



## The Discursive Construction of European Identities: A Multi-Level Approach to Discourse and Identity in the Transforming European Union

**Michal Krzyzanowski.**

Bern: Peter Lang, 2010. 232 pages. ISBN: 978-3-631-61-046-6.

Krzyzanowski begins the book with an extensive discussion of the role of European identity in social and political discourse, explicating that despite the plethora of debates concerning “role, meaning and identity of Europe” (page 9), the question of European identity remains salient even today because “those identities are still constructed by a variety of actors and in a vast array of contexts. Taking this perspective the book looks at the intricacies of discursive constructions – rather than outward nominal or speculative expressions and projections (or representations) – of European identities” (page 12). Thus Krzyzanowski takes the perspective that European identities are still undergoing “constant, dynamic and discursive reconstruction, yet require new models which will allow the grasping of their key distinctive features as well as their inherent transformation and dynamism” (page 12). It is for this reason that he argues for the repeated analysis of how form and content, within the interplay of ever-changing social and political contents shape the definitional construction of European identities, therefore structuring the book in five chapters which explore not merely representations but rather constructions of European identities.

Chapter one lays down a literature review of the academic research that has been conducted in the past and which underpins the work of the book, including an insight into identity formation and politics; the significance of identity in language and interaction, in narration, the construction of community, eventually foraying into a necessary section on how the more general concept of identity needs to be situated to more specific questions about European identities, both at the national and supranational level. This chapter is a valuable summary into the trend of identity research, critically assessing various approaches to the “on-going linguistic and discursive negotiation of identities” (page 24).

Chapter two presents the methodological framework that the book works within, explicating the discourse-historical approach (DHA), which Krzyzanowski sees as “closely connected to the notion of ‘fields of action’ (Bourdieu, 1977; Girth, 1996)” (page 76) in recognizing that discourses are not closed objects, but evolving, hybrid, and both intertextual and interdiscursive in the creation of new fields of action. Following from which, Krzyzanowski further elaborates on how prominent concepts in the book’s research, including text, discourse, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, can be investigated within this framework. The working definition of discourse within the book is linked to recent conceptualisations within DHA, which views discourse as both socially constituted and constitutive (Wodak, 2009), and as a “cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action” (Wodak, 2009: 89). In a similar vein, context is defined in the work as a “broader abstract concept which grasps the dynamic relations between physical ‘setting’ and discursively-funded (social) actions undertaken therein by different individual and collective actors”, acting not just as a setting for communicative events but as an “actual element of communicative action” (page 78). The chapter lays out its theoretical underpinnings well, laying ground for the multi-level analysis of the proceeding chapters. However, perhaps more detailed explanations of the concepts of interdiscursivity and intertextuality would have been useful, given their relatively under-explored dimensions, and importance in the analysis laid out in the book.

Chapter three focuses on the discursive construction of European identities at the supranational level of European Union politics, taking its data for analysis from individual semi-structured interviews with politicians of various backgrounds, in order to discover how “new discursive patterns of ‘talking about Europe’ in a supranational space forge new constructions of Europe’s post-national identities (...) [and] how European identities are constructed in new discursive constellations and dichotomies” (page 25). The chapter puts forward very interesting analysis derived from semi-private opinions and not official statements of members of the European Convention in attempt to reveal “heterogeneity and multiplicity of the different visions and conceptions of Europe, within which different forms of portraying the convergence between Europe and the EU, as well as different forms of arguing for the divergence between those concepts, are accommodated in a very diverse manner” (page 98). Krzyzanowski in the

chapter very neatly illustrates his various dimensions of analysis of both the macro and micro dimensions of discursive formations.

Whereas chapter three reveals that the construction of identity arguments favouring both convergence and divergence draw upon a common array of topoi, including identity, culture, history, and internal diversity; chapter four turns to “nationally-specific media formation of ideas about the enlarging and transforming European Union” (page 25), by analysing media discourses to investigate “to what degree media discourses about Europe’s and the European Union’s multilingualism and linguistic diversity might serve as loci of construction for different types of European identities” (pages 133-134). The chapter provides a relatively detailed look into the context of Europe’s multilingualism during the time of EU’s enlargement; an interesting investigation into language ideologies vs. language ideological debates; expounding on the empirical methods drawn on to arrive at its particular analysis; and finally presenting an in-depth thematic analysis of the qualitative features of the corpus that help reveal the key topics in the discourse of various countries in the EU, including France, Germany and Poland.

Chapter five, which completes the third section of the analytical aspects of the book, focuses on “the bottom-up discursive construction of identities of European migrants (...) as bearers of European social identities (...) in a variety of semi-private discursive practices and everyday interactions” (page 165). Having tackled more predominantly the impact of political contexts on the discursive constructions of identity, this chapter situates its analysis at a more socio-cultural level. Perhaps the most engaging analysis in the book, the chapter focuses on the discursive construction of belonging, a concept that has evoked much interest, debate, but not nearly enough analytical investigation in recent years. Krzyzanowski delves into the notion of belonging and the politics of belonging in the European context, concluding, “migrant identifications can clearly be divided into three major hypothesized modes – attachments, belonging and membership” (page 197).

Krzyzanowski ties together his comprehensive research with the view that “we are gradually moving away from the traditional divides into ‘collective’ and ‘individual’ identities, and that identity must now be primarily approached within the process of in-betweenness (...) and with equal recognition of the identity-forging potential for both individual experiences and concerns, and of collective visions and ideologies” (page 201).

Krzyzanowski presents an engaging and comprehensive book, tackling the complex discursive constructions of a multifaceted concept like identity, at various levels of Europe's socio-cultural and political contexts, probing the evaporation of individual vs. collective dichotomies in identity research; the need for more integrated, multi-layered approaches to the study of identity formation; and the importance and emergence of discursive dimensions, language, ideologies, and modes of belonging in the constructions of identity. While Krzyzanowski's analysis may be deemed Euro-centric, his research lays down a comprehensive and applicable approach to the study of identity at a more global level as well. The book will be useful to scholars interested in extending discourse analysis, and in particular those who work towards more integrative and multi-perspective approaches across social dimensions, in the study of dynamic and evolving constructs such as identity, globalization, new capitalism and the sorts, in the investigation of how discourse at different levels and across multiple-contexts shapes and moulds the definitional arguments of the above constructs.

[Review received 15 December 2011]

[Revised review accepted 22 February 2012]

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## References

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