BOOK REVIEWS

DAVID BLOCK, *Innovations and challenges in identity research*. London: Routledge, 2022. Pp. 146. Hb. £34.88.

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Innovations and challenges in identity research is a welcome edition for scholars interested in research on identity. This book signals David Block's over three-decade contribution to the field of identity and can be regarded as a trilogy of Block's exploration of the topic. His previous two influential books, *Multilingual identities in a global city* (2006) and *Second language identities* (2007), were published by Palgrave Macmillan and Continuum, respectively. In the former, Block portrays individual lives within the context of globalisation. In the latter, he adopts a post-structuralist approach and links identity with issues of second language development. In addition to his books and numerous papers on identity, Block continues his inquiry into this field in *Innovations and challenges in identity research.* He offers a critical analytical model informed by Marxist political economy in order to understand and analyse identity.

The first two chapters revisit, update, and advance the topic of identity based on previous studies. In chapter 1, Block reviews how identity, as a concept, was introduced to social science, humanities, and applied linguistics in the post-World War II era. This period was regarded as important for its postcolonial nature. Block discusses Fanon's (1952/1967, 1961/2001) and Spivak's (1988) thinking on postcoloniality and decoloniality and pays tribute to 'social constructivists' such as Anthony Giddens, Stuart Hall, Scott Lash, Zygmund Bauman, and other scholars for their efforts to link the nature and state of identity with the rise of globalisation. In line with these scholars, he makes his stance clear that identities are not fixed by biology or social environment. They are a fluid trajectory to be developed and discovered over one's lifetime (15). While admitting his poststructuralist position to frame identity as heterogeneous, contingent, fragmented, and emergent, he does not underestimate the other schools' value. Instead, he identifies other relevant literature to help readers' overall command and understanding of the concept of identity.

Chapter 1 then naturally leads into chapter 2, in which Block introduces the broad post-structuralist or social constructivist view of identity in contemporary society. He explains the key terms which constitute the understanding of this concept in social sciences and humanities, such as 'emergentism', 'heteroglossia',

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'performativity', 'multimodality', 'indexicality', 'style', 'belonging', 'authenticity', 'stigma', and 'ambivalence'. He also discusses ideas of 'race', 'gender', and 'ethnicity'. Block points out that to better understand identities, one needs to understand these terms as an 'ongoing evolution of subjectivities emergent in interaction' (40). At the end of the chapter, Block positions his identity as a critical realist influenced by Roy Bhaskar (2002). He lays out his approach for the rest of his analysis according to his self-portrayal as an ontological realist, epistemological relativist, and judgemental rationalist.

While the first two chapters are the historical and theoretical foundation for understanding the analytical framework of identity laid out by Block, in chapter 3, he draws on the works of Marx and Engels (Marx 1844/1988, 1867/1990; Marx & Engels 1846/1998). He interprets 'identity' from the perspective of the 'Marxist political economy approach'. In doing so, he first revisits the discussions of the marginalisation of redistribution issues and class struggle, saying that injustice in contemporary societies needs to be recognised to understand identity politics. Then, he applies the concept of class in new ways to understand existence in the world. Also, in this chapter, he discusses related issues in our routine lives, such as ideology, power, and resistance. This chapter is significant in that it provides a new lens for the examination of identity. It also relates this social inquiry to a consistent call by Block and the other scholars who, in the past decade, have been calling on researchers in applied linguistics to adopt a more informed political economy approach in their research.

The following three chapters are the book's core in which Block puts forward his critical political economy model in analysing identities. Chapter 4 starts with a discussion of structure and agency. Block points out that compared with the little attention paid to 'structure', 'agency' is usually the focal discussion of identity in academia. He then explores the meaning of structure by introducing a model called 'structuring spheres'. The structuring sphere analysis clearly lays out various elements shaping agency and identity and helps us understand the environment that shapes our identities in the world. The chapter finishes with a brief introduction to 'the multimodal communicative event sphere'. According to Block, identities emerge in this sphere via interactions on a moment-to-moment basis. In chapter 5, a crucial part of this book, Block elaborates in great detail on this model. Drawing on his recent work, he lays out his analysis framework cautiously. He tries to capture how identity emerges in interaction by expanding the original positioning model that Rom Harré (2004, 2012) and his colleagues developed in the 1980s.

According to Block, the structuring sphere and positioning theory are delineated but also highly interrelated components in analysing identity. The model entails the subtle understanding and analysis of moment-to-moment conversational interaction and the related deep-level political, economic, social, cultural, and geographical phenomena and events. Block claims that this analytic model applies to all types of communicative acts and events occurring in the flux and flow of social life, such as life-story interviews, which give written accounts of people's lives

and other storytelling and biographical events. To further elaborate on this model, he devotes chapter 6 to the application of the model, in which he gives a detailed exploration of how the model might be used to make sense of three excerpts from a life-story interview. The analysis references the deep-level research on the social, institutional, and social-cultural and embodies the psycho-cognitive as well as the meta-sphere—time. Block admits that his study is not aimed to be thorough as it does not touch upon the environment, physical/spatial factors, neurobiology, or technology. However, he hopes that the missing elements in his book will not undermine their importance in identity research.

The final chapter considers the future direction for identity research. In particular, Block points to the potential future research on the 'digital universe' and the 'infosphere' as identity-making sites. The digital universe helps create the infosphere that occupies every aspect of our daily lives and allows people to construct 'algorithmic identities', but both also create issues on the digital and class divide, and hence affect the attitudes of people towards 'information resources', widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Block concludes by reiterating the importance of the perspective of Marxist political economy in doing critical research on identity issues.

The most impressive aspect of the book is the transcendent disciplinary way that Block approaches identity and lays out the analytic framework. He cites and discusses several works in social sciences and humanities. However, his aim is not to amalgamate different disciplines but is rather tool-oriented in using them to solve real-world issues. This endows the book with great uniqueness and originality. The originality also lies in its Marxist political and economic perspective in understanding identity and the structuring spheres in analysing identity. The digital universe and the infosphere put forward by Block could be key areas for future original research on identity. As Block admits (xi), the book's greatest challenge is its transcendent disciplinary approach to handling identity issues. His study covers various disciplines, such as social theory, cultural studies, critical theory, philosophy, political economy, sociology, anthropology, history, and geography. This is a double-edged sword. While broadening the scope of thinking to the more-experienced scholars, it is less reader-friendly to the more novice researchers or students just entering the field. As a book to propose an analytic model, we suggest that future editions could be made more reader-friendly by adding cross-disciplinary notes, post-reading questions, and suggestions for further reading. However, even though it is not easy for beginners, it is an excellent contribution to identity research and warrants a read for anyone interested in this field.

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Much research on conspiracy theories has been rooted in disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, and communication studies, with the field of discourse analysis being relatively underrepresented. *Conspiracy theory discourses* successfully amends this underrepresentation. The volume convincingly demonstrates the potential for discourse analysis to investigate conspiracy theory discourse. It covers an immense array of topics, thus setting the scene for future research.

The volume's introductory chapter (Massimiliano Demata, Virginia Zorzi, & Angela Zottola) offers a comprehensive state-of-the-art review of conspiracy theory research across disciplines. After providing a historical overview, the authors identify 2016 as 'a key moment' in the 'transformation of many conspiracy theories into mainstream narratives' (4). A skillful discussion integrates this changing political context with the few existing discourse-analytical approaches to conspiracy theory discourse, and the authors formulate a strong case for the volume's undertaking. Each of the volume's twenty subsequent chapters (organized in five parts and an epilogue) effectively contributes to a deeper understanding of conspiracy theory discourse.

Part 1 covers epistemological questions related to conspiracy theories and opens with a corpus-driven analysis of discursive features of conspiracy theories (chapter 2, Paola Catenaccio). Analyzing a corpus of 9/11 conspiracy theories, Catenaccio identifies a relatively frequent use of (i) metadiscursive references, (ii) terms related to epistemology, and (iii) hypothetical structures as key features to