between Estonians and non-Estonians are considered not as much as a problem but as an advantage – is provided by Mati Heidmets in the third article of this issue.

The last article of the issue, edited by Wolfgang Drechsler, brings a summary of the panel discussion with the three abovementioned scholars, accompanied by questions and comments from the audience, brilliantly chaired by Wolfgang Drechsler himself. A final comment by Mati Heidmets captures well the general conclusion of this fruitful disputation: "What sums to be most important for the Russians today is to get some message from the Estonian side, from the side of the Estonian government and people, that they are wanted, that they are accepted, that they are *our* people. And if they would receive some certainty that at least their children would become Estonian citizens, I think this would reduce many of their fears and problems" (pp. 292–293, this issue).

Concluding remark

Finally, on behalf of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tartu and for myself, I would like to offer thanks to several parties who were especially helpful in the process of organizing the conference "Multiculturalism: Diversity in Action", as well as of the edition of this special issue. The Open Estonia Foundation provided full financial support for the execution of the conference, and special appreciation is extended to the Board of that organization. Riina Laidvee from the Faculty of Social Sciences and a number of students from the Department of Psychology at the University of Tartu assisted in the execution of the conference, and we are grateful for their help. The assistance of Tiina Laats with the editing of this issue is gratefully acknowledged. Last but not least, I

would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to John W. Berry, Michael H. Bond, Wolfgang Drechsler, and Mati Heidmets for their valuable and essential contribution both to the conference and for the current issue.

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