

# Foreword

 **Teun A. van Dijk**

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/dapsac.93.foreword>

Pages xv–xviii of

**Politics, Ethnicity and the Postcolonial Nation: A critical analysis of political discourse in the Caribbean**

**Eleonora Esposito**

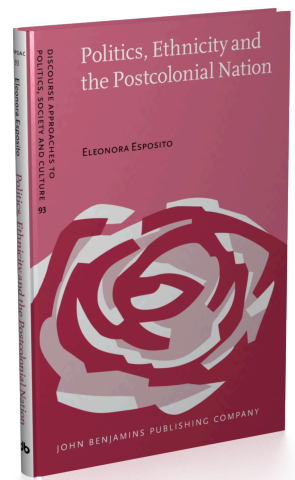
[*Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture*, 93]

2021. xvii, 207 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)).

For further information, please contact [rights@benjamins.nl](mailto:rights@benjamins.nl) or consult our website at [benjamins.com/rights](http://benjamins.com/rights)



# Foreword

Teun A. van Dijk

When Eleonora Esposito invited me to write this preface for her book on political discourse in Trinidad and Tobago, I had just spent 4 months in that country. A remarkable coincidence, and one of the many reasons to gladly accept the invitation. Another personal reason was that my first visits and lectures in the Americas in the 1970s took place in Puerto Rico, another island-nation of the Caribbean, followed by many other visits, both for tourism as well as lectures and conferences, to other parts of the region until the first conference in the Caribbean – after its foundation in 1995 – of the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies (ALED) in Santo Domingo in December 2019. In other words, there were many personal reasons motivating to learn from Eleonora Esposito's book about politics and discourse in Trinidad.

But these were merely a personal pretext for the more relevant academic reasons. First of all, together with other esteemed colleagues in Latin America, Eleonora Esposito had just published a unique edited book about discourses in Latin America and the Caribbean, one of the main interests of my work. Moreover, in that book she included a crucial chapter on a campaign of a Caribbean commission on reparations for slavery, colonialism and racism against the United Kingdom, France and the Netherland, a form of resistance within the domain of my last books on antiracist discourse. That same book also featured a chapter on the Chilean student movement by my brilliant former PhD student Camila Cárdenas (together with Carolina Pérez-Arredondo).

Whereas these are still secondary academic reasons to read Eleonora's book with special interest, there are even more relevant scholarly reasons to write this preface, such as its framework of Critical Discourse Studies, in general, and the perspective of the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), founded by Ruth Wodak, as well as the Social Semiotics as presented by Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and others, in particular.

The first major contribution of the book, therefore, is its presentation and application of these approaches in (multimodal) CDS, especially also because for the first time this happens in a study on discourses in the Caribbean. This is also the reason

why this study is one of the few monographs that connects CDS with a postcolonial framework, two critical approaches unfortunately developed independently.

It is within this broad scholarly framework of different approaches and methods, that this book offers a unique case study of the successful campaign discourses of lawyer and politician Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who won the 2010 elections, and the first woman to become Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Characteristic of the DHA approach of this study is not only the detailed analysis of these discourses, but also a systematic account of the historical and political context of these elections, the politicians, the candidate as well as Trinidad and Tobago as a nation.

The analysis at the same time is an ideological analysis in that it carefully examines the multimodal and textual polarization between the positive self-presentation of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, leader of the United National Congress (UNC) and her new coalition of People's Partnership, on the one hand, and the negative other-presentation of incumbent Patrick Manning of the dominant People's National Movement (PNM) party. This discursive polarization at the same time indexes the historical, political and ethnic polarization between the East Indian-Caribbean and the African-Caribbean segments of the population defining many aspects of everyday life in Trinidad, explained in great detail in this book. Beyond the personal and political polarization and opposition between the party leaders and the parties, the book more broadly examines the discursive expression of the nation, its identity and its past – other prominent topics of a DHA approach.

Besides the usual linguistic aspects of discursive polarization, Eleonora Esposito pays special attention to the analysis of the multimodal aspects of election campaigns, such as calypso music, songs, videos, images, flags, buttons, posters and much more.

At the same time, the analyses show that CDS still needs to develop notions and methods far beyond linguistic and multimodal approaches prevalent in the field today. Discourse, and especially political discourse, in still barely explored ways, expresses, indexes and reproduces political cognition and power for which at the moment we only have impressionistic categories or abstract notions of political science. As is the case for all areas of discourse studies, broad multidisciplinary cooperation with the cognitive and social sciences in this case is imperative.

Systemic analytical detail in this book is based on a sophisticated theoretical framework consisting of an impressive number of references in discourse studies and other disciplines, to which this book makes an original contribution. More specifically, Eleonora Esposito's book contributes first of all to the study of political discourse. Secondly, it is a unique discourse analytical contribution to Caribbean studies, until now dominated by the social sciences. Thirdly, the detailed analysis of the discourse and campaign of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and her leadership is a

valuable contribution to the study of gender and politics. And finally, as emphasized by Eleonora Esposito herself, the study persuasively advocates the necessary integration of Critical Discourse Studies and Postcolonial Studies. Indeed, much CDS so far has largely focused on Western Europe, the USA and Australia, and barely touched an important region such as the Caribbean, and thus may correct its 'North-Western' bias by taking into account the ideas, results and perspective of Postcolonial Studies.

*Teun A. van Dijk*  
*Center of Discourse Studies, Barcelona*  
*September 2020*

