

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND EUROPE
IN TIMES OF CRISIS
Doing and Undoing Europe

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**NATIONAL IDENTITY
AND EUROPE IN TIMES
OF CRISIS**
Doing and Undoing Europe

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INTRODUCTION: DISCURSIVELY DOING AND UNDOING EUROPE

Christian Karner and Monika Kopytowska

On 7 July 2015, writing in the German paper *Die Welt*, columnist [Thomas Straubhaar](#) warned that following Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' surprise call of a referendum leading to Greeks' resounding 'no' to more austerity, Tsipras was 'not to be trusted'. The latter, Straubhaar postulated, was a tactically astute radical seeking to install a neo-Marxist regime within the European Union (EU), which would, so Straubhaar continued, embolden the far left across the continent and could purportedly threaten Europe – or, more accurately, Europe as seen and defined by the journalist in question and with him, undoubtedly, significant sections of the German public. A few days earlier, Alexis Tsipras had left negotiations with his Eurozone partners, shortly before calling the referendum, declaring that 'the European Union was founded on principles of democracy, solidarity, equality and mutual respect', not on 'black-mail and ultimatums', and that no one, especially 'in these crucial times', had the right to compromise Europe's values (e.g. [Maltezou & Ponthus, 2015](#)). In the period between the Greek referendum and 'last-minute' talks widely seen to 'decide Greece's fate' whether inside or out of the Eurozone, German Chancellor Angela Merkel invoked the notion of a 'good European', suggesting that the latter 'respects the European treaties and national laws' and helps 'ensure the stability of the Eurozone' (e.g. [Levine, 2015](#)).

These were but some of the near-daily recent invocations of what Europe is taken to be, by a multitude of social actors, from politicians to public intellectuals, academics, journalists, to 'ordinary citizens'. As such examples

powerfully illustrate, there is not only long-standing disagreement over Europe's boundaries and polysemy (e.g. Jenkins, 2008), but Europeans continually reflect and speak from a diversity of historical, structural and ideological positions about the continent's past, present and future. The present volume captures and analyses such reflections and positions on Europe in a variety of national and local contexts. Several key observations and underlying premises will accompany us throughout the following chapters: first, discourses about Europe, its limits, meanings, values, histories and future trajectory are inescapably varied and conflictual, both within and across national boundaries; second, none of the competing positions examined can be understood without thorough contextualisation in their local and national histories of ideas, political conflicts and their enduring legacies; third, disagreements over Europe are also inescapably future-oriented, revealing clashes between competing models and answers as to *which Europe* – or, in some prominent formulations, which post-European institutional configurations – the political actors in question have in mind and argue for or against. Further, we discover in what follows that discussions about Europe are the most prominent in moments or periods of crisis (also see Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2009), when established positions are called into question and possible alternatives suggested. Moving backwards, so-to-speak, from an anticipation of our findings to our premises, all our contributions, their different and mutually complementary methodological and theoretical trajectories notwithstanding, share important ontological and epistemological ground: the conviction that linguistic and semi-otic realms – what we say, write, read and hear as well as how it gets said and communicated – play a crucial role in the reproduction or transformation of existing social and political relations (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2001); and that illuminating these interfaces of the discursive with the political requires the kinds of approaches outlined and utilised in the following chapters.

This book is the outcome of intellectual debate, exchange and refinement that has preoccupied its editors and contributors for more than 2 years, having started with a conference organised at the University of Warsaw in May 2014 and dedicated to examining questions of *doing and undoing Europe* from the inter-disciplinary perspectives of political linguistics.¹ This volume contains a selection of the theoretically most sophisticated and empirically most thorough papers first presented in Warsaw and subsequently refined by their authors. What is more, we have made sure to select contributions that, taken together, stretch across as much geographical space and as diverse a set of historical and contemporary experiences as possible. Consequently, the chapters that follow cover, collectively, large parts of Western, Central and Eastern Europe, the continent's North as well as its Mediterranean South. To state and repeat the obvious: historical memories, and their perceived relevance today, as well as perceptions and experiences of current crises inevitably differ enormously both within and across the different national contexts examined by our contributors. Before turning to our individual chapters and their examinations of the

different kinds of political work performed by multiple discursive engagements with 'Europe' currently evident across the continent, important preliminary ground needs to be covered. We thus proceed with outlines of the empirical circumstances, out of which this volume emerges and which it in turn seeks to illuminate, and the conceptual foundations, on which we build and which we hope to further refine.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

The European project, under which we here subsume the EU and its now long-standing attempts to work towards greater integration of its currently 28 (but soon, following a now materialising Brexit, 27) constitutive member states, is on the brink. The centrifugal forces currently threatening to unravel this historically unique political project that has ensured peace, economic and political collaboration between nation states – whose inter-relations had historically been defined by warfare, intense competition, border disputes, mutual distrust and dislike – are varied and many.

When we first commenced the editorial work for this collection of essays in July 2015, the long-standing 'Greek debt crisis', which in actual fact is a much-deeper and wider crisis reflecting the incompleteness of the political structures of the common currency used by the 19 members of the 'Eurozone', was at the forefront of public debate and concern across and beyond the continent. More accurately, the spectre of a possible 'Grexit', or Greece's exit from the common currency, had haunted Europeans for several years. More than a year later, such a scenario continues to be a distinct possibility, even if the previous peak of the difficulties faced by ordinary Greeks who were having to live with capital controls on top of Europe's highest unemployment figures, tough austerity, and a chronically stagnating economy, has arguably, if only temporarily, been displaced by other epicentres of crises. And if a 'Grexit' was to materialise, this would undoubtedly do great damage to both the Eurozone's and, more widely, the EU's credibility vis-à-vis the markets, European citizens and the world at large. This is not to even mention the spectre of Italy opting out of the Eurozone, which following the rejection of Matteo Renzi's proposed constitutional reform in December 2016 is no longer considered to lie outside the realm of possibility. Even without any of these worst-case scenarios, recent events within the Eurozone and the EU more widely have revealed new – or arguably merely revived – chasms, power dynamics and inequalities between its member states that provide ample reason for grave concern that the European project could be undone from within. As we conclude our work on this edited collection at the end of 2016, Europeans are awaiting at least three major elections in the year ahead, in the Netherlands, France and Germany, each of which with

considerable potential to further exacerbate the crises jeopardising (further) European integration.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's referendum in June 2016 determined that long-standing and over recent years growing British opposition to EU membership will in due course culminate in a 'Brexit', whether a 'hard' or 'soft' version thereof is yet to be seen, taking one of Europe's largest economies outside of the EU and casting further doubt on whether, or how enduringly, the continent's historical wounds have indeed healed and if the majority of European citizens and politicians can, or are willing to, look beyond national frames and institutions. Concurrently, the appeal and success of populist, often unapologetically neo-nationalist, EU-sceptical or explicitly EU-phobic parties have also increased elsewhere, and often dramatically, over recent years, as evidenced particularly by the most recent elections to the European Parliament in May 2014. All along, on the other side of but very close to the EU's current boundaries, and at least in the Ukrainian case very much on what is widely considered to be European territory, human lives are lost in a number of armed conflicts on a near-daily basis.

Nor do Europe's profound and deep contemporary challenges and problems stop there: since 2015, a dramatic increase in the number of asylum-seekers crossing the Mediterranean has pushed several receiving countries to or beyond their infrastructural capabilities, while not many of their often larger, richer, northern European 'partners' show a definitive commitment to sharing the practical and ethical responsibility of handling this humanitarian crisis. On the contrary, and to repeat what readers will remember well, the much-discussed 'refugee crisis' since 2015 has also led to the re-building, renewed patrolling and closure of fences and borders on the European continent, which the historical shifts and institutional developments of the previous two decades had (at least partly) dismantled. Moreover, in the post-9/11 era a succession of vicious terrorist attacks has cost hundreds of lives across a number of European countries. These most violent and tragic episodes in Europe's recent history have also caused as yet hard-to-estimate damage to inter-religious relations and are commonly interpreted – by politicians, journalists and other opinion-makers, as well as growing numbers of so-called 'ordinary European citizens' – as purported signs that Europe's ethnic and religious pluralism constitutes a problem rather than an asset. This, in turn, not only leaves the continent's recent histories of migration, its various multicultural policies and their often exclusionary logics and effects (e.g. Baumann, 1999; Castles, 2000) unscrutinised, it also stands in the way of Europe discovering and sharpening its arguably historically demanded mission: to institutionalise and represent collective responsibility and respect for the rights the dignity of 'the other' (Bauman, 2004), the subaltern, whose oppression European societies have historically enabled and benefited from, and critical opposition to which is at the same time demanded by the legacy and moral imperatives of the Enlightenment.

Arguably, the list of profound, systemic crises currently shaking Europe is longer still. One, for instance, may wish to add current demographic shifts, commonly described as the ageing of populations, and consider the difficult questions those shifts pose about the long-term sustainability of welfare systems and social contracts, from which three generations in at least (Western) Europe's more affluent nation states have benefitted. Further, environmental degradation and climate change are, in Europe as elsewhere, providing ample reason for serious concern and immediate action. Added to all this is a subtle, though undeniable state of collective nostalgia afflicting significant proportions of Europe's populations, which sense or fear that the continent is increasingly struggling to compete on what are now irrevocably global markets, where production costs are always and inevitably lower elsewhere (e.g. Beck, 2000), leading to local, national or ultimately continental losses of industry and all it provides, while post-industrial, service-driven economies never seem to 'catch' all those now finding themselves 'surplus to requirements' (Bauman, 2005). In the context of these multiple and mounting crises, one also discerns a re-opening and retrenchment of 'older' ideological chasms, as neoliberal and neo-Keynesianist positions clash in the struggle for what may come to constitute a new (or old) economic orthodoxy for the twenty-first century, and as social inequalities – both continentally and globally – reach levels not known for much of the last 70 years (e.g. Piketty, 2014). With political power now also exercised transnationally, and the EU the quintessential 'network state' trying to come to terms with the multiple challenges of contemporary globalisation (Castells, 2000), such economic struggles do not always map onto the classical political spectrum and ideological categories quite as straightforwardly as one may predict; thus, for example, political science research (Halikiopoulou, Nanou, & Vasilopoulou, 2012) has demonstrated that the European project is currently called into question both by the far left and the far right, though for the contrasting ideological reasons of class solidarity and ethnic nationalism respectively, with only parties near the centre of the classical political spectrum showing a relatively reliable and consistent commitment to the EU and its integrative efforts.

Such and similar contemporary crises could be further multiplied at will. This book casts light on how such shifts, challenges (and political responses to them) that presently threaten – or are perceived to threaten – life-worlds, identities, institutional structures and present- or future life chances, manifest across a range of national contexts and, both within and across them, in a range of pertinent discursive domains. This calls for an outline of the conceptual backdrop to our individual analyses.

2. CRISIS TALK

Crises have long been recognised for their politicising effects. In one of his earliest and most seminal contributions to social theory, Pierre Bourdieu (1977,

pp. 168–169) discusses the effects of ‘objective crisis’ on people’s cultural common-sense (i.e. shared dispositions, cognitive categories, practices and ways of living), or the ‘universe of the undiscussed’, which Bourdieu subsumes under his central concepts of the *habitus* and *doxa* respectively. It is in moments of crisis, Bourdieu postulates, that a previously taken-for-granted cultural universe undergoes a profound transformation: everything formerly seen as self-evidently true and hence merely backdrop to the ordinary course of events is suddenly called into question and debated; *doxa* thereby turns into a ‘universe of opinion[s]’, a domain of competing political positions. While describing the consciousness-raising effects of profound social change, Bourdieu’s model is underpinned by his acute – and characteristic – awareness of the impact of power, inequality and hierarchy on social actors’ thought and behaviour. Or in Bourdieu’s own words (1977, p. 169), while ‘crisis is a necessary condition for the questioning of doxa ... the dominated classes have an interest in ... exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa’.

Existing literature has employed Bourdieu’s argument to cast light on the politicising effects of, for instance, migratory experiences or on perceptions of crises affecting cherished symbols of national identity (e.g. Karner, 2005, 2007; Vertovec, 2000). The present volume also connects with this conceptual strand, by illuminating the contrasting politics – and their competing discursive uses of the category ‘Europe’ – formulated in contexts of, and often polarised responses to, various crises. That said, we also here extend Bourdieu’s relatively narrow crisis definition. While very significant parts of Europe are currently undergoing their most severe, systemic crises for generations, which by any definition clearly qualify as ‘objective crises’, other parts of Europe continue to enjoy what are by global standards remarkable levels of affluence and security. However, as we also discover in some of our later chapters, a *perceived sense of crises* perfectly suffices to trigger similar processes of collective soul-searching, debate, disagreement and political antagonism. Indeed, in some of the more prosperous European contexts examined below the mere perceived contrast with a nostalgically (mis)constructed recent past, purportedly before the onset of social decline bemoaned in the here and now, gives rise not only to nationalist identity politics, but also to alternative ideological reactions in increasingly contested discursive fields. The centrality of objective/ structural or perceived crises to contemporary social life also provides a plausible explanation for the rise of neo-nationalisms (e.g. Gingrich & Banks, 2006; McCrone, 1998) witnessed over the last 20 years. After all, nationalist historiography (e.g. Hutchinson, 1987) – with its distinctive discursive structure juxtaposing an alleged ‘golden age’ located in the past to a present found to be deeply unjust or unsatisfactory, and to a future premised on a nation-focused revival and return to purported ‘order’ – often prove themselves to be widely appealing interpretative and political reactions to crisis-stricken contexts. In the

settings examined by our respective contributors, this raises the crucial question as to how nationalist responses to crises react to the idea and structures of 'Europe'. To repeat our earlier point, however, the following analyses also corroborate Bourdieu's observation that the political responses to crises are seldom, if ever, uniform; instead, crises give rise to internally heterogeneous and strongly contested discursive realms. In our specific cases, we thus ask *how Europe is being discursively both done and undone* under the particular historical circumstances and in the particular political fields being examined.

Rather than offering an extensive literature review of the large, multi-disciplinary and steadily growing bodies of scholarship examining current forms of pro- and anti-European politics, a task that is best left to our contributors and their nationally focused discussions, there are two competing, existing hypotheses that also form a crucial part of the theoretical backdrop to this book and therefore need to be summarised in this introduction. The first hypothesis, as, for example, formulated by Montserrat Guibernau (2007, pp. 112–118) even before the financial crisis of 2008 and its serious fallout on Europeans and their identifications, postulates that at present the EU can, at best, offer instrumental, 'embryonic', 'non-emotional' identities that are secondary to more immediate and much stronger national identifications; consequently, Guibernau articulates serious doubt if such weak European identifications could withstand a serious economic crisis. Arguably, these were prophetic fears that anticipated precisely the discursive 're-nationalisation' (e.g. Hartleb, 2012) witnessed over recent, indeed crisis-stricken years.

The alternative hypothesis was, interestingly, first explicitly formulated after the effects of the financial crises on Europe in general, and the Eurozone more particularly had already become apparent. In an extension of Michael Billig's (1995) seminal notion of 'banal nationalism' – describing the countless daily, largely unnoticed semiotic and discursive ways of performing and thus reproducing national identities – Laura Cram (2009) observes forms of 'banal Europeanism': national and European identifications, she postulates, are not mutually exclusive, but increasingly sit alongside one another, in mutually complementary rather than contradictory fashion, in many Europeans' life-worlds; Cram refers to the waving of European flags, passports and driving licences, where the EU appears alongside national ascriptions, as indications of such a banal Europeanism. As we discover in some of our contributions, these are indeed some, though not the only ways of *doing Europe* in our era of multiple crises.

All along, there is of course – as we discover throughout this book – ample evidence of the corrosive political tendencies that invest much of their discursive energy in *undoing Europe*. To reiterate our empirical and conceptual focus, however, our collective attention here rests on the *competing politics* vis-à-vis Europe and other scales and categories of identification that are currently (re-)shaping a variety of local, national and transnational contexts. In exploring

such contexts, we further build on seminal work examining Europe's experiences of the interfaces of crises, ethics and political struggles:

*[M]oments/ events of crisis are crucial for the ethically based negotiation of Europe and/or the nation(-state). It is within these crises that values are sometimes violated (e.g. values of freedom, or human rights) while different actors also use those crises to express (in/ through the media) their defence of other values (e.g. democracy, social justice or peace) with a view to legitimizing their ideas about the existing social, political and economic order ... It is within those crises, understood here as *disruptive moments of history*, that sensitive perceptions of different common objects of reference (e.g. 'Europe', 'nation-state' and relations between them) become particularly salient and vibrant, and open for a context-dependent (re-)negotiation and (re-)appropriation. (Krzyżanowski et al., 2009, p. 6, original italics)*

Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak also provide vital methodological impetus for the present volume, in alerting us to the centrality – in moments of crisis and ethical/ political debate – of discursive negotiations taking place within 'European public spheres' and, yet more particularly, within the media. As we discover in the ensuing chapters, these are precisely some of the key domains, within which our contributors locate today's defining political battles.

Before providing a somewhat more explicit anticipation of our book's constitutive chapters, a little more definitional groundwork is needed. Given that 'crisis talk' is central to our concerns, more needs to be said about what the broad category of 'talk' is here taken to include and what its wider significance is.

3. IDEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

The notion of discourse, central to our entire analytical endeavour, has already informed our introductory elaborations on contemporary Europe's multiple crises and, conceptually, on the consciousness-raising effects of crisis and the political negotiations they give rise to. By way of a working definition, we here follow Bo Stråth and Ruth Wodak critical discourse analytical (CDA) understanding of discourse as 'social practice', recognising that 'speaking and writing always represent, produce and reproduce attitudes, beliefs, opinions and ideologies' (2009, p. 28). Our contributors approach their respective contexts of investigations from a variety of (often mutually complementary) methodological and theoretical perspectives. Each chapter provides an outline of the methods and theoretical premises underpinning it, which therefore require no separate outline here. However, and such conceptual and methodological diversity notwithstanding, our contributors also share more implicit ontological and epistemological common ground. The latter does warrant further preliminary commentary.

Concepts of *ideology* and *discourse* lie at the heart of much scholarship in each of the intellectual (sub)disciplines represented in this volume, including

(political) linguistics, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, history and political science. In each of these scholarly settings, and arguably even more so in an inter-disciplinary project such as ours, 'ideology' and 'discourse' need to be approached with definitional clarity, particularly since both terms are of course also part of everyday language and political rhetoric, where they are often left undefined, invoked vaguely, yet put to a range of subtle though important argumentative purposes. To avoid complicity in such un-reflected rhetorical trickery, let us turn to ideology first. Its use in the present volume is that proposed by Martha Augoustinos (1998) who defines as 'ideological' all language and (other) social practices that contribute to the *reproduction or contestation of existing relations of power*. We ought to note that, thus defined, the concept avoids pronouncing on the veracity or otherwise of what people say and do; ideology, in this definition, can be either dominant or resistant, either way it is understood as words or actions that are socially situated and politically consequential.

Discourse, though overwhelmingly tied to language (as we see below), has also been conceptualised somewhat more broadly, as going beyond the merely linguistic. Thus, for example, Rom Harré (1998, p. 132) defines 'discursive activity [as] the work we severally or jointly engage in when we make use of a common system of signs for the accomplishment of some task or project'. This is evidently relevant to some of the images or ethnographic observations that some of our later chapters examine alongside more typical 'language-based' data.

The central ontological terrain occupied by this volume is arguably most accurately delineated by the aforementioned approach of critical discourse analysis. Condensing an internally varied, complex and continually expanding body of work to its conceptual core-assumptions, CDA defines all discourse, that is, written and spoken language of any form and in any register, as forms of 'social practice' (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; Weiss & Wodak, 2003) that emerge from, and hence need to be understood in relation to wider social and political contexts, which discourse in turn feeds back into either as a contribution to structural reproduction or as a force of ideological resistance. Put differently, discourse is both shaped by and in turn (potentially re-)shapes its wider contexts (e.g. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). All language therefore needs to be understood in relation to the institutional surroundings that give rise to it, as well as in relation to the social effects language in turn has. While CDA has born particularly impressive fruit in illuminating the discursive 'construction, perpetuation or justification, transformation ... or dismantling' of national identities (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999, p. 33), we here examine similar processes of reasserting, negotiating or at times refusing various identifications on several geographical scales simultaneously, most centrally in relation to 'the nation' and 'Europe' respectively. What is more, collectively we here trace such discourses in different national contexts both within and outside the current and regularly shifting external boundaries

of the EU, across a wide range of social and cultural domains, and as they are articulated by a diversity of (structurally and ideologically differently positioned) social and political actors.

We consider it to be one of this volume's other great assets that, taken in its entirety, it offers and utilises a range of approaches to understanding language in context. Yet, CDA, in particular, helpfully points towards our shared epistemological core: that is, our underlying assumption that in paying close analytical attention to the contexts, meanings and workings of written and spoken language and other sign systems, one can help to cast light on wider political processes of institutional reproduction and transformation and on the implicated self-identifications and boundary negotiations.

Thus, we turn to a very brief anticipatory outline of the chapters to follow. As already mentioned, this volume stretches across considerable geographical distances and displays formidable and productive methodological flexibility and diversity. Fittingly, we thus start with an analysis by Franco Zappettini of some transnational, indeed 'trans-European' discourses. Most of our subsequent contributions, however, focus on particular and current member states of the EU, including Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Poland. At the same time, we also – in and through Muhic's chapter on Macedonia – examine a national context that currently lies politically outside the EU, yet, for example, in relation to the refugee crisis shares a central European challenge of our time. The migrant crisis itself, along with its media representation and the implications it has had for perceptions of European solidarity and security, is taken under scrutiny too in Kopytowska and Grabowski's study. What is more, our collection also includes two chapters with different British foci, examining UK responses to Bulgarian and Romanian migrants and to the Lisbon Treaty respectively, which help interpret the political and discursive developments that had paved the way towards the Brexit decision in June 2016. In other words, this volume also makes considerable space for analyses of a national context where the discursive processes of *undoing* EU membership have progressed the furthest.

While we are here empirically focused on Europe in some of its historical and geographical diversities, the theoretical implications of the present volume go much further, for we illustrate and analyse how political institutions and social relations are continually being done, re-done and – particularly in periods of crisis – partly undone. Moreover, we pay particular attention to the roles played by linguistic and other semiotic practices in such crucial, albeit widely taken-for-granted processes of ongoing social reproduction and (occasional) transformation. In empirical terms, our selection of chapters has had to be precisely that – a selection that reflects the process and its particular participants, as well as their respective areas of expertise, that have given shape to our international and inter-disciplinary project. It is stating the obvious that numerous other contexts not addressed here, that is, other local, national and transnational settings, are equally pertinent to the questions explored in what follows.

While we can obviously make no claims to exhausting these questions in their timeliness and full geographical spread and relevance, we very much hope to help pave the way towards future work on some of the most pressing issues confronting our continent and its shifting political structures in the early twenty-first century.

NOTE

1. Professor Anna Duszak was the driving force behind the conference organised in Warsaw in 2014 and behind the early editorial work for this edited collection resulting from it. Sadly, Professor Duszak passed away in December 2015. Her imagination, organisation and kindness are greatly missed. Without her, this book would never have seen the light of day. It is to her memory that this volume is dedicated. The editors hope that the present work will also reflect and do justice to Anna's lasting legacy within political linguistics.

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