

Book review

Zienkowski, J. (2017). *Articulations of self and politics in activist discourse: A discourse analysis of critical subjectivities in minority debates*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. xix + 451pp.

Reviewed by **Markus Leibenath**, Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development, Weberplatz 1, 01217 Dresden, Germany, E-Mail: m.leibenath@ioer.de.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2018-2009>

This book caters to at least two communities of interest that do not necessarily overlap. The first comprises anyone with an interest in the formation of selves, in political struggles over subjectivities and the creation of dialogues between theoretical perspectives such as discourse theory and linguistic pragmatism. The second is made up of readers concerned with political debates over migration and integration in western European countries and with the ways individuals position themselves in these debates, contribute to them and are shaped by them. The author's main goal is "to understand the political engagements of intellectuals and activists with a Moroccan background in Flanders" (p. 30). At one time, this field of enquiry might have appeared rather exotic, referring as it does to a minority (intellectual-activists) within a minority (people with Moroccan background) within Flandres as a subterritory of Belgium). However, as Zienkowski mentions on p. viii, the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and elsewhere have, sadly, drawn the world's attention to Moroccan immigrants and their descendants living in Belgium and, more broadly, to the salience of issues of integration, marginalization and diversity.

Articulations of self and politics in activist discourse is basically split into a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical discussion (chapters 2 and 3), Zienkowski introduces a wide range of concepts derived from "the Essex approach to discourse and subjectivity", which is closely associated with Ernesto Laclau, and "linguistic pragmatic and pragmatist perspectives on language and subjectivity" (p. 89). The notion of articulation functions as the key to integrating these strands of reasoning. Zienkowski elaborates on the double meaning of articulation as, firstly, establishing relations between discursive elements and, secondly, as the performative practice of pronouncing, speaking and expressing. In addition to articulation, the author presents a number of other poststructuralist categories, which are later used for the ensuing empirical analyses. One of these is the notion of logics, borrowed from Jason Glynos and David Howarth, who employ it "in order to name and analyze social and political practices of identity formation and hegemonic struggle" (p. 51). Then there is the binary of self and politics,

which also figures in the book's title and which resonates with Michel Foucault's governmentality perspective. For Zienkowski, "self and politics are two sides of a coin called subjectivity" (p. 1). Hence they are related to technologies of the self and technologies of power, or to subjectivation and subjectification (to use terms commonly found in the literature of governmentality). By complementing these poststructuralist approaches with an array of categories taken from linguistic pragmatics such as enunciation, performance and metapragmatic awareness, the author successfully demonstrates how linguistic pragmatics can help alleviate the relative blindness of poststructuralist discourse theory with respect to the performative, practical and contextual aspects of discourse production.

In the empirical part of the book, one chapter is devoted to discursive constructs of integration in the Flemish minority debate (chapter 4). Starting with an enlightening description of the rise and fall of the rather perplexing terms "autochthons" and "allochthons", which I have only previously encountered in the classification of native and alien plant species, Zienkowski outlines hegemonic logics of "the migrant problem" (p. 205) before turning to various counter-hegemonic logics. While providing almost no information on the data or methods underpinning this analysis, the author is very explicit about the methodological strategies he employed to conduct and analyze the 26 interviews forming the main body of his empirical work (chapter 5). Yet not all of these interviews inform the analysis in equal measure. The author repeatedly refers to a few complex cases when answering his five detailed research questions, the two most prominent of which are "How do politics-related signifiers function in relation to the subject positions my respondents positively, negatively or partially identify with?" (p. 270) and "How do interviewees articulate preferred and disavowed modes of selfhood in relation to preferred and disavowed modes of politics?" (p. 271). The notion of logics again serves as the main heuristic device in the presentation of results, for instance, when Zienkowski identifies "large-scale logics in the public realm" (p. 301) or "common logics of dealing with feelings of misrecognition" (p. 346).

Without doubt this is an important and ambitious work: Large in scale, it encompasses a wide theoretical and empirical spectrum. As somebody with a predominant research interest in geographic issues, I benefited most from Zienkowski's theoretical explorations. To me it seems that he has managed to bridge the often separate spheres of discourse theory and governmentality research, on the one hand, and linguistic pragmatics, on the other, much more successfully than any previous attempt. I also found the empirical discussion highly stimulating. Zienkowski certainly provides valuable insights into the ambivalent and conflict-ridden subjectivation processes of intellectual-activists with a Moroccan background in Flanders. And while such individuals could be regarded as 'extreme' examples, the case studies shed light on more general mechanisms

of how selves and politics constitute one another. The pleasure in reading this ground-breaking and thought-provoking book is only partly diminished by the author's habit of first paraphrasing the contents of the many interview excerpts he then quotes at length. Further, one could quibble that not all facets of his theoretical framework are of equal importance to Zienkowski's empirical analyses. However, the reader is free to concentrate either on the conceptual or the empirical part of this highly recommended book.