

Lack and jouissance in hegemonic discourse of identification with the state

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Abstract

This article shows how hegemonic discourses are sustained through the play of lack and *jouissance*. Lack refers to the symbolic limits of discourse and is both the condition of possibility and of impossibility of hegemony: while it vitiates the realization of a full identity, it at the same time keeps spurring the search for it. *Jouissance* describes the paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction that subjects procure from this lack, from the failure to attain the enjoyment that hegemonic discourse promises. Looking at how organizations become enmeshed with the formation of state subjects, the article considers identification with the discourse of a strong Russia at a Russian elite university as an empirical illustration. This discourse becomes hegemonic in students' identification not only because it proposes a comprehensive project that unifies a range of diverse signifiers and promises enjoyment, but also because it fails to provide a full symbolic suture and subjects are unable to obtain the promised enjoyment. This constant lack forms the basis for repeated acts of identification that strive to overcome it and provides a *jouissance* that keeps subjects attached to the illusory quest for real enjoyment—and thus to identification with a strong Russia.

Keywords

discourse, identities, hegemony, jouissance, Lacan, lack, Laclau, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, Russia

The concept of discourse has been at the heart of thinking about identities and subject formation in organization studies. Departing from a positivist conceptualization of identities as relatively stable and measurable attributes of subjects or organizations (Albert and Whetten, 1985), the turn towards discourse, part of a larger linguistic turn (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000a), has served to bolster a position in which identities are seen as constructed through language (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004;

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Grant and Hardy, 2004; Ybema et al., 2009). Central to almost all understandings of discourse is the assumption of symbolic meaning construction. This assumption has helped foreground the incompleteness and fleeting character of identities (e.g. Driver, 2009a; Jones and Spicer, 2005) and, in a more critical stance, the disciplining, hegemonic effects of identity making, management and manipulation (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Brown and Humphreys, 2006).

This article argues that in order to understand how identities become and remain hegemonic through discourse, we need to think hegemony from the limits of discourse—that which exceeds the symbolic structure and cannot but fail to be expressed in language. In so doing, two interrelated concepts are of central importance: lack and *jouissance*. Each hegemonic discourse exhibits a constitutive lack that has a dialectical relation to hegemony: while it reveals the impossibility of attaining a fully sutured identity, lack also reinvigorates the search for this impossible identity in an attempt to overcome the last obstacles that bar the subject from realizing it. Lack thus is both the condition of possibility *and* of impossibility of a hegemonic identity (Laclau, 1990). The psychoanalytical concept of *jouissance* describes the paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction subjects procure from failing again and again to fill the constitutive lack at the heart of their identities, to obtain the enjoyment that hegemonic discourses promise (Driver, 2009a). The intention of the article then is to contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of the power as well as the limits of discourses, asking what makes some stick, gripping their subjects, and others not (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011: 1131; Stavrakakis, 2007: 21).

The article will develop this conceptual argument on the basis of material from ethnographic research at a Russian elite university. A central mission of this university is the education of patriotic citizens who identify with the discourse of a ‘strong Russia’. Besides a number of disciplinary mechanisms of teaching and learning that support this discourse, it also promises enjoyment through consumption and career success. But although it is marked by a constant lack and reneges on the promise to deliver enjoyment, students continue to be attached to this discourse. This is because this lack delivers *jouissance* and stimulates a desire that supports the quest for an illusory real enjoyment and with it the hegemonic construction of a strong Russia.

On the empirical side, the article thus moves away from examining individual or organizational identities as the dominant foci of identity research in organization studies (Alvesson et al., 2008: 13) to look at how an organization is embedded in larger societal discourses and promotes identification with the *state*. Instead of asking ‘Who am I as a member of this organization?’ (Brewer and Gardner, 1996), it is interested in the question ‘Who am I as a citizen of this state?’. In this sense, the article is still concerned with identity regulation in organizations (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), but examines how organizations are bound up with the formation of hegemonic discourses and the production of state subjects through the dialectic of lack and the associated work of *jouissance*.

Discursive identities: moving through lack to *jouissance*

The lack in the symbolic

Discourse has become one of the conceptual linchpins of research on identities and subject formation in organization studies. Sometimes framed as narratives (Boje, 2001; Brown, 2006; Czarniawska, 1997), stories (Boje, 2008; Gabriel, 2000) or talk (Thurlow and Mills, 2009; Ybema, 2010) the concept of discourse, almost without exception, has been treated as a language-based construct (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011: 1125). The chapter on identities and discourse in the *Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, for example, defines discourse as ‘interrelated sets of

texts' (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004: 154). In a few cases, the study of discourse is seen as extending to meaning construction through practice, going beyond the analysis of textual representations (e.g. Bridgman, 2007). Yet, despite the multiplicity of understandings of the term (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000b), it seems fair to claim that a common thread is the focus on symbolic meaning construction—mostly through language, sometimes through language and practice. This focus reflects the underlying assumption that the world is negotiated in and through meaning, making discourse central in the constitution of identities.

One prominent strand of discursive research has emerged around questions of hegemony and the ways in which one identity becomes temporarily dominant in particular settings (see Alvesson et al., 2008). This work has employed theorists such as Laclau (e.g. Böhm, 2006; Bridgman, 2007; Contu and Willmott, 2005; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Spicer and Böhm, 2007) and Foucault (e.g. Knights and MacCabe, 2003; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) to conceptualize the variegated relationships of power and resistance in organizations. A framing through the concept of discourse has allowed this research to understand hegemony as a set of texts and practices that construct the social world in a particular way, excluding other possibilities (Grant et al., 2009). Studies vary, however, in the extent to which they stress the stable, structuring character of hegemony or foreground contingency and resistance (see Böhm et al., 2008; Spicer and Böhm, 2007).

In another strand of analysis, ideas from French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan have recently attracted considerable attention for conceptualizing subjectivity and identity formation (e.g. Arnaud, 2002; Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Contu et al., 2010; Driver, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Jones and Spicer, 2005; see Kenny, 2009 for a critique). Michaela Driver (2009a), for example, has made a case for refocusing identity research on the lack in the constitution of identities, on the illusion that the subject can be whole and fulfilled. The subject comes into being by attempting to fill this lack, by struggling again and again to overcome it, but is faced with the impossibility of ever succeeding in this endeavor.

This article aims to bring together ideas from Laclau and Lacan, proposing to view the emergence of hegemonic identities from the limits of discourse, where symbolic signification fails, is interrupted, is distorted. For Lacan the lack of the subject is a hole in the symbolic structure, the impossibility of the subject to fully represent itself in the symbolic order: 'The cut made by the signifying chain is the only cut that verifies the structure of the subject as a discontinuity in the real' (1977: 299). Ernesto Laclau incorporated this constitutive role of lack in Lacan's work into his social theory of hegemony (Laclau, 1990, 1996a). Laclau had long been familiar with the work of Lacan, at least since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Stavrakakis, 2007). This engagement was taken one step further at the beginning of the 1990s with Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990; see also Laclau, 1996a) in which he appropriated Lacan's negative ontology of lack (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004). For Laclau, lack circles the limit of a discursive structure, representing 'the *interruption* or *breakdown* of the process of signification' (Laclau, 1996a: 37). This limit prevents a discourse from becoming fully hegemonic, that is from structuring the social world in only one way.

Several authors in organization studies have pointed to this parallel in the *œuvres* of Lacan and Laclau. Contu and Willmott (2006: 1772), for example, stress that hegemonic discourses are structured around a radical negativity just as identities always exhibit a lack, Böhm and Batta (2010: 357) see lack as the event of resistance against hegemonies and Jones and Spicer (2005) show how the discourse of entrepreneurship constantly fails to produce the object it speaks of:

We are suggesting that entrepreneurship discourse is not a coherent and stable discourse, held together around a stable centre. Rather, it is a paradoxical, incomplete and worm-ridden symbolic structure that posits an impossible and indeed incomprehensible object at its centre (Jones and Spicer, 2005: 236).

It is important to note that both for Laclau and for Lacan lack plays the dialectical role of being both the *condition of possibility and impossibility* of a certain identity. While it bars the complete realization of a given identity, it also makes identification possible in the first place.

If I need to identify with something, it is because I do not have a full identity in the first place. These acts of identification can only be thought of as the result of the lack within the structure and have the permanent trace of the lack (Laclau, 1996a: 92).

The subject thus emerges from a structural lack and identification is an attempt to fill this lack. The dialectical function of lack can be seen in the example of the discourse of entrepreneurship from above. Since it always blocks an entrepreneurial identity and threatens to overturn its discursive hegemony, lack exposes the *impossibility* of complete meaning fixation. But at the same time it is essential for being able to think of an entrepreneurial identity in the first place, because it is only vis-à-vis this lack and the attempts at overcoming it that the subject defines itself as an entrepreneur and acts of identification take place. The identity of the subject is therefore suspended in the dialectical relationship of lack and hegemony (Driver, 2009a).

With Laclau, the presence of lack is always attributed to an antagonist—someone or something that prevents us from becoming who we want to be and is made responsible for the lack in our identity—a scapegoat (Laclau, 1990; Žižek, 1989). In this sense, antagonism marks the constitutive outside of a hegemonic discourse. It simplifies the social space through establishing a dichotomous division into two camps (see Figure 1). In each camp, one signifier (ES) comes to stand in for the demands of all other signifiers (S1, S2, S3, S4) through arranging them in relations of equivalence (expressed by = in Figure 1). The existence of this so-called empty signifier is the essential precondition for the emergence of a hegemonic discourse (Laclau, 1996b: 44).

The subject of jouissance

We have seen that Laclau and Lacan share much common ground with regard to the concept of lack as the basis of a negative ontology. One further step, however, is necessary to explain why discourses continue to exercise a hold over subjects although they repeatedly fail to fill the lack in identities—a step that Laclau has been reluctant to take (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004; Stavrakakis, 2007: 71–87). Why do subjects ‘turn around when they get called’ (Jones and Spicer, 2005) and only engage in ‘decaf resistance’ to hegemonic discourses (Contu, 2008)? For Lacan, the subject cannot be contained in the symbolic structures of discourse, since it is crucially a subject of *jouissance* (*sujet de la jouissance*) (Lacan, 2007). *Jouissance* is the paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction that results from the repeated failure to obtain the full enjoyment subjects are promised in hegemonic discourses. Obtaining this full enjoyment is illusory, precisely because of the constitutive lack of every discourse. Hegemonic discourse thus relies on the dialectic of the promise of enjoyment on the one hand and the *jouissance* that subjects procure from failing to obtain this enjoyment on the other hand (Figure 1). Lack thus penetrates discourse in a dual form: through the emergence of an empty signifier that strives to unify the symbolic structure and through the search for an illusory enjoyment, both of which promise to fill the lack. It is important to realize that *jouissance* exceeds the symbolic structure, escapes symbolization and appears only as a disruption or distortion of discursive signification (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, 2010; Wissinger, 2007: 239). But although it is beyond language, it is still in relation to language that we need to think of it (Stavrakakis, 2007: 94).

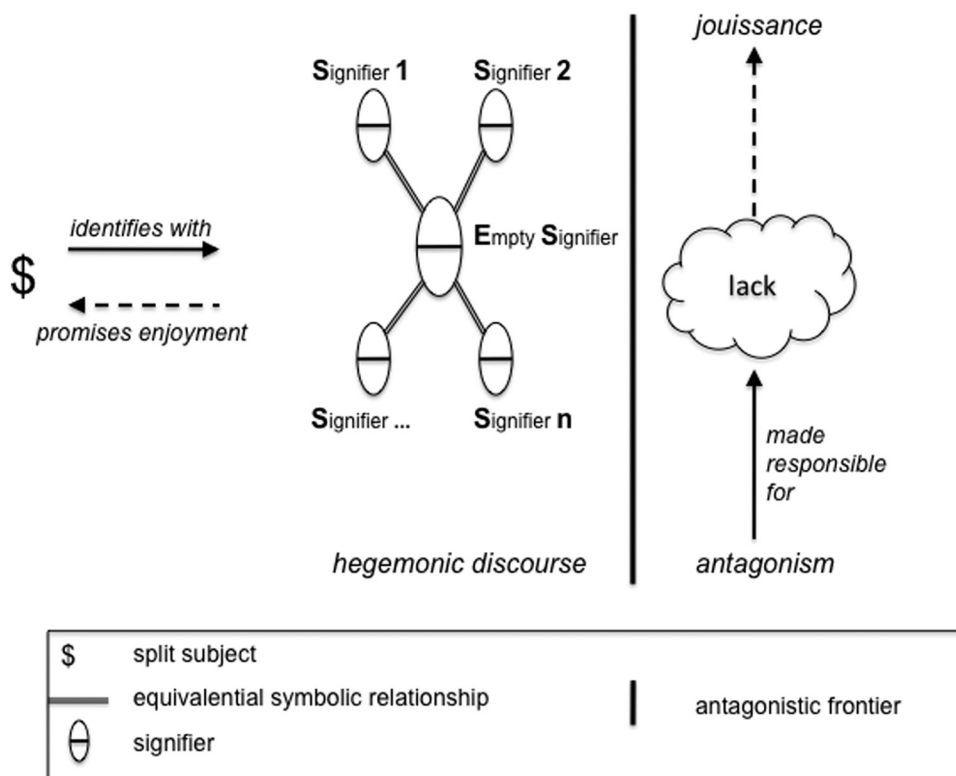


Figure 1. Subject identification with a hegemonic discourse and the role of lack

The importance of *jouissance* for understanding the formation of identities has been underscored in a number of recent publications in organization studies (Arnaud, 2002; Contu, 2008; Driver, 2009a; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006). Thinking about it together with the lack in the symbolic order of discourses, it can act as the missing link that explains why a subject who recognizes the contingency of a hegemonic discourse cannot help but repeating it (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004), engaging only in what Contu (2008) calls *decaf resistance*. Žižek writes that

what psychoanalysis can do to help the critique of ideology is precisely to clarify the status of this paradoxical *jouissance* as the *payment* that the exploited, the servant, receives for serving the Master. This *jouissance* ... keeps us attached to the Master—makes us accept the framework of the social relationship of domination. (Žižek, 1997: 48)

Crucially, *jouissance* arises always from enjoyment that we fail to achieve, enjoyment that we have lost and are looking for (Contu and Willmott, 2006; Driver, 2009a; Kingsbury, 2008). This lack permits the emergence of what Lacanian psychoanalysis calls the fantasy. Fantasy promises to fill the lack in the *jouissance*. It is a construction that conceals the subject's lack through projecting an image of fullness, while at the same time being constituted against antagonism (Braunstein, 2003: 106; Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 130). The term fantasy points to the illusory nature of the project:

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, realizing one's fantasy is impossible because the subject (as a subject of desire) survives only insofar as its desire remains unsatisfied. But the obstacle ... transforms this impossibility into a 'mere difficulty', thus creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible. (Glynos, 2008: 283)

We can see here the immediate parallel of fantasy to Laclau's concept of hegemonic discourse: a hegemonic discourse, too, projects an image of fullness on the one hand, but exhibits a constitutive lack on the other. Just like fantasy, a hegemonic discourse can never reach a full suture, although it promises to do so, due to an external antagonist. Yet, what Lacan adds to Laclau is the idea that the constant failure of fantasy to deliver enjoyment produces desire. This desire animates subjects in the pursuit of a lost enjoyment and functions as the support on which hegemonic identifications rest: 'beyond the field of meaning but at the same time internal to it—an ideology implies, manipulates, produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy' (Žižek, 1989: 125).

Böhm and Batta (2010), for example, analyse this interplay of desire and enjoyment using the example of commodity fetishism. Why, they ask, do people continue to buy the products of multinational textile companies, although countless campaigns have exposed their questionable production processes? The Lacanian reply to this would be that the consumption of those products is unable to bring us full enjoyment, is unable to deliver what it has promised. The fantasy of consumption engenders a constant desire for more in the hope of eventually obtaining enjoyment that keeps us attached to the Master of consumption (Lacan, 2007). If we want to understand why certain identities become and remain hegemonic, we therefore need to look at the limits of discourse where the dialectic of lack and *jouissance* at the same time stabilize and subvert discursive hegemonies.

Analysing identification at a Russian elite university

Stavrakakis (2007: 204) reminds us that 'fantasy is often reproduced through official channels' such as education. Taking up this observation, the empirical case in this article seeks to illustrate how lack and *jouissance* plays out in the discursive construction of identities in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), a Russian elite university. When examining identification in this article I am thus not interested in organizational identification with the university, but rather with identification with a country and its role in world politics. This is a specific type of group identification, just as organizational identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 22), or Lacan would put it: it is an identification of the subject with the state as the Other (Lacan, 1998 [1973]). This departure from looking at individual identities or organizational identification (e.g. Bridgman, 2007; Brown and Humphreys, 2006; Garcia and Hardy, 2007; Humphreys and Brown, 2002) is a crucial one if we are to take seriously the implications of a social theory of hegemony in organization studies. In the constitution of hegemony in society, organizations need to be conceived in relation to and not in isolation of the social world around them. Analysing identification in organizations therefore needs to be acutely aware of how organizations are bound up with and contribute to societal discourses such as those of geopolitics or nationalism.

The analysis builds on 35 interviews with students and transcribed lectures as well as entries from a field diary from nine months of participant observation as a full-time exchange student at MGIMO. While at MGIMO, I attended lectures and seminars that were relevant to my general interest in identification with Russia and ascriptions of Russia's role in the world. All lectures and interviews were transcribed in Russian. Extracts were selected for inclusion in this article on the

basis of their suitability to reflect identification processes in a pronounced form. Only those extracts were translated from Russian into English.

Inevitably, the narrative construed in this article is an interpretation of an interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009: 9), or even an interpretation of an interpretation of an interpretation: students at MGIMO interpret the narratives of lecturers, lecturers interpret the narratives they glean from newspapers and academic journals and I interpret their interpretations of interpretations within my own conceptual framework. Recognizing the multiple authorship of the reconstructed discourse in this article calls for a reflexivity that situates the material in its respective organizational, social and political context (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009)—although this contextualization can never produce more than only partial transparency (Rose, 1997). Combining qualitative interviews with ethnographic observation provided the advantage of being better able to place the interview material in the context of its production, accounting for the fact that interviews are a locus of relational identity construction vis-à-vis the researcher and the views expressed might therefore not be the same as in interactions in everyday life (Alvesson, 2003).

This article as a narrative in its own right has been constructed through coding of the material into common themes that appeared repeatedly when talking about identification with Russia. After an initial open coding process using *in vivo* codes, I used selective coding to establish a core category and its relationship to other categories (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In so doing, the motif of a strong Russia emerged as a central category in the material. In the subsequent step of the analysis I sought to systematize the attributes that were ascribed to a strong Russia, asking what a strong Russia meant to students and lecturers. At this point it became evident that a strong Russia was connected to a range of diverse, sometimes conflicting attributes. It emerged in the coding process that students and lecturers frequently articulated the project of a strong Russia as a response to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was linked to notions of loss and trauma. At the same time, however, the material contained considerable doubt about Russia's ability ever to become a great power, hinting at the inherent impossibility of the realization of a strong Russia.

In order not to remain trapped within descriptions at the subject level, a central critique of inductive methodology such as grounded theory (see Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Parker, 1997), I then moved on to link the structure that had emerged in the coding process to theoretical concepts. Here, I considered different lines of interpretation through theoretical constructs such as critical discourses analysis, narrative analysis and material semiotics. Yet, none of these approaches could account for a phenomenon that I found to be salient at MGIMO: the fact that subjects continued to be invested in the discourse of a strong Russia, despite its obvious failure. For this purpose, I found the work of Laclau and Lacan particularly apt, since it offered a conceptual vocabulary to examine expressions of lack and how the articulation of the fantasy of a strong Russia functions as a hegemonic discourse that not only purports to overcome this lack, but also promises enjoyment to its subjects. Forging this link between a data-driven analysis and general theoretical concepts was crucial to avoid succumbing to the positivist assumption that phenomena are waiting in the data to be discovered, independent from the researcher or the research subjects (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Although the analysis was an inductive process that tried to avoid the risk of fitting data into preconceived conceptual boxes, it must be cautioned against assuming that the account of identification with Russia presented in this article is somehow more authentic, correct or better than other accounts. It is a situational co-construction involving myself, the research subjects and the reader and can therefore not be generalized and applied to other contexts. Other social groups in other contexts and other researchers will frame political events in a different way. Yet, as with the

construction of meaning in general, it is only through articulating this difference that a new perspective on identification with Russia can emerge.

Making subjects for a strong Russia

The endeavour of situating material in the context of its production for a reflexive interpretation renders the organizational context important. Laclau's theory of hegemony, however, has been criticized for being 'unable to perform even elementary institutional analysis' (Boucher, 2009: 97) and taking place in an 'institutional vacuum' (the term 'institutions' encompasses organizations here) (Mouzelis, 1988: 115). This ties in with Howarth's (2000: 119) and Böhm's (2006: 190) observation that discussions of how organizational processes inflect, facilitate or subvert hegemonic discourse are notably scarce from a Laclauian perspective and Alvesson and Kärreman's (2011: 1131) concern with the practices, relations, norms or organizational cultures that make for the power of discourse to stick in the first place.

More than only teaching knowledge and skills, educational organizations produce subjects through an array of disciplinary techniques and practices for the acquisition of knowledge: 'every educational system is a means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them' (Foucault, 1971: 46). Educational organizations are the first locus of intensive training for future administrative and management positions and may shape graduates for all their lives (Fox, 1989). Critical work in educational research has emphasized the contribution of education to legitimizing and stabilizing state power through teaching the 'right' knowledge, educating 'good citizens' and instilling loyalty to the state (Apple, 2004; Green, 1990). Education is thus seen as closely enmeshed in the creation of the ideal state subject, 'one schooled in the norms and proper codes of behaviour related to national citizenship' (Mitchell, 2003: 390).

The Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) serves as a crucial hegemonic link between state ideology and students. Its position in the Russian state apparatus and its mission qualify it for advancing the agenda of the Russian state. As a university under the auspices of the Russian Department of Foreign Affairs, it is embedded in the hierarchical structure of one of the so-called 'power ministries'—state organizations that control vital instruments of state power (Pallin, 2007). The education of loyal citizens is one of its principal goals:

It is our mission to prepare highly capable elites—opinion leaders, business captains—who can serve as a role model and who will be of use for the Russian society and our state (Interview with Professor at MGIMO, 2007).

Education at MGIMO ties explicitly into the process of nation-building and promoting a strong Russia on the international stage. It is an attempt to regulate the identification of Russian citizens and, through promoting a patriotic identification with Russia, produce the appropriate citizen-subject (see Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This situates MGIMO within the larger project of the re-assertion of Russia as a great power, which has been the dominant vision of Russia since the middle of the 1990s, relegating other orientations such as Westernism or Eurasianism to the sidelines (Mankoff, 2009; Tsygankov, 2006). This socio-political context is central to understanding how identification at MGIMO does not happen in an isolated bubble (Alvesson et al., 2008: 11) but is bound up with the state project of advancing Russia as a great power.

This is all the more important since MGIMO fulfils a central role in the reproduction of Russian elites as the school which traditionally trained future members of the Soviet *nomenklatura*. Even

today, in times of mass higher education, the parents of a majority of MGIMO students still come from the highest economic and social strata in Russia (Temnickij, 2002). Although students now increasingly take up work in the private sector, careers in the state apparatus—particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—are still one of the main career choices. MGIMO therefore has a reproductive function for Russian elites, bestowing, as Bourdieu (1996 [1989]: 103–128) writes, ‘societal consecration upon its students’.

Beyond MGIMO’s position in the Russian state apparatus, the specific organizational context of education at this university facilitates the fixation of meaning in the hegemonic discourse of a strong Russia (see Müller, 2009). Perhaps the most influential practice, which I would like to highlight here, is the teaching and reproduction of knowledge. The nature of examinations promotes the accumulation of large amounts of facts and data. As a mainstay of academic performance this kind of knowledge acquisition and reproduction is held in high regard by lecturers and students alike and rewarded with good grades. Knowledge is something to be mastered through drill and amassed—the more the better. It is not uncommon, for example, that there is a complete list of possible questions for the exams available beforehand from the lecturer, which gears the preparation towards memorizing prefabricated answers. In class, students have to be prepared to immediately reproduce information such as the definition of GDP or the hectares of arable land per capita in Russia. This practice of learning and examining fashions knowledge with a quasi-objective character: it is something to be stored and reproduced rather than examined for its contingency. The mastery of minute details is considered essential for making an informed judgement. As one lecturer cautions:

I don’t know the details of the talks and that’s why I hesitate to comment on this question. You have to know all the details. I don’t want to say anything about this topic, because you have to be a professional. (Lecture 31/18)

A similar reservation towards making judgements was evident in my interviews with students. Many students were anxious to explain how their arguments could be backed with objective reasoning. Whenever possible, they quoted events, statistical data or expert analyses to support their positions and were reluctant to make assessments without having detailed knowledge about an issue. When they did so nevertheless, they qualified their assessments as ‘subjective’ or ‘without proper foundation’ and expressed their concern about ‘getting it wrong’. This put me in the sometimes awkward position that I felt like I was examining students on their knowledge when interviewing them and I had to take particular care to emphasize that I was looking for opinions and not for professional analyses. The concern about ‘getting it wrong’ suggests, on the other hand, that once all the details are acquired there is nothing that would stand in the way of an objective conclusion.

The educational apparatus at MGIMO contributes to objectivating knowledge and turning it into truths, thereby making the meaning fixations of what Laclau calls a hegemonic discourse appear natural and shutting out the contingency of the social. In this vein, the organizational context plays a crucial role in providing the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the hegemonic discourse of a strong Russia. This objectivation of knowledge, however, operates only at the symbolic level of signifiers. I will attempt to show in the following that where this symbolic level exhibits a lack, it is the promise of enjoyment and the *jouissance* from failing to obtain full enjoyment that sustain the hegemonic discourse of a strong Russia, despite its obvious failure to bring about what it promises.

Hegemony, lack and *jouissance* in the identification with a strong Russia

Hegemony: strength

At MGIMO, the idea of a strong Russia, of Russia's re-emergence as a great power, proposes a hegemonic discourse that most students can identify with. Ideas of what could constitute a great power are diverse. Some consider great powers to be states with a great past: 'like every country which has a rich history, rich traditions, a rich culture—this is a great power' (Larissa, Year 4, International Relations, 15/89). Economic success is also seen as a crucial precondition for bolstering Russia's great power ambitions. Russia can only become a great power if it rebuilds its economy. 'Improving our economic situation, we become more important in the world arena and the big countries will turn their attention to us' (Galja, Year 4, International Relations, 23/10). For others, it appears important that Russia plays a leading role in unifying the post-Soviet space:

All should be united in one political space, in Eurasia. ... In what context, in what way this will happen is not clear yet. Maybe it will be Russia again. Russia should have the leading role, because it has the biggest assets. (Aleksandr, Year 3, International Relations, 14/55)

Articulations of Russian strength are complemented with articulations of Russian autonomy. A strong Russia is also an autonomous Russia which does not look to others for orientation or support. For Andrej, a fourth-year student of political science, the status of a great power is associated with political, technological and military leadership:

I think that Russia is not only a great power because of its nuclear weapons, not only because it is the biggest country in the world, but because it has resources, it has potential. ... And if we cannot definitely call it a great power now, if we cannot compare with America now, then we can at least say that in the very near future Russia will recoup this status. (Andrej, Year 4, Political Science, 24/74–76)

This vision, of course, is utopian in the short to medium term, but it is expounded with all the more vigor. This daydreaming also allows to articulate visions of Russia that break with the image of a great power that flexes its muscles and are far removed from the current state of affairs and policy conduct. Consider, for example, Boris's rendition of a strong Russia:

For me a great power is primarily a state which can serve as an epitome of virtue for other states, an example of highly moral, highly cultured political relations with that country. A highly developed society which has a high self-awareness, which has its role in the world. (Boris, Year 4, International Journalism, 27/49)

Boris still subscribes to the discourse of a strong Russia, although for him it is not military, political or economic strength but ethical considerations that distinguish a strong Russia. We can see here that a wide range of diverse demands, ranging from economic leadership to re-establishing control over the post-Soviet space, is united within the discourse of a strong Russia. With Laclau (1996b), a 'strong Russia' presents an empty signifier that unifies the social field (compare Figure 1): almost everyone at MGIMO can identify with it, because it offers to fulfill almost every identificatory demand.

What makes the identification with a strong Russia all the stronger is the fact that it also grips students' desires. As with most political projects (Stavrakakis, 2008: 1054), the realization of a strong Russia is linked up with promises of enjoying a 'good life': consumption, a successful

career and, for male students at least, the fulfillment of sexual desire. In general terms, this is the elite life that students and graduates of an elite university such as MGIMO expect and, indeed, are taught and presented with in everyday life. Stories about the weekend trip to Europe or a summer holiday in Goa and the purchase of the latest car model are omnipresent among students at MGIMO. Recruiting events for ‘high potentials’ advertise the stellar career opportunities that await MGIMO students with a degree from their institution. Such a career does not only constitute a guarantee to indulge in consumption, but, for male students, also helps to find and afford an attractive partner.

Students therefore at least in part submit to the hegemony of a strong Russia in education at MGIMO, because of the promise of a future ‘payment’, as Žižek (1997: 48) puts it, in the form of enjoyment. This promise becomes most evident in the MGIMO student magazine, which, in a reflection of everyday life at MGIMO, is a peculiar crossover between a politics, a fashion and a career magazine. The cover of one of its issues advertises an interview with Russian foreign minister Sergej Lavrov and a feature story of career perspectives in the export of Russian arms against the background of a picture of an MGIMO student lasciviously lounging in a Maserati sports car, announcing a multi-page photo shoot in that issue. A strong Russia, this suggests, does not only mean heavy-handed military strength and tedious diplomacy. No, it is much sexier. It means a successful career, a stylish car and an equally stylish and desirable female partner. This promise of enjoyment also plays out in everyday life at MGIMO. Regularly updating one’s wardrobe with pieces from the newest collection, flaunting an expensive mobile phone or boasting about the latest trip abroad is as much part of students’ lives as the hunt for the best job offer that promises the realization of one’s career ambitions and enough money to indulge in a consumerist lifestyle, all the while being true to one’s country (see Müller, 2009). These promises are bound up with the education at MGIMO—an education that not only seeks to make subjects of a strong Russia but also appeals to their desires. They represent the libidinal investments that turn the Russian great power project into something that subjects actively desire to identify with.

The lack in the discourse of a strong Russia

We have seen in the previous section that the discourse of a strong Russia is hegemonic at MGIMO because it both promises enjoyment and manages to cancel most differences and construct a unified social field where almost every demand can be formulated in terms of establishing a strong Russia. But at the same time, there is a paradoxical sense that becoming as a great power might be impossible, that there is a lack at the centre of the discourse of a strong Russia that prevents the realization of a strong Russia and bars the discourse from what Laclau calls a complete suture of the symbolic. This impossibility of symbolization fashions lack with a traumatic quality of something that cannot be mastered (Hurst, 2008: 208–220). In the circling of lack, the symbolic order breaks down and established conventions of speech and reasoning are unable to express what subjects want to say (Driver, 2009b: 355; Hoedemaekers, 2010: 384).

But what prevents this realization of a strong Russia? For one thing, it is the perceived presence of the West as an antagonist to a strong Russia that vitiates the full constitution of the discourse. The West is constructed as an agent that tries to curtail Russia’s influence and prevents its emergence as a strong state, for example through supporting the centrifugal tendencies in the post-Soviet states:

[L]ook at those botanic revolutions, or at the horticultural revolutions or at the flower revolutions as they call them. Lemon revolution, saffron revolution. All those revolutions cannot do without Western NGOs. The West, in fact, is at work. It is just that in the closed Soviet society we did not know how the West worked against us. (Lecture 62/4)

For this lecturer, the color revolutions mark the advance of the West in Eastern Europe and he interprets them as a threat to a strong Russia. The ridiculing in this statement ('horticultural revolution, ... lemon revolution, saffron revolution') presents, once again, a radical deviation from the standard style of reasoning that relies on facts and figures and is espoused at MGIMO. Unsettling established organizational practices of teaching and knowledge acquisition, this deviation transcends the symbolic dimension. In circling the lack through the use of cynicism it hints at a traumatic event that defies symbolization and exposes a lack in subjects' identification (Driver, 2009a). If Russia's strength is challenged in its own backyard, who can rightfully speak of a strong Russia? Interviews and lectures thus reveal a sense of blaming an external culprit, an outside force for the permanent failure of a strong Russia. This process of scapegoating, of constructing an external antagonist, attributes the impossibility of a strong Russia to an external antagonist (see, for example, Žižek, 1989 on Jews as scapegoats in Germany under national socialism).

In a similar vein, in the lectures and interviews a feeling of exclusion repeatedly surfaces that reinforces the blockage of Russia's re-emergence. Rather than being taken seriously as an equal partner, Russia is perceived to be looked down on as backward and underdeveloped. What shines through in those instances in both lectures and interviews is a feeling of personal offence. 'We can do what we want: we stay unreliable partners. Here, again, [the West] tries to create such a negative image of Russia' (Aleksandr, Year 3, International Relations, 14/57). Just as Western states are perceived to display a condescending attitude towards Russia, reluctant to grant the country equal footing in world diplomacy, so are Westerners thought to display a condescending attitude towards Russians. Reaching, once again, beyond the realm of the symbolic, the failure of a strong Russia also extends to students' enjoyment. Consider the following anecdote by a student which she recounts with palpable indignation and outrage:

In [the imagination of] the majority of European countries we remain a country in which people drink vodka all the time. I travel a lot in Europe and it hurts me deeply when I hear that we drink the whole day, that we don't know anything, that we are a very backward and poor country. I have been told a story that a [Russian] girl once visited Germany and they gave her a shampoo as a present. That is, they think that she doesn't have money to buy herself shampoo. Really horrible stereotypes! I am confronted with them all the time. (Marina, Year 4, Other Department, 34/62)

With Žižek (1993), social groups attribute their lack of enjoyment to an external force who is thought to be enjoying more or better. The anecdote of the shampoo gift seems to refer to exactly this: the West seems to enjoy more and better than Russia, which, in the view of the West, needs basic lessons in consumerism. The encounter with the West suggests a lack of wealth and consumerist distinction in Russia. The discourse of a strong Russia reneges on its promise of enjoyment: even in the field of consumption, the West still seems to be outdoing Russia.

Jouissance from failure

It is precisely this failure of enjoyment, however, that instigates the desire for more and more expensive consumption that we find at MGIMO in the 'unending quest for the lost/impossible *jouissance*' (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004: 210). Consider the example of Marina, who is a recent graduate of MGIMO and now head of a subdivision in a prestigious law firm. In an interview that appeared in the MGIMO student magazine Marina is asked in the 'fast facts' column about her first expensive dress:

- Marina: I bought it at Benetton for 150 Dollars. Now, my dress on any day costs more than 1000 Dollars. I buy them in Milan, where I travel twice a year to update my wardrobe.
- Question: What brands do you wear?
- Marina: Dresses by Dolce&Gabbana, Gucci. Casual also by Dolce&Gabbana. Shoes by Dior. Bags also by Dior or by Louis Vuitton.

This extract not only reveals the desire for more expensive but also for more differentiated consumption. As Marina progresses in her career, her new outfits not only cost significantly more than her first one, but she also chooses different labels for different kinds of clothing and travels to international fashion capitals to do her shopping, presumably a sign of a more sophisticated, chic style. But just as the Benetton dress did not deliver full enjoyment, neither will the Dolce&Gabbana one purchased in Milan (compare Böhm and Batta, 2010). Yet Marina, just like many others, obtains *jouissance* from this satisfaction in dissatisfaction: as consumption does not deliver the promised enjoyment (because the West consumes in a more sophisticated way, because the first expensive dress from Benetton is now too cheap and not chic enough), she is encouraged to indulge in even more refined, more expensive consumption in a renewed quest for the lost enjoyment—only to fail again.

A similar logic applies to the desire for a successful career. Working on one's career promises enjoyment: job promotions and a bigger pay check act as direct rewards for hard work and self-sacrifice.

For the past three months I have worked like crazy. No free time, I spent the nights at the office, hardly have time to see my friends. I live to work, but you get out of it what you put into it. You do it, because you feel the immediate results of your work and if your work is good, if it is excellent, you might get a great job. (Konstantin, Year 5, International Business; ethnographic interview)

Yet, each job promotion reneges on the promise to deliver full enjoyment and displaces it on the next career step, pushing students to work even harder to reach it. An article in the Russian magazine *Kar'era* describes this fantasy of the successful career as the life motto of the true 'Russian careerist': 'You work like a dog, you get paid, you get promoted, you enjoy it' (quoted in Yurchak, 2003: 80). This is the moment of *jouissance* in which the subject 'enjoys the very conditions that he or she is complaining about' (Hoens and Pluth, 2002: 10). In their constant failure, consumption and careerism thus deliver *jouissance* and emerge as fantasies that promise the realization of subjects' desire, the extinction of the lack.

The discourse of a strong Russia therefore fails in a dual sense: in its symbolic assertion as a unifying project and in its promises to deliver enjoyment. But this failure, at the same time, maintains the desire for striving for fullness (Stavrakakis, 1999: 45). While this fullness is unattainable, the constant lack spurs the search for real enjoyment with redoubled efforts and identification with a strong Russia. In order to withstand outside threats and overcome exclusion, in order to fill the lack, the fantasy of a strong Russia is re-asserted:

We should learn our lessons from all this and gather our strength in order to then solve our tasks. We don't feel hurt that others play give-away with us (*igrat' v poddavki*), that they want to settle their accounts with us. As long as we are not strong, nobody is obliged to us in any way (Aleksandr, Year 3, International Relations, 14/50).

This statement suggests that if the lack could just be filled, if Russia could just be made strong, everything would be good. That, of course, is the ultimate illusion all hegemonic identification is

predicated on—an illusion that keeps the discourse of a strong Russia firmly in place, even as it continues to fail.

Discussion

The dynamic of identification at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations illustrates how hegemonic discourse is predicated on the dialectic of fullness and lack, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. On the one hand, the discourse of a strong Russia becomes hegemonic through constructing a fullness around a signifier that is able to draw together a set of disparate demands and unify the social field, making the students and lecturers identify with the project of a strong Russia. Žižek, however, reminds us that a hegemonic discourse needs to grip its subjects with more than symbolic meaning to be successful (Stavrakakis, 2008; Žižek, 1993) and make subjects turn around when they are called (Contu and Willmott, 2006; Jones and Spicer, 2005). Education at this university then is not all about ideological inculcation but rather comes with the promise of enjoyment, enticing students with the perspective of a quick career and lavish consumption.

On the other hand, the hegemonic discourse of a strong Russia is always marked by a constitutive lack. A strong Russia is perceived as blocked, because it faces exclusion and attempts at containing its rise from the West and the promised enjoyment fails, because the West seems to be enjoying better and the *jouissance* obtained is less than what was promised (Lacan, 1998: 111). This lack, however, not only makes hegemony fail, but it also is its condition of possibility (Laclau, 1990: 17). The constant failure of the discourse of a strong Russia only serves to support and reinforce the desire to realize a strong Russia and the full enjoyment it promises. Just as Russia must be made even stronger to resist and overcome exclusion and belittlement by the West, consumption of even more expensive, more differentiated products might eventually deliver the promised enjoyment. A crucial element of the attractiveness of the discourse of a strong Russia therefore can be found in *jouissance*, for instance the chance to buy more and more expensive products after the failure to obtain enjoyment from consumption. Lack thus has a dialectical nature: while it may offer a space for liberation and creativity in the failure of hegemony (Driver, 2009a: 59), it also serves to reinforce hegemonic discourse, because this discourse provides a fantasy that the subject can identify with in the repeated illusory attempts to fill the lack.

Does the elite university studied in this article then manage to forge a link between state ideology and the student population and serve the larger hegemonic discourse of a great power Russia? In line with the dialectic of presence and absence, the answer is “yes and no”. Yes, in that a strong Russia is the primary identification at this university and largely excludes other ways of thinking about Russia. For one thing, this hegemonic discourse is undergirded by the disciplined practices of absorbing and reproducing what counts as ‘the right’ knowledge, facilitating the fixation of meaning. More than that, however, the discourse of a strong Russia ties successfully into students’ desires of a good life and a successful career. Hegemony is thus not achieved by strict discipline alone, but requires the promise and administration of enjoyment (Contu, 2008; Stavrakakis, 2008). While this enjoyment continues to fail, the fantasy of a strong Russia keeps promising to fill this lack and deliver full enjoyment.

But at the same time the university does not manage to institute completely sutured hegemonic identities, because a strong Russia exhibits a permanent lack that makes identification fail again and again, foiling the full constitution of subjects. Hegemony, therefore, is never complete (Brown and Humphreys, 2006; Spicer and Böhm, 2007). This incompleteness is built into the very constitution of hegemony. The constant failure of hegemonic discourse to fully assert itself cautions against the assumption that educational organizations act as a faithful transmitter of state ideology to

state subjects (Apple, 2004; Peet, 2002). Rather than being subservient state instruments of identity inculcation, universities and schools cannot help but experiencing the same inevitable dialectic of lack. It is at that point that a (radical) democratic way of coping with failure could come in that would be based on the passionate agonism of difference (Mouffe, 1989). This would mean institutionalizing lack through providing a space for affective political agonism rather than affirming a hegemonic utopian vision of a strong Russia that purports to eliminate negativity. Stavrakakis, however, underscores the difficulty of such an undertaking and Lacan himself, indeed, was rather pessimistic about it, cautioning against replacing one Master with another (see Stavrakakis, 2007, 2008).

Conclusion

This article has argued that discursive hegemony needs to be understood as emerging from the limits of discourse where symbolic signification breaks down in the face of lack but subjects cannot help but intensify the quest for overcoming this lack. The power of discourse is predicated not only on the meaning fixation of signifiers and the promises of a good life, but on the holes in the symbolic structure and the *jouissance* resulting from the failure of discourse to deliver on its promises. The dialectic between presence and absence is crucial here: the absence of a fully constituted identity serves as the pre-condition for the possibility of its presence. Lack blocks the full realization of subjects and the promised enjoyment, but at the same time delivers *jouissance* and engenders a fantasy that fuels our desires to overcome this blockage. Identities thus become hegemonic and sticky not despite but *because* the identification and enjoyment they promise are impossible.

Given the recent call for an understanding of discourse that takes into account the affective dimension of social processes (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2010; Grant et al., 2009: 226); (similar Bloom and Cederström, 2009), thinking discourse from its limits can open a perspective which bridges scholarship focusing on discursive identity construction in text and talk (e.g. Ybema et al., 2009) and that foregrounding affective aspects that reach beyond the symbolic realm (e.g. Böhm and Batta, 2010). It allows thinking about the lack in the symbolic structure, the *jouissance* that can result from it and the fantasies that purport to fill it. This sits well with the recent push to bring the limitations of the constitutive power of discourse more into focus, rather than treating language as a universal explanatory framework (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011). The challenge for organization studies lies in both fashioning a textual analysis of meaning construction and mapping the specific organizational contexts and practices that contribute to and subvert hegemonic discourse and the concomitant administration of enjoyment: how enjoyment fails and how this failure creates *jouissance* and establishes the ground for fantasies that cater to subjects' desires and prompt them to intensify the quest for enjoyment. Such a research focus urges us to veer away from discourse analysis as mere textual analysis (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Phillips and Hardy, 2002) towards embracing research methods that also allow us to capture more of subjects' fantasies and desires. This could include a move towards experimenting with new modes of narrative and address—language that evokes rather than describes (for example as in McCormack, 2003; Wylie, 2005)—or with more artistic formats such as film and performance (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011; Paterson, 2009; Walkerdine, 2010).

The concern with social hegemony, however, also asks us to expand the empirical focus on organizational identification. Any analysis of hegemony should extend well beyond the boundaries of organizations and account for the broader institutional, societal and political relations that foster certain identity constructions and discourage others (see Alvesson et al., 2008: 11). Examining how organizations are enmeshed in producing state subjects and identification with the state, this article

hopes to contribute towards a larger critical agenda that discusses the role of organizations in establishing hegemonic links between state and society (Böhm, 2006: 190). In the future, such an agenda could open up cross-disciplinary connections to political science, political sociology or education that study aspects of state constitution such as nation-building or national identity and enhance the recognition of the role of organizations in constructing, maintaining and regulating state-based identities (e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Kashti, 1998; Parmenter, 1999), not only through ideology but also through enjoyment. Žižek underscores that identification with the state cannot be reduced to textual practices, but requires that a 'specific mode of *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices' (Žižek, 1993: 202). Organization studies could make an important contribution here, for organizations, such as schools and universities, are often the missing link between state ideology and the production of state subjects and organizational practices are crucial in making this link work—or severing it.

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Biography

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