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Articulating metalinguistic and political awareness in Flemish discourses on integration and allochthony

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ABSTRACT *This article focuses on the way actors involved in the Flemish minority debates construct alternative modes of subjectivity and political awareness in the debate on the integration of ‘allochthon’ minority members. Resistance to hegemonic discourse requires articulatory practices marked by a high degree of metalinguistic awareness. This type of awareness is necessary in order to distinguish between preferred and disavowed modes of activism and subjectivity. Through his analyses of the decision of newspaper De Morgen to ban the notion of ‘allochthony’ and of an interview with a former Arab European League member, the author demonstrates that subjects can grip ideological elements actively through metalinguistic strategies. He argues that an understanding of resistance to hegemonic logics requires an understanding of metalinguistic awareness as marked in concrete texts and interactions. The author argues in favour of a methodological and theoretical articulation of poststructuralist discourse theory and linguistic pragmatics.*

Introduction

Every theory of discourse is also a theory of subjectivity. This principle holds for the Essex school for discourse theory and analysis, but it also holds for approaches that are often considered to be more ‘linguistic’ or ‘textual’ in terms of their orientation. The discursive perspective articulated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*¹ is often termed ‘discourse theory’ due to its treatment of discourse as an ontological category rather than as a type of language use.² Unfortunately, this rather arbitrary distinction between two sets of perspectives—poststructuralist discourse theory and everything else—leads to a demarcation along disciplinary lines that has severely limited the impact of poststructuralist discourse theory on

linguistic, textual and ethnographic approaches to identity, ideology and hegemony.

It also has led to a long history of neglecting questions concerning *the way* we may empirically identify discourse theoretical principles and phenomena in concrete texts and interactions. It is rather uncommon for discourse theorists to ground their explanations methodologically. There are virtually no sections on methodology to be found in articles containing discourse theoretical case studies.³ Jacob Torfing pointed out that ‘with a few exceptions,’ the founders of discourse theory were ‘not very interested’ in heuristic or methodological issues that address the way key concepts of poststructuralist discourse theory can be applied. He explains that most Essex-inspired studies illustrate pre-established theoretical concepts. According to him, ‘discourse theorists have thrown the methodological baby out with the epistemological bathwater’ because of an anti-positivist stance and because of an ontological interpretation of the category of discourse.⁴

In this article, I will address ‘the urgent need for critical, explicit, and context-bound discussion of what we do in discourse analysis, why we do it, and what the consequences are,’⁵ through an analysis of the debate on the integration of so-called allochthons and autochthons in Flanders. The question addressed in this article is both methodological and political. The case of the debate on the binary pair allochthony/autochthony is decidedly metalinguistic. It is a debate wherein meanings that have been hegemonic for several decades are being challenged. The study of this debate requires an understanding of the reflexive awareness of political actors as marked in concrete texts. I will argue that this type of awareness can be studied empirically by focusing on the way sociopolitical actors mark their metalinguistic awareness in concrete texts and utterances.

In order to advance my argument, I will combine poststructuralist theories on discourse and subjectivity with linguistic pragmatic insights into the functions of metalinguistic awareness. Linguistic pragmatics is a broad and interdisciplinary field of inquiry that focuses on the interactional, dialogical and process-based aspects of language use in concrete contexts.⁶ Many of the studies carried out in this area restrict themselves to the micro-level of discourse at which phenomena such as speech acts, conversational turns or inferences operate.⁷ At the same time, other pragmatics-oriented authors have devoted their attention to the way small-scale aspects of language use interface with higher levels of discursive organization. Such levels are frequently described in terms of ideology and hegemony.⁸ This pragmatic strand of ideology research works as a useful antidote against reified notions of ideology.

Poststructuralist authors warn us against treating ideologies as stable, closed and centred wholes. But their analyses rarely demonstrate how these ideologies operate at the level of linguistics and concrete interactions. Pragmatics-oriented research into the link between concrete language use and the macro-phenomena of ideology and hegemony can provide us with an answer to the methodological deficit of poststructuralist studies on discourse.⁹ In many ways this programme builds upon insights developed within pragmatism, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and other interpretive strands within the social sciences.¹⁰ As such,

it aims to provide insight into the way(s) the big 'isms' operate at the level of concrete texts and interactions.

For instance, pragmatic and anthropological studies of ideological language use have focused on issues as varied as the gendered, class-based, generational or group-based values and beliefs that structure everyday interactions between individuals and institutions in the interest of specific social or cultural groups within particular contexts. Moreover, they explain how varieties of language use structure group memberships and how they may reproduce and challenge language ideological practice(s).¹¹

Studies in the ethnography of communication have shown how verbal and non-verbal performances are indexically linked to particular identities, values and beliefs.¹² They show how language users make aspects of contextual reality relevant for interpretation and how and why the ideological meanings of utterances change across contexts even when the structure of the messages remains the same.¹³ This variation is hierarchically ordered so that some indexical meanings are preferable over others in specific (institutional) contexts.¹⁴ It is therefore important to realize that a focus on micro-communicative phenomena does not necessarily happen at the expense of developing insight into the way societies are structurally organized.

In the context of this article, I do not intend to provide an overview of the various ways in which authors working within the field of linguistic pragmatics have conceptualized the micro-macro link. Rather, I prefer to explore the potential of this approach for studies that seek to examine the dynamics of (resistance to) ideological and hegemonic discourses. I will do so by presenting the most important logics that structure debates on integration in Flanders. Even though highly particular neologies have been developed in Flanders and in the Netherlands (i.e. 'allochthony' and 'autochthony'), the discourses in which these neologies are used share many ideological family resemblances with immigration and integration debates in other European countries. Such characteristics include an ideal-typical notion of a culturally homogeneous society, cultural reductionism and a problematization of the citizenship status and language use of (descendants of mostly non-European and Islamic) immigrants.¹⁵

My examination of the logics that structure hegemonic discourses on integration in Flanders will clear the ground for a discussion of the way activists and intellectuals may articulate alternative modes of subjectivity and politics. As a case in point, I refer to an interview conducted with an activist formerly active in the Arab European League (AEL) and to a newspaper article in which the editor of *De Morgen* advocated an editorial decision no longer to use one of the key concepts in hegemonic discourses on integration—the concept of allochthony. These cases demonstrate that an analysis of the metalinguistic features of ideological language use allows for a mode of empirical ideology research that recognizes the reflexive and critical awareness of political actors as marked in discourse.

On the logic(s) of contextualized self-interpretations

One of the most systematic attempts to deal with the methodological deficit in poststructuralist thought has been undertaken by Jason Glynos and David Howarth. These authors acknowledge that there is a lack of poststructuralist texts that tackle the question of method in a sustained and philosophical way. Responding to charges of methodological arbitrariness, particularism and idealism,¹⁶ they developed a grammar of concepts that includes (1) a re-interpretation of the concept of articulation as a research practice, (2) an elaboration on the concept of logic as deployed in poststructuralist discourse theory and (3) an incorporation of the concept of self-interpretation into their approach to politics, subjectivity and discourse.

Articulating logics of critical explanation

Glynos and Howarth adopt and adapt the notion of articulation as used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Articulation was originally defined as a practice of linking (discursive) elements to each other in such a way that their meanings are partially fixed and modified.¹⁷ As such, the notion of articulation has been used in order to analyse articulations of semiotic elements such as identities, signifiers, subject positions, ideologies, institutions, organizations and practices. Within the Essex strand of poststructuralist discourse theory, the concept functions as a basic unit for analysis. As the meaning of words emerges from the way we articulate them to each other in unstable semiotic configurations, the meaning of a political identity undergoes similar changes when articulated with another identity in a political alliance striving for hegemony through the articulation of a collective will.

Glynos and Howarth seek to offer an alternative to mechanistic law-like explanations grounded in positivist ontologies on the one hand, and hermeneutic explanations grounded in the contextualized self-interpretations of individuals on the other hand. As an alternative, they present an approach that seeks to identify *logics of critical explanation*.¹⁸ These logics are named and constructed by researchers in order to identify 'the rules or grammar of the practice' under investigation and 'the conditions which make the practice both possible and vulnerable.'¹⁹ They are named and constructed by researchers in order to explain particular conjunctures and events.²⁰ More specifically, the authors distinguish between social, political and fantasmatic logics.

The identification of social logics boils down to the naming and characterization of the various discursive elements and social practices that constitute a particular discursive regime.

The notion of 'social logic' is meant to capture the patterning of a social practice whereby these practices are understood as functions of the 'contextualised self-interpretations of key subjects.'²¹ For instance, Flemish hegemonic discourse on minority issues can be described in terms of a social logic of homogenization grounded in the principle that the ideal society should be as uniform as possible. This logic informs various statements on issues as diverse as education, migration,

multi-lingualism and culture. It informs a definition of integration as the sole responsibility of migrants, their descendants and their communities. In addition, this logic gives rise to the articulation of nouns such as 'allochthons' and 'autochthons' that are unique to the Dutch debates on integration. As such, this logic plays a key role in the self-interpretation(s) of Flemings *as* Flemings. This logic has been institutionalized and legitimized by various political policies, practices and institutions in Flanders and in the Netherlands throughout the last three decades.²²

There are also two types of political logics to be identified. Whereas logics of equivalence simplify political space, logics of difference expand and complicate it.²³ A logic of equivalence works through the establishment of a chain in which various discursive elements are articulated with each other in opposition to another discursive element.²⁴ For instance, Flemish and Dutch homogenizing logics tie together a chain of equivalence in which various subject positions are equated with each other (e.g. guest worker = migrant = Muslim, Moroccan = Turk = not-integrated). The privileged signifier that functions as a nodal point in this discursive chain is 'allochthon.' This chain of equivalence can be opposed to another chain that determines the identity of 'indigenous' Flemings or so-called 'autochthons' on the basis of the empty signifier 'integration' (e.g. autochthon = white = hard-working = ethnically Flemish = speaks Dutch). The integration of so-called autochthons is usually a non-issue. I will elaborate on this distinction further on.

When logics of equivalence are dominant they give rise to rather simplified us/them discourses. When logics of difference are becoming more dominant, the contingency of dominant identity constructs and hegemonic practices is highlighted in favour of the articulation of difference. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that neither logic can dominate the other completely.²⁵

A third type of logic completes the poststructuralist explanatory framework of Glynos and Howarth. They propose the notion of *fantasmatic logics* as a means to explain the way subjects are gripped or held by a practice or regime of practices.²⁶ To them, the main function of fantasy is 'not to set up an illusion that provides a subject with a false picture of the world, but to ensure that the radical contingency of social reality—and the political dimension of a practice more specifically—remains in the background.'²⁷ With regard to social and sedimented practices and discourses, it reinforces the natural character of discursive elements and prevents their politicization. With respect to the political dimension of practices, fantasy can provide support for many of our political projects and choices. For instance, it is through fantasy that we may strive to achieve equality, democracy, justice and/or a homogeneous society—ideals that can never be fully realized but whose enjoyment one may crave and try to realize.

Metalinguistic self-interpretations and the need to distinguish between dominant logics and counter-logics

Glynos and Howarth retain the hermeneutic lesson that any explanation of a social phenomenon requires a passage through the self-interpretations of those we study.

I will argue that a focus on the metalinguistic dimension of these interpretations as marked in discourse allows us to arrive at a better understanding of the logics that structure subjectivity, discourse and politics. Similar points have been made in other contexts of investigation, but considering the methodological deficit in poststructuralist discourse theory it is useful to articulate the work of pragmatics-oriented authors with the writings of poststructuralist discourse theorists.

Our understandings and explanations of sociopolitical phenomena cannot rest on contextualized self-interpretations alone. Rather, 'we bring to each particular object of study a set of concepts and logics that necessarily transcends the particularity of context.'²⁸ As researchers, we are involved in practices of articulation.²⁹ Consequently, it is absolutely necessary to go through the self-interpretations of subjects, both in the initial process of problematization and in the process of articulating an understanding of the character of social, political and fantasmatic logics.³⁰

At this point we should ask ourselves what it means to go through a self-interpretation. We are obviously dealing with a metaphor. Like any other metaphor this one has its benefits and limitations. On the bright side, it highlights the importance of taking self-interpretations into account when identifying logics of critical explanation. On the down side, it may lead to the faulty idea that the selves we need to pass through are fully constituted and bounded entities. This is obviously not the case, since the poststructuralist project is at its very core a critique of the possibility of a fully present subject as well as a fully constituted linguistic structure.³¹ Rather, going *through* self-interpretations of subjects entails a practice of making explicit links between the discourse(s) on self and other(s) articulated by individuals on the one hand, and the concepts we deploy as analysts and theorists on the other. It involves taking the reflexive awareness of individuals as marked in their communicative practices into account.

It is therefore worthwhile to consider the metalinguistic dimension of articulatory practices. The notion of metalinguistic or metapragmatic awareness does not entail a possibility of positioning oneself outside of language. It merely highlights the fact that language is the only semiotic system that can bend back onto itself.³² Blommaert describes this principle as follows:

Every discourse simultaneously says something in itself (e.g. it describes a particular state of affairs 'out there') and about itself, about how that discourse should be interpreted, situated in relation to context, social relations, and so on. Such indexical levels can also be called 'metalinguistic' (i.e. about linguistic structure) or 'metapragmatic' (i.e. about forms of usage of language).³³

We can use discourse in order to communicate about language as a system as well as for commenting on what we do when using language. It provides us with the possibility to mark our intentions and to guide each other's interpretive processes and inferences towards relevant aspects of contextual reality.³⁴ It is this property of language that allows us to distinguish between our own discourses and the discourses of others, as well as between preferred and disavowed modes of subjectivity. Moreover, it is this property of language that may help us to name

the logics that structure the self-interpretations and world views of the people we study.³⁵

The practice of naming social logics and the act of moving through the self-interpretations of subjects can be performed simultaneously by analysing the metalinguistic features of discourse. I will not provide an extensive overview of metalinguistic markers and strategies in the context of this article. Such overviews can be found elsewhere.³⁶ Here, I will first and foremost focus on metalinguistic comments, hedges and reported speech. More specifically, I will focus on the metalinguistic framings of key concepts such as integration and allochthony. It is useful to distinguish between the social logics that political actors consider to be dominant or problematic on the one hand, and the logics that inform their preferred modes of politics and subjectivity. The identification and investigation of the way metalinguistic markers are used while discussing key concepts in a political debate makes it possible to investigate the critical awareness of subjects in detail. As such, I seek to demonstrate that metalinguistic awareness is a precondition for the emergence of political awareness.³⁷

Logics may be defined as large-scale interpretive patterns informing a particular subjectivity. They are interpretive configurations of functional relationships between subject positions, statements, practices, (sub)topics or any other aspects relevant to an understanding of self and other. All logics (political, social and fantasmatic) involve an interpretive dimension. Nevertheless, it is useful to distinguish between the logics that positively define an individual's preferred mode of subjectivity and politics and the logics (s)he opposes. Markers of metalinguistic awareness may help us to identify the way logics function with respect to the self-interpretations articulated in and through discourse.

The discourse of activists and other political actors frequently involves a simultaneous (re)articulation of hegemonic *and* alternative identities, arguments and discourse(s). As such, it involves both latent and manifest rearticulation(s) of dominant logics and counter-logics. Glynos points out that 'counter-logics become visible in those moments when self-interpretations of subjects resist easy assimilation into an already existing mould.'³⁸ Subjects do not subscribe to and/or identify with both (sets of) logics in the same way. An implicit or explicit articulation of counter-logic(s) by political actors or researchers involves a certain degree of awareness of the fantastic dimension of hegemonic meanings in a particular sociopolitical context.³⁹

As we will see, individuals distinguish metalinguistically between their own voices and those of others while organizing and qualifying these voices in order to position themselves in an imagined public sphere. The human capacity of metalinguistic awareness is what allows individuals to be interpellated by ideological discourses. However, it also provides us with the capacity to grip discourse and to reflexively manipulate its ideological function(s). This principle applies to researchers and research subjects alike. Through a systematic focus on the metalinguistic categorizations and strategies deployed by language users, researchers can deconstruct and reconstruct the way political awareness

emerges. An exemplification of this principle requires a brief overview of the logics that structure the dominant or hegemonic ideology.

Hegemonic logic(s) in the Flemish debate(s) on integration

In order to understand hegemonic discourse on minorities in Flanders, it is important to shed some light on some categories that are unique to the Flemish and Dutch debates on the integration of minorities: allochthony and autochthony. These notions are closely connected with a very particular concept of integration. There are at least three logics structuring the Flemish debates on integration. These logics can be named as social logics of homogenization, culturalization and integration or assimilation. I will discuss each of these logics before moving on to a brief discussion of some recent politicizations of these logics in the Flemish public sphere.

A social logic of homogenization

In the early 1990s, Blommaert and Verschueren claimed that in spite of explicit recognitions of the value of diversity, Flemish hegemonic discourse on integration is implicitly characterized by right-wing (neo-)racist assumptions. Their analysis of the discourse(s) of the so-called tolerant majority showed that Flemish integration-related discourse is aimed at cultural and linguistic homogenization or assimilation.

The authors write about homogeneity as an ideology or world view

implicitly defined in terms of the vague and largely imaginary feature cluster of history, descent, ethnicity, religion, language and territory, is seen as the norm and as a condition for social harmony, yielding 'natural groups' with a self-evident right to self-determination.

This logic of homogeneity abnormalizes the presence of (descendants of) foreigners while normalizing negative reactions to this presence by autochthons.⁴⁰ It functions in tandem with an assimilatory logic of integration and with a logic of culturalism. This becomes especially clear if we take a look at one of the most important binary pairs in hegemonic notions of integration: allochthony and autochthony.

Allochthons, autochthons and the culturalist logic

Etymologically, the word allochthon (Dutch: allochtoon) stems from the Greek words *allos* (other) and *chton* (country, land or earth). Since the concept of race is taboo in Belgium and the Netherlands, the objects and/or subjects that are expected to integrate themselves have evolved over time from guest workers, over migrants, to allochthons. These concepts are used in similar ways in the Flemish part of Belgium and in the Netherlands. Flemish contemporary use of the notion is borrowed from migration-related policy in the Netherlands.⁴¹

The Flemish minority decree of 1998 defined allochthons as people who (1) reside legally in Belgium and who (2) have either one parent or grandparent born outside of Belgium and who (3) find themselves in a disfavoured position because of their ethnic origin or their weak socio-economic position. In the same policy context, ethnic minorities are defined as groups of allochthons, going back to one particular country of origin.⁴² The category of autochthon refers to supposedly ethnic Flemish, Belgian or Netherland citizens.

The concept of allochthony initially functioned as a euphemism for the prototypical foreigner or guest worker in mainstream political discourse. However, already in 1993, Blommaert and Verschueren noted an associative widening and a semantic narrowing from migrant to Arab and Muslim.⁴³ There also proved to be a free variation between ethnic markers such as Moroccan or Maghrebi within this associative network—usually without any link to anthropological reality.

The concept of allochthony is now used in everyday language usage about minorities, migrants, diversity and integration. When I tell my Flemish friends and family that my research is about the world views of intellectuals and activists with a Moroccan background in Flanders, responses include ‘so, it’s about allochthons then,’ or ‘so, tell me, how is their integration progressing . . . ?’ In Flanders, the notion is used almost exclusively in order to designate Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish descent living in this region.⁴⁴ As such, the notion is frequently hedged. People talk about ‘so-called allochthons’ or ‘allochthons between quotation marks.’ Nevertheless, even though language users metalinguistically acknowledge the problematic nature of this category, this does not seem to stop them from using this concept altogether.

Since the end of the 1990s, a shift has occurred from so-called biological racism to what is sometimes referred to as cultural racism. The category of culture has become constitutive for the distinction between allochthons and autochthons.⁴⁵ Reified notions of culture lie at the heart of Flemish debates on allochthons, autochthons and integration. These notions are marked by a culturalist logic that ‘directs one’s gaze away from systematic analyses, the socio-economic dimension of societal problems, power, and power relations.’⁴⁶

Popular discourses tend to view cultural difference as an explanatory factor for the disadvantageous socio-economic position of many ‘allochthons,’ rather than the other way around. This culturalist logic ‘entails a bipolar political discourse that elevates culture to the driving force of the world.’⁴⁷ It gives rise to a problematization of Islam as a problem of integration. Islam thus becomes an obstacle to the integration of minorities, migrants, allochthons and/or new citizens into a supposedly homogenous society.⁴⁸

An assimilatory logic of integration

The logics of culturalism and homogeneism function in tandem with a third logic centred around an assimilatory conceptualization of integration. Below, I will

offer a discourse theoretical reading of existing sociologic and linguistic literature on integration.

Since the early 1990s,⁴⁹ several publications have problematized the concept of integration as deployed in public debates.⁵⁰ The multiplicity of sociological definitions is also increasingly being recognized by researchers, activists, politicians and intellectuals involved in these discussions.⁵¹ Moreover, many of my interviewees displayed a very high degree of metalinguistic awareness with respect to the various ways in which this notion may be used.⁵²

Nevertheless, quite often, key presuppositions are left unquestioned in mainstream discourse and in research about integration. In an argument that parallels concerns raised by Ernesto Laclau about the impossibility of society,⁵³ Schinkel argues that the problematic of integration can be traced back to a conceptualization of social order grounded in a notion of society as a closed organic whole. Elements of organicistic teleology have survived within sociological integration research in the form of a normative valuation of unity and stability of the societal 'organism'.⁵⁴

Schinkel notes that from a sociological perspective, the problem of integration is—in principle—not just a matter of integrating migrants into society. Sociologically speaking, integration also concerns ex-convicts, criminals, psychiatric patients, women, homosexuals, the unemployed, the sick, elders or people who are not able to use computers. He argues that through its self-obsession with a paradoxical non- or disintegration, society has become a hypochondriac phenomenon whereby an impossibly complete integration of individuals and groups into society is considered to be the ultimate ideal of health.⁵⁵

All of this leads to a paradoxical situation in which a multiplicity of groups and/or individuals are considered to find themselves outside of society—hence the need for them to be integrated—while they simultaneously find themselves within society. The borders of society are thus internal to the social system itself.⁵⁶

Responsibility for a vague process is thus systematically allocated to those who find themselves on the imaginary outside of society. When a Moroccan or an allochthon is accused of not being integrated and when his culture is involved in the explanation for his situation, responsibility is extended to the group that shares his culture. What starts as a process of individuation ends in a process of de-individuation. Mainstream usage of the concept of integration thus leads us away from the sociological idea wherein integration is a process of society as a whole.⁵⁷

Sociological literature and research usually investigates indicators of integration such as language competences, religious affiliations, educational level or professional status.⁵⁸ Schinkel points out that

only a lack of sociological reflexivity and the appropriation of existing integration ideals that should never be taken as a point of departure for sociological research, derived from policy and from politics, can lead to the conclusion that it is migrants who are not integrated in all these cases.⁵⁹

This does not mean that I consider all sociological research on integration to be inherently bad or dysfunctional. Rather, I wish to emphasize that the value-laden

connotations of integration in mainstream political discourse do not allow for an unreflexive usage of the term. Some linguistic observations clarify this point.

A first observation relates to the fact that the Dutch verb *integreren* (English: to integrate) is both a transitive and an intransitive verb. It is transitive in the sense that it can be used with a subject that is the agent making a patient undergo an action. It would be possible to state that *Jan integrates Mohamed*. However, such utterances hardly occur in mainstream discourse. A focus on an intentionality directed at plural and generalized subjects and direct objects precludes such usage. In mainstream discourse, utterances such as *Muslims are not integrated* or *Allochthons do not want to integrate themselves* are far more common. According to Blommaert and Verschueren, this articulation of a will is indicative of the programmatic nature of the concept of integration. Second, it should be noted that the verb to integrate is a process verb that indicates a movement from the outside to the inside. The Latin *integer* means literally *to complete*. This implies that the objects of integration are always placed implicitly on the outside of the boundary that constitutes society.⁶⁰

A third restrictive usage of the notion of integration is related to the fact that it is commonly used as a reflexive process verb in the following three contexts: in stipulating the conditions of acceptance such as in *if they only would integrate themselves*; in reproaches such as *they do not want to integrate themselves*; or in the assignment of duties such as *they have to integrate themselves*.⁶¹ All of this shows that there is a lot to be gained from linking linguistic pragmatic analyses with discourse theoretical concepts.

Some recent politicizations in the debate

Even though critiques of this homogenizing ideology can be traced back to the early 1990s,⁶² it took more than two decades before the terminology was abandoned by some media and municipal administrations. In its edition of 20 September 2012, the Flemish newspaper *De Morgen* announced an editorial decision to abandon the binary pair ‘allochthon-autochthon’ in its articles.⁶³ This was front-page news that dominated the newspaper for an entire week. For a brief moment, the words were used more often than ever, but after a five-day period of debate, *De Morgen* consistently abandoned the terminology.

Even though other newspapers decided not to ban the notion from their vocabularies, the Belgian socialist Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo metalinguistically applauded this ‘beautiful and brave initiative’ while explicitly acknowledging ‘the power of words’ in the battle against discrimination. Other members of the Belgian federal government also reacted positively but no decisions were made at this polity level.⁶⁴ In the Netherlands, the city of Amsterdam decided no longer to use the binary pair allochthon/autochthon in public administration in February 2013. Instead, the city opted for the American system of hyphenated identities.⁶⁵ And in March 2013, the progressive coalition of the Flemish city of Ghent decided to bury symbolically the words ‘allochthon’/‘autochthon’ during

the festivities organized around an initiative called ‘the Ghent Spring’ (see Figure 1). It also decided no longer to use these words in public policy and administration.⁶⁶



Figure 1. (left to right) Displaying ‘allochthon’ and ‘autochthon’ in front of a coffin; parading the coffin around the city of Ghent; burying the notions in the Baudelo Park in Ghent.

The editorial triggering these events clearly stipulated that the newspaper did not intend ‘to wipe the problems of multi-ethnic and multi-religious conviviality under the rug.’ Quite the contrary: ‘the immigration debate deserves to be held in all vehemence. Every day again.’ According to the editor, the issue boils down to the ‘question’ whether one can ‘practice good journalism with a notion such as “allochthon” in the news.’ The decision to abandon the allochthon/autochthon binary pair is informed by an awareness of the ‘stigmatizing’ and ‘excluding’ usage of a word that is ‘much too vague’ for practising ‘good journalism.’⁶⁷

The most important logic informing this decision is decidedly journalistic. The editor argues that the ‘simplistic’ and ‘undernanced’ concept of allochthony is inadequate for purposes of reporting. The editor explicitly constructs a preferred mode of journalism in which the logic of difference is more dominant. He argues that ‘living together in our cities happens in a more multi-ethnic and multi-religious way than ever’ without losing sight of ‘social and material inequalities.’⁶⁸ As such, the editorial obviously challenges the logic of equivalence built around the concepts of allochthony and autochthony. At the same time, it ‘remains relevant’ to point at the ethnic, cultural and religious dimensions of minority-related issues⁶⁹:

It is and it remains relevant to write that the small group of men that bothers short-skirted women in the streets of Brussels is of Maghrebian decent. Just like one has to report that the instigators of the riots in Borgerhout are extremist Muslims, and that the young rioters are also Muslims. That weak students in education are weak because they speak a different language, or have parents who speak a different language. Or that we report that a successful entrepreneur is Ghentian, Antwerpian, or a Turkish Belgian.

Whereas the editor displays a high degree of awareness with respect to his usage of the concept of allochthony, this is less so for other aspects of Flemish hegemonic discourse on minorities. It seems as if the author is incited and obliged to speak out on the cultural motivations and backgrounds of his journalistic

objects of investigation. This sense of obligation to problematize minorities in a culturalist sense is marked in metalinguistic expressions about the way the debate should be held and reported on: 'it is and it remains relevant to write that,' 'one has to report'; one does 'not want to wipe problems of multi-ethnic and multi-religious conviviality under the rug'; and the debate has to be held 'every day again.'⁷⁰

On a more critical note then, one has to wonder whether self-censorship—in spite of the constitutive functions of discourse—necessarily undermines the hegemonic logics of homogenization, culturalization and assimilation that have characterized mainstream discourse on minorities and integration thus far. The excerpts above indicate that this is not necessarily the case. The culturalist logic that has branded Dutch and Flemish hegemonic discourses on integration may prove to be more resilient than the binary pair *allochthon/autochthon* to which it gave rise.

Case study: activist discourse on integration and *allochthony*

In spite of the hegemonic dominance of the logics discussed above, some activists and intellectuals have been criticizing the associated discourses from the outset.⁷¹ The AEL was one of the first organizations to develop publicly a sustained critique of the Flemish integration debate on *allochthons* and *autochthons*. Its first leader, Dyab Abou Jahjah, was born in Lebanon but arrived in Belgium at the age of 19. The *New York Times* would call him the Belgian Malcolm X due to his radical stances in the Belgian debate on minority and integration issues.

Dyab Abou Jahjah and his right hand Ahmed Azzuz were blamed by politicians and by the Flemish press—including *De Morgen*—of provoking riots in Antwerp in November 2002.⁷² Both were accused of inciting these riots in 2002. They were convicted for one year of imprisonment in 2007 but were cleared of all charges in 2008 after taking their case to a higher court.⁷³

The organization focused on issues such as racial discrimination, police brutality, political representation, Palestine and Iraq. It attracted sympathy from radical leftists, antiracists, Islamic progressives and radical Islamists. The unifying element was a stress on the opposition between the excluded and the included in Flanders and in the international arena. According to Jacobs, 'there is no gain for the AEL in having a "pure" ideological line and thus exclusively defining themselves as Arab nationalists or Islamists.' Note that the US-styled hyphenated identity 'Arab-European' is quite uncommon in Flemish hegemonic discourse. Jacobs concluded his study by pointing out that 'The bulk of its followers are mainly attracted by its firm stress on the opposition between the excluded and the included, of which AEL defends the underdog position of the excluded population of immigrant (Muslim) background.'⁷⁴

AEL discourse was explicitly opposed to hegemonic notions of integration, *allochthony* and *autochthony*. Instead of positing a culturalist understanding of the problematics associated with Flemish Moroccans and with Muslims in general, the

AEL offered a political project based on notions such as class, (cultural) identity, citizenship and emancipation. For instance, in a contribution to a collective volume that analyses and criticizes hegemonic understandings of Flemish identity, the Dutch AEL activist Abdou Bouzerda argued that integration should be abandoned as a policy goal.⁷⁵ Simultaneously, he reframed the question of integration as follows:

The debate should be about equality, autonomy and citizenship. Summarized, it needs to be about emancipation. I argue against integration, because I am in favour of emancipation. This is more than a lame discussion about definitions, this touches upon the essence of building a new society upon the acceptance of diversity.⁷⁶

In line with official AEL discourse, he rejects the notion of allochthony as an unacceptable type of conditional citizenship. This does not mean that identity is irrelevant to the AEL. Bouzerda points out that the AEL tried to stimulate citizenship on the basis of cultural and identity-related claims.⁷⁷ The AEL claimed the right *not* to assimilate *and* the right to be addressed as first-rate citizens who may publicly display and perform cultural and/or religious practices.

During its rise by the end of the 1990s and the turn of the century, Flemish progressive circles often reacted with scepticism and hostility towards the AEL. The organization was accused of being a migrant equivalent of the far right party called *Vlaams Blok*. AEL activists were accused of pursuing a polarizing agenda.⁷⁸ On 28 November 2002, the moral panic concerning the AEL reached a peak after riots broke out in response to the racist murder of an Antwerp teacher called Mohamed Achrak by one of his neighbours.⁷⁹

As mentioned before, politicians and media accused the AEL chairman Dyab Abou Jahjah and his right hand of inciting these riots. Interestingly, after they were declared innocent in 2008, some degree of public rehabilitation took place. For instance, in a letter published in the newspaper *De Standaard* titled, 'We belong to the AEL generation,' several academics, journalists and intellectuals claimed to be heavily influenced by this organization. Since his return to Belgium in 2013, Dyab Abou Jahjah writes a column in the Flemish-quality newspaper *De Standaard* and has figured several times on television as a talk-show guest.

Even though other intellectuals and actors in civil society have certainly played their part in problematizing hegemonic discourses on integration, the contribution of the AEL should not be underestimated. It has definitely influenced a move away from the usage of integration-related notions and the development of a policy discourse that emphasises diversity. Nevertheless, the discourse about 'allochthons that have to integrate themselves' has anything but disappeared from the public realm.

By focusing on the way former AEL activist Issam Z articulates the notion of integration in an interview conducted in 2007, I will demonstrate that political and metalinguistic awareness are fundamentally intertwined. Moreover, I will show that an identification of the logics informing a preferred mode of politics and subjectivity involves making a metalinguistic distinction between the logics that positively and negatively define preferred and disavowed modes of political

subjectivity. As such, I hope to show that going through the self-interpretations of subjects can be partly achieved by taking markers of metalinguistic awareness into account when identifying the logics that positively and negatively define a preferred sense of self and politics.

Preferred and disavowed logics and modes of integration

It is useful to take a look at the metalinguistic framing of integration-related notions by a former AEL activist. The topic of integration was discussed at various points throughout the interview with Issam Z. We talked about 'integration,' about Flemish 'integration policy' and about something called an 'integration trajectory.' Based on the critical attitude of the AEL with respect to Flemish integration policy, one might expect that he would evaluate 'integration' in a straightforward negative way. This is not always the case.

Issam seems to construct two logics of integration that are diametrically opposed to each other. He does this by means of a metalinguistic distinction between two types of activism and practices of discursive (and ideological) interpellation. During a discussion of the importance of the AEL in raising political awareness among people with a Moroccan background in Flanders, Issam explained that he had the 'impression [...] that activism among Moroccans here in Flanders really started with the AEL.' When I asked him whether there were also other organizations involved in triggering this type of awareness among Flemish Moroccans, Issam also mentioned an organization called Kif Kif.

This organization explicitly presents itself as a democratic, anti-racist, leftist, progressive, pluralist, inter-cultural, anti-essentialist and critical project.⁸⁰ The organization enjoys a high profile in the Flemish minority, integration and/or diversity debates. Kif Kif is not only an intellectual platform, the organization also organizes job-fairs and sociocultural talent fairs for so-called allochthons, trainings for aspiring journalists and media-watch workshops based on critical discourse analysis. In addition, its activists organize and participate in sociopolitical debates on citizenship, inter- or multi-cultural society, poverty, culture and identity.

Even though Issam described Kif Kif as 'a praiseworthy website,' he urged me to 'take a look at one of their activities' some of which he considers to be rather 'elitist.' His metalinguistic comment that 'this is not a reproach' allows him to criticize the politics and practices of interpellation of this organization. The distinction between two types of ideological interpellation is constructed almost entirely through metalinguistic speech.

According to Issam, Kif Kif is rather elitist since it interpellates either 'progressive Flemings who are like "I want to broaden my ... my worldview"' or allochthons who have made it between quotation marks.' Note that Issam uses reported speech in order to characterize the discourse of progressive Flemings. This reported speech is marked by subtle changes in tempo and intonation within the interview. He also hedges his own usage of the category of 'allochthons who made it' by putting this category verbally between 'quotation marks.'

Excerpt 1: Interview with Issam Z on 3 March 2007.

IZ: a musical evening for instance you should go and see what sort of people participate in that. It is a very elitist happening. This is not a reproach but I merely observe that the people who come to that sort of thing are either progressive Flemings who are like 'I want to broaden my ... my world view' or *allochthons* who made it between quotation marks eh.

JZ: yes.

IZ: to us having made it means when you have a job you made it eh ... that sort of people who only have a weak personal link with ...

JZ: I can't say I see any street boys there so yes.

IZ: yes *voilà* ... but ... if we talk about *problems of allochthons*, *problems of integration*, problems of connecting to society, then it is not about that one per cent not even that who has a nice job, it is about the street boys. That is why I have considerable doubts about the activism of Kif Kif. To me it seems rather like ... the reward for some kind of *integration trajectory*. But I don't see any real activism in Flanders today eh ... BOEH is the most activist thing I see.

Hedges, indicators of reported speech, and metalinguistic comments are among the most important markers of metalinguistic and reflexive awareness in political discourse.⁸¹ They allow Issam to differentiate his voice from those of other actors in the debate. Moreover, they allow him to distinguish between different logics of activism and integration. In an earlier part of the interview, Issam described how the AEL was able to count on 'street boys' enabling the organization to mobilize a significant number of people for protests 'in the street.' As a response to Issam's remark that Kif Kif basically interpellates progressive autochthon elites and so-called allochthons who made it, I acknowledged that I did not meet any 'street boys' at Kif Kif.

At this point Issam articulates his 'considerable doubts about the activism of Kif Kif.' In the excerpt above, he argues that it is rather a 'reward for some kind of integration trajectory.' The concept of an integration trajectory thus functions as a spatial metaphor in order to describe a process of integration whereby one moves away from a practice of interpellating street boy-related subject positions towards a practice of interpellation that appeals to elite sensitivities of progressive autochthons and 'allochthons who made it between quotation marks.' Having 'made it' is defined socio-economically: 'when you have a job you made it eh.' Issam thus articulates the notion of activism with the concept of integration. An 'integration trajectory' gains legitimacy when it involves practices aimed at the interpellation of so-called street boys who haven't 'made it' in terms of having a job.

A more positive evaluation of the notion of integration occurs during a discussion of Issam's positioning with respect to the political left and right in Flanders. According to him, 'the left ... is at least as much to blame for this, how

shall I put it, for the bankruptcy of this situation.’ He points out that ‘the left’ ‘has never wanted to talk about’ issues such as ‘exclusion,’ either ‘because of some desire to do good’ or ‘because of some will to be progressive.’ On the other hand, Issam states that the left has been less active in the problematization of Moroccan and other Islamic groups in Flanders. In the excerpt below, Issam goes on to clarify his point of view.

Excerpt 2: Interview with Issam Z on 3 September 2007.

IZ: [...] one has to credit the right for the fact that they want a debate about it. But Flanders simply hasn’t held the debate yet ... Flanders has, how shall I put it, nipped it all in the bud.

JZ: The debate about its own integration policy or that sort of stuff?

IZ: Yes ... yes ... very quickly the edge was taken off ... whereas in the Netherlands ... today still eh it it’s incredible ... That is really a *proof of integration* that one has people ... Muslims Moroccans who can give their opinion and who can be assertive and who appear on television ... who can express their individuality without needing the help of someone else ...

Issam claims that ‘Flanders simply hasn’t held the debate’ on integration yet. To him, ‘proof of integration’ involves a series of discursive practices whereby Islamic and ethnic markers are explicitly acknowledged: giving one’s opinion; being assertive in public media such as television; expressing one’s individuality without needing the help someone else. This mode of integration is something he aspires to. Issam thus distinguishes metalinguistically between two modes of integration. In contrast to the assimilatory logic of integration he considers to be dominant in Flanders, he posits an alternative as performed on ‘television’ in the Netherlands.

Issam’s preferred mode of integration can be explained as being informed by an individualizing logic of integration. However, this is not to say that he subscribes to a Cartesian or liberal idea of the subject as a strictly delineated, bounded and autonomous whole. It should be noted that I have been using the English notion of ‘individuality’ as an approximate translation of the Dutch word ‘eigenheid.’ Eigenheid can also be translated as particularity or as selfhood. In Dutch, it has a reflexive connotation that highlights an idea of reflexive uniqueness. Upon reading my analysis of our interview, Issam asked me to emphasize that my English translation of eigenheid as individuality should not be mistaken for a ‘liberal’ conceptualization of the self. To Issam, the notion of eigenheid implies a reflexive stance towards one’s sociocultural heritage. It is in this sense that Issam’s preferred mode of politics is also a struggle for individuality.

Excerpt 3: Interview with Issam Z on 3 September 2007.
[...] I'm like, 'whether you're a Muslim or not, whether you experience this actively or not, you are who you are, including your cultural heritage, ... '. According to me, this was the struggle of the AEL.

Preferred and disavowed modes of political subjectivity and activism

In activist discourse, preferred and disavowed modes of activism are constructed in tandem with a set of preferred and disavowed modes of selfhood. If politics becomes a way of life, it impacts upon the ethics of public practice and on the ethics of self-construction. This can be exemplified with reference to the excerpts discussed below.

During a discussion of integration policies in Flanders, I argued that it was possible to identify a shift within policy discourse from talk about integration towards talk about diversity in Antwerp. In the excerpt below, Issam Z acknowledges this but goes on to argue that mainstream usage of the term diversity functions as 'a cover term' for the same kind of politics. As a case in point, he refers to the 2006 ban on religious symbols for public servants who interact directly with citizens. This ban is known as the headscarf ban in Flanders and was instituted under the administration of the social democrat mayor Patrick Janssens (SPa).

Excerpt 4: Interview with Issam Z on 3 September 2007.
IZ: Yes, but it is a cover for the same politics. Diversity, as far as I have understood it, implies that there is some room for a certain variety. The only thing I have seen from the SPa thus far is a ban on headscarves that discourages diversity. Of course, I understand what Patrick Janssens is doing. He says like 'there are a lot of Antwerp people who take offence with that, so if you want to make yourself acceptable as a Moroccan, take that headscarf off'. I think this is a very dangerous reasoning. I don't think this is the right way. I rather think that you have to help the Flemish to get used [to it]. Try [to involve] more people with a headscarf who are assertive, who master Dutch well. Try to involve people like that because they are going to disrupt that image of backwardness or of not being honest or of whatever. Try to involve Arabic as a language in education. I don't say that ... education should be Arabic but incorporate it as a positive element, as a lever.

Issam points out that 'this ban on headscarves discourages diversity.' He rearticulates the voice of Patrick Janssens and disqualifies his 'reasoning' as 'dangerous.' In accordance with his preferred mode of integration, Issam thinks that one 'rather' has 'to help the Flemish get used' to diversity. According to him,

this could be done by involving people who can ‘disrupt that image of backwardness’ and of so-called allochthons as not being ‘honest.’ Other strategies include ‘involving Arabic as a language in education’ as a ‘lever’ for social change and integration in the positive sense of the word.

To Issam, ‘assimilation’ boils down to a non-desirable form of ‘integration.’ The excerpts below demonstrate how his distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of integration are linked to specific conceptualizations of activism and individuality. He explains that assimilation occurs when groups become so marginalized that they do not engage themselves in any form of ‘political struggle.’ In turn, this lack of ‘political struggle’ leads people to turn away from their Islamic and Arabic practices and norms. Issam thus establishes a mutually constitutive relationship between political activism and a mode of subjectivity in which individuals are able to articulate cultural and religious aspects of their individuality. This happens when Issam discusses the relationship between ‘parents’ and youngsters in the Moroccan community on the one hand, and public institutions such as schools on the other hand. According to him, assimilated—i.e. non-activist—religious parents and children run the risk of becoming ‘trapped in a net’ that brings them ‘into conflict with themselves’.

Excerpt 5: Interview with Issam Z on 3 September 2007.

IZ: ... They get *trapped in a net*. They don’t wage a *political struggle*. For instance, they are going to ... their own daughters can’t wear a headscarf in school any more. You can’t explain to me how someone who has been educated with a headscarf at home and who goes to school and experiences a hostile environment over there, or at least hostile in so far as the headscarf is concerned, ... that is someone who will definitely wind up in some sort of *inner struggle*. Puberty is already hard enough and that comes on top of it. To what extent someone gets out of that unharmed ... I have my reservations about that. A lot of parents mistakenly believe, and this is understandable somehow, one does not have a lot of skills, like ‘if I only raise them according to Islamic norms everything will turn out fine’ ... that is bullshit of course. You are more outside than at home. And also, the impact of outside ... that’s way bigger eh Education has an enormous impact on the way you think. So a lot of people will get *into conflict with themselves* by noting that their children are taking a different turn and will not be as Muslim-friendly as they would like to think.

Issam continues in the excerpt below and argues that keeping ‘aloof of society’ impacts upon one’s self. It is in this context that the topic of the AEL is introduced once again. To Issam, the struggle of the AEL was as much a struggle for a preferred mode of integration whereby one can publicly claim one’s individuality

and place in the public sphere, as it was a struggle for a particular mode of subjectivity.

Excerpt 6: Interview with Issam Z on 3 September 2007.

IZ: I feel like when you keep aloof of society, what are you doing to yourself. What do you learn in order to play a certain role in society. That is also something one has never understood with respect to the AEL. The AEL ... there is no other organisation that has tried as hard [as the AEL] to involve Moroccans in the social debate. Exactly in order to play a meaningful role in that society. And I consider assimilation to be a kind of languishment in the margin, uhm, that first generation, perhaps that second generation manages to keep on doing that, but the third won't and will simply dissolve into the majority. Nobody wants marginalisation eh.

JZ: so marginalisation is linked to assimilation so to say

IZ: Well... firstly, my parents and perhaps my generation is still marginalised, but if in the end, there does not emerge a political consciousness, a social activism whereby your role in society ...

JZ: a socio-economic role?

IZ: that's right, whereby you start to play a role in society, guarding your individuality, if you don't do that, in the long run ...

The fact that the AEL interpellated street boys and the fact that it tried 'to involve Moroccans in the social debate' in order to 'play a meaningful role in that society' was a strategy that directly targeted the assimilatory logic of integration that we identified as being key to hegemonic discourses on minorities in Flanders. Issam therefore articulates his fear that a lack of 'political consciousness' and 'activism' oriented towards an improvement of one's socio-economic situation will lead to a loss of one's 'individuality.'

Conclusion

Contemporary critiques and challenges to mainstream Flemish discourse(s) on integration, allochthony and autochthony are becoming more prevalent in various locations and institutions of the public sphere. And even though the abandonment of the binary pair allochthon/autochthon should be welcomed in a pluralistic society, researchers and political actors need to be aware of the fact that societal logics are never embodied in a singular signifier. They operate through a whole set of functional family resemblances between particular identities, concepts, narratives and (institutionalized) practices. One of the main ideological tasks for progressive forces in the minority debate is therefore to trace and challenge other statements and practices informed by the same logics and not to abandon critical practices after burying parts of the associated terminology.

The articulation of political awareness in concrete texts and interactions goes hand in hand with the articulation of a multiplicity of metalinguistic, comments, markers and strategies. In the context of this article, I have provided some examples of the way metalinguistic awareness can be marked in discourse with reference to the usage of reported speech, metalinguistic comments and hedges by the editor Wouter Verschelden in *De Morgen* and by former AEL activist Issam Z. The former case demonstrated that the deletion of a key signifier within a particular discourse—e.g. allochthony and/or autochthony—does not necessarily guarantee that the logic that gives rise to such words will be abandoned completely. The latter illustrated that political actors can display a rather pragmatic attitude with respect to the notions they challenge. Issam Z distinguished between preferred and disavowed modes of subjectivity, activism, politics and integration.

Both the case of *De Morgen* and the case of Issam Z demonstrated that individuals may display a relatively high degree of political awareness with respect to the social and political logics that structure hegemonic understandings of society and its subjects. And even though this awareness can never be complete, it provides the possibility to distinguish metalinguistically between preferred and disavowed modes and logics of critical explanation. In order to address the methodological deficit in poststructuralist studies of discourse and in order to grasp the way self-interpretations of individuals function, it is therefore worthwhile to take a closer look at contemporary linguistic insights into the way metalinguistic or metapragmatic awareness operates in concrete texts and interactions.

Subjects are not only 'gripped by' ideologies and discourses but can also strategically 'grip' discursive elements with a relatively high degree of awareness. Poststructuralist discourse theory could be enriched by linguistic and pragmatic perspectives that offer a fine-grained conceptual apparatus for analysing the way language users mark subjectivity in discourse. A consideration of these markings may yield empirical insight(s) into the way(s) individuals relate themselves to the sociopolitical logics that structure societies and their subjects.

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