Identification with large scale social categories: A social psychology perspective[1]

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Identification with Large Scale Social Categories: A Social Psychology Perspective. This paper reviews social psychology approach to the study of group identities based on social identity and self-categorization theories. These are discussed with respect to multiple category memberships and identification with large scale social categories such as nation and Europe. The assumption about hierarchical relations between nested categories is criticised and it is argued that the perceptualist approach to social categorization should be combined with approaches taking into account the role of language and discourse in the processes of identification. Finally, some methodological implications are outlined.
Sociológia 2006, Vol. 38 (No. 6: 546-561)

Key words: *social identity approach; large scale social categories; multiple category memberships; national identity; European identity; discourse*

Introduction

"Social psychology occupies a pivotal position in the social and behavioural sciences. It is a crucible for numerous levels of explanation ranging from individual cognition to interpersonal interaction and group processes to social structure. It is placed ideally to link the micro and macro levels of analysis – to show how social and individual variables become expressed in social situations within a societal context." This is how Dominic Abrams and Michael Hogg (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004, p. 98) start their paper on the need of a metatheory in social identity research. If this assertion holds, than social psychology should provide a perfectly suitable conceptual and methodological apparatus for studying the identification of individuals with large scale social categories such as nation and Europe, which has been of interest also to sociology and political science. (See e.g. Jamieson, L., 2002; McManus-Czubinska, C. et al., 2003)

In the following study two social psychology theories of identity will be presented that create the most frequent conceptual basis of empirical studies in this domain of investigation and that can be subsumed under a more general term of *social identity approach.* (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004) Their limitations will be discussed mainly in the framework of rhetorical and discursive approaches in social psychology (e.g. Billig, M., 1995; Potter, J. – Wetherell, M., 1987) and in the light of empirical findings from research with members of "real" social groups in "real world" settings[3]. (e.g. Bellier, I., 2002)

Although the basic assumption of all the conceptualisations of identity in social psychology is that the self-concept of an individual is to a large extent defined by his/her social relations and social groups s/he belongs to, these conceptualisations vary in their main focus. (Brewer, M. B., 2001) *Person based* identities are localized "inside" the self, the group membership being considered an integral part of the self-concept. *Relational* (*role based*) identities define the self in relation to others. *Group* based identities concern the self-perception as a member of a group. Finally, *collective* identities can be defined as norms, values and ideologies connected to the membership in a collectivity, being more than mere similarities between the group members (ibid). Clearly, we can hardly consider these "levels" of identity as mutually independent; they just represent an analytical distinction corresponding to different levels of explanation in social psychology. (See Doise, W., 1982)

The social identity approach situates the empirical research mainly within the group based conceptualisation and a situational/contextual understanding of identity without, however, necessarily claiming a constructivist standpoint. It has been largely used in the study of phenomena such as in-group favouritism, understanding of reactions to inequality of statuses (e.g. in the situation of minority-majority interactions), stereotypisation, modification of intergroup attitudes through contact and, mainly within the last decade, interactions between subordinate (e.g. national) and superordinate (e.g. European) category memberships. (See Brown, R., 2000 for an extensive review and critique)

[1] This text was written in the framework of the grant VEGA 2/6159/26 „Nation as a social category and narrative construction: Case of Slovakia 1989-2004". The author thanks Jana Plichtová and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions to earlier versions of this paper.
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[3] Traditionally, a large body of social psychology empirical research drawing on social identity approach has taken place in experimental laboratory settings – in an environment perfectly controlled for any intervening influences, working with a restricted number of well defined variables and, in some cases, with arbitrarily assigned group memberships. However, an increasing number of researchers apply, test and/or redefine the fundamental social identity approach assumptions in empirical research with real social groups and, eventually, outside of the laboratory context. (See e.g. Gibson, J. L., 2006; Hunter, J. A. et all, 2005; Rutland, A. – Cinnirella, M., 2000; Cinnirella, M., 1997) In these cases multiple influences on intergroup perception and behaviour, other than a mere group membership salience, come to the fore. Some authors even use a history approach to these phenomena. (See Reicher, S. et all, 2006)

Identity as a category membership: social identity theory and self-categorization theory

The basic question that motivated the emergence of the social identity theory was to understand why people are so prone to discriminate in favour of their in-group. (See Tajfel, H. – Turner, J. C., 1986) The first body of empirical research was based on the *minimal group paradigm*, defining the group as a mere cognitive representation. This was a reaction against Sherif's realistic conflict theory, illustrated by his famous experiments in boy's summer camps. (Sherif, M., et all, 1961) Unlike his predecessor, Tajfel considered that inequality of material resources was not a necessary condition of discrimination between groups. He provided experimental evidence that the strict minimal group situation, where the participants are arbitrarily assigned a group membership in a laboratory setting, is sufficient for eliciting strong in-group favouritism. (e.g. Tajfel, H., 1978) This has often been interpreted as an out-group discrimination rather than as a striving for a maximal differentiation between an in-group and out-group. (For criticism see Reicher, S., 2004; Leyens, J.-P. et all, 2003; Brown, R., 2000) However, research in anthropology and social psychology shows that in-group favouritism and out-grou derogation are not necessarily correlated. (Brewer, – Campbell, 1976; Hinkle – Brown, 1990 in Leyens, J.-P. et all, 2003)

The *social identity theory* proposes that social perception and behaviour can be described on a continuum ranging from personal and interpersonal at one extreme, to group and intergroup at the other. At the group extreme, people judge and treat one another as representatives of social groups and categories rather than as individuals, and their social rather than individual identity becomes salient (Tajfel, H. – Turner, J. C., 1986) Social identity *"consists of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging"* (ibid, p. 16)[4]. The central idea of social identity theory is that social structure influences people's actions through the social psychological medium of social identity. That is, *"ethnic, gender, and class divisions persist not because of inherent characteristics of the members of the different groups, but because those people identify with groups that exist in specific relation to one another. Social stasis or social change reflects people's acceptance or rejection of the relations between these groups".* (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004, p. 101)

The *self-categorization theory*, assumes that self is a complex system that can be defined at various levels of abstraction and is a context dependent cognitive representation. (Onorato, R. S. – Turner, J. C., 2004)[5] When identification with a particular group is salient, people will conform to norms, attitudes and communicative conventions of that group (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004) and it will be perceived as more homogenous than an out-grou. (Tajfel, H. – Turner, J. C., 1986) Yet some self-categorizations can be more accessible, more subjectively important and more enduring than others. For instance those social categories that are used more frequently for self-definition should be less sensible to the context change than those used occasionally (Stangor, et all, 1992, in Rutland, A. – Cinnirella, M., 2000), which is relevant for the study of emerging social identities such as the European one.

Multiple category memberships: hierarchical relations between social categories?

Breakwell (1993) criticises the approach, which for a long time dominated the social identity research in social psychology and preferred comparisons between one in-group and one out-grou, while ignoring the interactions between multiple category memberships. Yet people belong to many groups and the meaning of every social identity depends on other identities an individual has in his/her repertoire. (See Hopkins, N., 2001)[6]

The self-categorization theory had a simple recipe concerning these interactions, assuming that there is a *functional antagonism* (Turner, J. C., 1987) between various levels of self-categorization (e.g. local, regional, national, European). This would mean that if the categorization of an individual as a European is salient, it leads to an accentuation of perceived similarities between different European nations (low variability within the category Europe), while if the categorization of an individual as a member of a particular nation is salient, it leads to an accentuation of perceived differences between own and other European nations (high variability within the category Europe). As the variability within a category cannot be high and low at the same time, national and European

[4] As the self-esteem of an individual depends on his/her positive social identity, s/he will seek membership in groups that provide it. The research on self-esteem and intergroup behaviour indicates that discrimination raises self-esteem rather than lowered self-esteem motivates discrimination. (See Brown, R., 2000) However, the need to categorize oneself and others – to reduce uncertainty to make the world and one's place within it meaningful – might be complementary to or even more fundamental than self-esteem. (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004)

[5] The dependence on the context is manifested by the tendency to increase (in relevant dimensions of comparison) the differences between the in-group and out-grou and the similarities within one's in-group. (Turner, J. C., 1987)

[6] For example, the results of an experimental study by Onorato and Turner (2004) suggest that even the self- schema, traditionally considered as stable in psychology research on self, can be changed when a superordinate category is made salient. Their participants generally responded in line with the salient identity, even if this pattern of responding directly contradicted their personal self-schema.

identities should be constructed at different levels of abstraction and should not be salient simultaneously.

However, the fact that in everyday life people maintain a coherent sense of who they are in spite of being able to behave differently in different contexts seems incompatible with the idea that people function at only one level of categorization at a time. (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004) Moreover, even if a social category becomes salient, people do not necessarily strongly identify with it. (Rutland, A. – Cinnirella, M., 2000)

The results of empirical research on the relations between multiple category memberships provide at least three possible arguments against the mechanically hierarchising position. These are, of course, mutually interrelated and concern: (1) the thematic presence of particular social categories in public discourse and their subsequent accessibility for self-definition; (2) the structural relations between social groups including their relative status; (3) the representations of the "superordinate" categories.

Ad (1)

Regional, national and European identifications of Scots were investigated in various comparative contexts. (Rutland, A – Cinnirella, M., 2000) The Scottish participants were asked to rate first the Australians and than the Scots on some characteristic traits. The assumption of the self-categorization theory, according to which such a manipulation of comparative context should elicit a supranational (European) or at least a national (British) level of comparison/identification, was not confirmed. Thus, the way people perceive these social categories and the meaning they ascribe to them can contradict formal hierarchical understanding of the relationships between social categories, according to which the superordinate European category should include the British and Scottish categories and become salient in an "intercontinental" comparative context. In fact, the psychological relations between these social categories are totally different, the Scottish-Australian comparisons being a relatively rare experience in today's Scotland (ibid)[7].

Moreover, even if we think of different social categories – such as regional, national and European – in terms of different levels of abstraction that should, theoretically, be perceived as mutually inclusive, their perceived compatibility can vary according to different media and political discourses that are predominant in a particular country. For example, Cinnirella (1997) found that while the national and European identities in Italian students were positively correlated, the opposite was true for British students. This finding was interpreted as reflecting the dominant discourse in the UK at the time of study, which presented European identity as constructed at the same level of abstraction as the national identity (as its alternative) and, thus, as a potential threat. (See also Condor, S., 1999; 2004)[8]

Ad (2) and (3)

Gibson (2006) argues than when the content of a superordinate group is contested, simply sharing a superordinate group membership may be of little consequence for intergroup relations as well as for the perception of and identification with the superordinate group. Pre-existing social-structural relationships between groups such as asymmetries in size, power, or status may create strong forces of resistance to change in category boundaries. (Brewer, – Gaertner, 2004 in Gibson, J. L., 2006, p. 694)

As far as the European integration is concerned, it has been suggested that if the subgroup (national) identities are to be maintained within the context of a superordinate (European) common group identity, the perceptions about the position of each subgroup might organise the representation of the superordinate group as a whole. (Chryssochou, X., 2000b) Thus, instead of solely studying feelings of common bonds between individuals or groups (so frequent in social psychology research on identities), empirical investigation should pay more attention to the principles that guide lay theories people hold about the unification processes within superordinate groups. (Chryssochou, X., 2000a)

For example, Chryssochou (2000b) showed that both French and Greek participants agreed upon the idea that the relative status of EU member states is based on economic criteria. However, while the French defined the EU in terms of positive common goals and interdependence (it is reasonable to be together if we want to survive economically), for the Greeks the EU membership was linked to the feelings of dependence. The Greeks feared that the legitimacy of their EU membership might be doubted and, thus, did not feel automatically included in the EU as in a more inclusive category than the national one. The author argues that, in terms of intergroup relations, it is important to see how these different representations are negotiated within the superordinate group (ibid).

[7] Also other authors point out the importance of experience with certain comparisons in eliciting a sense of superordinate identity, although not in the sense of its context dependent salience. For example, Boehnke and Fuss (2004) suggest that previous experience of travelling into other European countries is – together with foreign languages command and willingness to move into another country – a predictor of identification with Europe in young adults.

[8] Cinnirella (ibid) suggests that the European identity in Britain was discursively constructed at the international level of abstraction in relation to the Gulf war (1990-1991) during which the country cooperated with the rest of Europe. In this case, European identity was perceived as compatible with the British identity, because both had served common goals of ensuring security and power.

Yet multiple category memberships are not just an issue of conflicts and tensions between various identities. The constitutive elements of the superordinate and subordinate categories may in a way also blend together. To mention another example related to Greece, it was argued that in this country the elements of national identity and history (mainly Antiquity) have become constitutive elements of Europeaness and, conversely, the European elements (economic prosperity and position of the EU as an influential political actor) have influenced the representations of the Greek nation. (Triandafyllidou, A., 2002) Thus we cannot mechanically say that being Greek and being European are nested identities.

The findings mentioned above make it quite evident that the level of abstraction of a social identity is not an objective characteristic of a particular social categorization. The relations between social identities and categories are not just a matter of comparative context; they are also shaped by socio-political factors, normative expectations, discourses, social representations, power interests, everyday experience as well as strategic goals of communication. Hence the formation of national and European identities is not as simple as the model of hierarchically nested levels of categorization derived from the self-categorization theory[9].

From cognition to meaning negotiation

In his review of theories of nationalism, Findor (2006) suggests that there has been a shift in focus from real groups to categories of practice. Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004) even speak of a *cognitive turn* in the study of ethnicity, race and nation, and refer to psychology (and anthropology) as a potential source of inspiration. As far as social psychology is concerned, the research on national identity is particularly flourishing at British universities.[10] However, this tradition of research has rather been undergoing a *linguistic turn,*

[9] Various social psychology models focus on the superordinate category membership and its consequences for the relations between the subgroups. For example, the *common in-group identity model* (Gaertner, S. L., et all, 1993) postulates that intergroup conflict can be reduced by transforming the representations of membership in two different groups into a representation of membership in a single, more inclusive group. This does not necessarily mean that each group must give up its previous identity – a dual *identity* can be created that allows realising the advantages resulting from a common superordinate identity such as cooperation between groups and recognition of superordinate goals (Brewer, 2000). However, Hornsey and Hogg (1999) suggest to beware of the assumption that the intergroup relations can be mechanically improved by motivating the subgroup members to focus on the shared superordinate category. In their experiment also those who perceived the superordinate group to be highly inclusive showed high levels of intergroup discrimination regardless of whether the subgroup boundaries were preserved (analogous to cultural pluralism) or not (analogous to cultural assimilation). Moreover, Mummendey and Wenzel's (1999) *model of in-group projection* suggests that if both in-group and out-grou are incorporated in a more inclusive social category and if the in-group's attributes are perceived as prototypical for that category, the difference between the groups may be so fundamental that out-grou is not to be perceived as a part of the superordinate category.

[10] The British tradition of research in this domain is represented mainly by the work of Michael Billig and his colleagues/students who would probably object to my blithe use of the term *British*.

and it can be argued that it has refocused the analytical attention from social groups as cognitive representations back to the real groups as social actors.

For example, Reicher (2004) criticises the classical formulation of social identity theory for not taking into account the possibility for the individuals to choose the *type* of social categories that will be used for self-definition, the *number of* those *categories* nor the *number of dimensions* through which the intergroup differentiation will take place. This runs counter the assumption that in post-modern era an increasing number of category memberships can be acquired by acts of choice. (See e.g. Baumeister, R. F., 1987) Furthermore, the social identity approach ignores the gradation in the *strength of identifications* as well as the *subjective meanings* and *stability* of many social and political identities. (See also Huddie, L., 2001) It also pays little attention to dynamic processes such as *language, negotiation of meaning* or *social influence.* (Hopkins, N. – Kahani-Hopkins, V., 2004) This leads to a one-sided perceptualist terminology that might suggest that the categorization is mechanically derived from the context. (Reicher, S. – Hopkins, N., 2001) However, the language is not just a source through which cognitive representations can be captured, it is a domain where the definitions of social categories are constructed and negotiated. (Potter, J. – Wetherell, M., 1987)

While the perceptualist terminology implies that categories used for self-definition reflect the "real" relations of common faith and similarity, the rhetorical psychology argues that social identities are not simply results of perception of the world such as it is now, but are instead arguments that should make possible the future transformation of the actual social relations. Their strategic use has consequences for what social action will be deemed possible. (See. e.g. Billig, M., 1995; Hopkins, N. – Kahani-Hopkins, V., 2004; Hopkins, N. – Reicher, S., 1996; Reicher, S., 2004; Reicher, S., et all, 2006; Reicher, S. – Hopkins, N., 1996, 2001) Thus, Muslim political activists in Britain constructed different definitions of British Muslims' religious identification – either an identification with the international community of Muslims or a dual categorization as Muslim and British citizen – expected to lead to different perceptions of this group by "British public opinion" as well as to different possibilities of their action as a group. (Hopkins, N. – Kahani-Hopkins, V., 2004)

In the same vein Bellier, political anthropologist, shows how strategic communicative concerns influence identity choices people make in a particular situation. Her research on expatriate civil servants working for the European Commission in Brussels in 1990's (Bellier, I., 2002) suggests that, when interacting with each other, the civil servants were more likely to define themselves in terms of their regional identities (reaffirming their roots, providing optimal distinctiveness, not conflicting) than in terms of their national identities

(potential source of tensions) as the social identity perspective would suggest. When asked when they felt European, surprisingly, they did not relate their sense of European identity to their common work for the EC ("superordinate goals"), but all of them replied: *"when I come back home"*, and *"when I am dealing with Americans and Japanese"*. (ibid, p. 90) European identity was defined only in contrast to the national Other and not in reference to internal positive or negative features that, probably, did not provide enough "optimal distinctiveness". (Brewer, M. B., 1991)

Large scale social categories

As far as the research on national identity is concerned, Billig (1995) criticises the social identity and self-categorization theories for aspiring to universalism and ignoring the specific meaning of social categories[11]. Their focus upon the cognitive processes of categorization leads to neglecting the ways in which national identity becomes part of everyday practice. (ibid) Actually, the most effective way of imposing a definition of a social category is to consider it natural or granted. (See e.g. Reicher, S. et al., 2006; Findor, A., 2006 for the discussion on theories of nationalism.)

Moreover, the applicability of the approaches drawing on the perspective of social identity to the questions of nationality and citizenship is limited in the sense that they focus on the way people relate to social categories by the means of categorization and overlook the possibility that the boundaries of a political community can also be imagined in institutional or territorial terms (Abell, J., et all, 2006), which is particularly true for national identities. (Hopkins, N. – Dixon, J., 2006).

Finally, Cinnirella (1996) criticises the mechanical use of social identity approach for explanation of identification with large scale social categories because the creation and diffusion of group beliefs in this kind of categories is much more complex than in small social groups studied in laboratory. Moreover, large scale social categories are often characterised by heterogeneity of norms, prototypes and stereotypes, which can have a considerable influence on social identities the individuals will opt for. In this kind of investigations we necessarily touch also the issue of social representations – systems of shared beliefs and constructions of reality shaped in communication and social interaction. (ibid, see also Chryssochou, X., op. cit.)[12] For example, the identification with a group is influenced by the representation of this group as a clearly delimited entity, which can be particularly important in earlier stages of this group's formation. (Castano, E., et all, 2003) In the case of European integration this may have direct implications for attitudes towards the EU[13].

Although Brewer (2000) agrees with the assertion that the formation of a common identity between actors interacting in a laboratory setting is qualitatively different from the formation of symbolic identities in large scale collectivities; she considers that laboratory research might help thinking of intergroup relationships in the large scale, mainly in respect to the reduction of intergroup conflicts. She suggests (ibid) that it might help to formulate the policies of pluralism in multicultural societies where – because of the assumption that distrust and animosities between groups are a product of a realistic conflict – the institutions often strengthen existing differences between social categories by allocating resources to particular subgroups, which subsequently reduces the potential for creation of superordinate group identities and goals.

Some methodological implications

Traditionally, empirical research drawing on social identity approach uses experimental approach, the most frequent material being identification scales or check lists where, in different experimental conditions and different comparative contexts elicited by the experimenter, the participants are asked to display the strength of identification with a particular social category (e.g. Slovaks and/or Europeans), to chose attributes typical for their in-group and for the out-grou, etc. Correlation questionnaire studies are also frequent. (See e.g. Cinnirella, M., 1997) However, it can be argued that the same concepts (such as Slovaks or Europeans) can have different meanings for different individuals or groups (as well as different concepts can have the same meaning) and that the meaning of each term depends on the larger framework within which it is established. (Reicher, S. – Hopkins, N., 2001)

Another problem is that individual difference measures of social identification are sometimes used to operationalise the salience or importance of particular group memberships, which seems to contradict the fundamental social identity assumption that social identity phenomena are context dependent. (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004) Moreover, social identity is sometimes treated as a thing rather than a process underpinning multiple social phenomena (ibid)[14]. Abrams

[11] According to Billig, to have a national identity is to "*possess ways of talking about nationhood*". (Billig, M., 1995, p. 8)

[12] While social representations influence the formation of social identities by defining group boundaries, social identities influence social representations by affecting to which representations the individual and the group will be exposed, which of them they will adopt and how they will use them. (Breakwell, G., 1993)

[13] Indeed, the negative attitudes towards the EU seem to be linked to the belief that it is not a real entity, while the positive attitudes seem to be linked to the belief that it has a real existence. (Castano, E., et all, 2003)

[14] Not in the sense of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman's *reification* or *typification* of identities (Berger, P. – Luckmann, T., 1991), but rather in the sense that it is considered as a construct that is clearly delimited and can be objectively captured, measured, and described.

and Hogg further point out that "*there is a need to be clear about the relation between methods and measures used and the process under observation. In the case of self-categorization the process can be observed at the level of cognition, but* (…) *the cognition is shaped and organized in relation to people's shared membership of social categories and a self-concept that is organized on the basis of perceived relations among different categories. Individual differences in identification are useful to capture variance in the relation between social identity and behaviour but do not explain that relation".* (ibid, p. 103) Other authors also recommend using implicit rather then explicit measures of identification. (Brown, R., 2000)

But the problems with "measurement" of identities are not reserved to social psychology research. For example, in its classical operationalisation of identification with nation and Europe, Eurobarometer *à priori* constructs these identities as mutually exclusive[15]. (But see Standard Eurobarometer 62 for a non exclusive operationalisation.) Still, in spite of these limitations, Eurobarometer can be considered an instrument that may help constructing a European "imagined community". (Anderson, B., 1991) In fact, after publication of a new wave of results the media report on what "the Europeans" identify with, what "the Europeans" think of the EU and its institutions, or what "the Europeans" fear. Thanks to its repeated thematic presence in public discourse, this category may become part of everyday life and, eventually, become more accessible for self-definition.

Also those keen to use a more qualitative approach to studying identities, but restricting it solely to semi-structured interviewing, should be aware of several limitations of this method. (See e.g. Atkinson, P. – Silverman, D., 1998) When investigating identities via an interview[16], the researchers should avoid the mechanical assumption that difficulties the participants have when talking about certain kinds of identity necessarily reflect difficulties in their thinking of themselves in terms of these identities. (Condor, S., 2004) Condor (ibid) argues that we should not confuse explicit *identity claims* with the construct of identity *per se*. Moreover, the analysis of interview material should also take into account *identity displays* such as deixis or personal pronouns' use. (ibid, see also Condor, S., 1999; Abell, J., et all, 2006) For example, in a cross-cultural research on European identity (See Jamieson, L., 2004) some of those who claimed having a strong sense of European identity at the same time used linguistic displays of distance („there", „they") that implicitly suggested the perception of Europe as the Other. (Condor, S., 2004; see also Condor, S., 1999)

[15] "In the near future, do you see yourself as...?: (NATIONALITY) only, (NATIONALITY) and European, European and (NATIONALITY), European only". (Standard Eurobarometer 61, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/eb61_en.pdf, p. B.94).

[16] For a methodological discussion on identity work in semi-structured interviewing on identity see Lášticová & Petrjánošová (2005).

Conclusion

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that the use of the term "identity" in social sciences is often contradictory. In some cases it tends to mean too little and in others it tends to mean too much – in the real world settings many actions can but many cannot be explained in terms of identities. For instance, even if people participating in deadly ethnic riots may have strong group attachments, most of those with strong group attachments fail to riot. (Gibson, J. L., 2006) The influences on behaviour are often cross-cutting and contextual, as in the finding that one of the strongest predictors of participation in protest activities is simply getting an invitation from a friend. (Gibson, 1997 in Gibson, J. L., 2006, p. 696)

Identification with large scale categories as studied by mainstream social psychology means too little when limited to individual categorization processes and forgetting that these are mediated by multiple and often contradictory discourses. Even if defined as a cognitive process, self-categorization does not "happen" in a void, the participants in a laboratory research bringing in different social representations and normative expectations that may influence the way they respond to the scales. In the real world settings, a particular categorization is also a matter of strategic/pragmatic choices, particular opportunities and various resources. However, we should beware of what Brubaker and Cooper (op. cit., p. 11) perceptively call *clichéd constructivism*. The most important idea the researchers ought bear in mind – whatever their methodological convictions – is that social identity is a medium trough which the social structure influences people's actions. And this is indeed the "meso" level of analysis Abrams and Hogg (op. cit.), quoting Pettigrew, are talking about.

To conclude, and to come back to the position of social psychology in research on identification with large scale social categories, let's mention the danger social psychologists should definitely attempt to avoid: [We] *"may take for granted that what we observe is the phenomenon of interest—that because we can study something in the lab it is useful to do so, and that we may have furnished an explanation that is useful or relevant. There is a risk of losing sight of the more micro and macro processes that surround those under observation".* (Abrams, D. – Hogg, M. A., 2004, p. 98)

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