

doi:10.1017/S0376892909005414

**The Power of Words in International Relations. Birth of an Anti-whaling Discourse**

BY CHARLOTTE EPSTEIN

xii + 333 pp., 23 × 15 × 2 cm, ISBN 978 0 262 55069 7 paperback, GB£ 16.95, Cambridge, USA/London, UK: The MIT Press, 2008

As the title suggests, this book focuses on presenting a particular theory of international politics that rests on the concepts of discourse and social field, as developed by scholars following the lead of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. In doing so, it illuminates a familiar story in an idea-centred way by focusing on how contentions in the International Whaling Commission (IWC) have been shaped by successive discourses that determine the meaning of whales (as resources in a 'whaling discourse'; as magnificent creatures to be left alone in an 'anti-whaling discourse') and create 'subject-positions' that political actors assume and enact through behaviour when they accept a particular discourse. Epstein traces the effects of discourses about whaling for individuals, private organizations and states (more accurately, governments of states) through a chronological account focusing first on the discourse of industrial whaling that prevailed when the IWC was established in 1949, then on the formulation and spread of anti-whaling discourse in 1965–1980, and then on the formation and spread of new whaling discourses using themes of cultural difference, food security and sovereignty to challenge anti-whalers after 1990.

Epstein places herself firmly within the camp of political analysts who accord to shared meanings and beliefs primary weight in their explanations of actions and outcomes. Material factors receive attention and materialist theories of politics are mentioned, but critique of other ideas-based theories of politics receives the most attention. This necessarily requires extended theoretical discussions. Here Epstein does readers a great service because she generally succeeds in explaining her approach in language much clearer than that used by most advocates of postmodernist discourse theory.

The book displays both the strengths and the weaknesses of that approach. It highlights the contentiousness involved in defining shared meanings, the ways that accepting a particular set of meanings channels an actor's own thinking and acting, and how success at getting other actors to accept the same set of meanings creates 'a form of power that does not need to coerce, because it commands consent' (p. 10). Many readers will find the methodology rather loose, and some of the connections drawn between whaling and other issues or concerns unpersuasive. Epstein avoids the near-complete denial of human choice characterizing some versions of discourse theory, but her actors remain heavily beholden to discourse. Thus the use of 'strategic rhetoric', namely statements made because they are expected to persuade others rather than because the speaker accepts a particular discourse, is largely ignored. Yet tracing strategic as well as sincere rhetoric would better illuminate the dynamics by which meanings and associated practices are weakened or modified, such as why some states found among the 'anti-whaling states' of the 1980s reappear among the 'whaling states' in the 1990s. The restrictive Foucauldian assumption that human reasoning operates through binary pairings of favoured versus out of favour alternatives suggests how individuals can be mobilized for political action, and seems confirmed when conflict hardens. However, notions of binary divide are not particularly useful for understanding decision-making. The political fact that in the IWC neither whalers nor anti-whalers

comprise the 3/4s majority needed to adopt new whaling rules means that anyone wanting to secure a policy change must develop proposals that will be accepted by some adherents to the competing discourse. As long as governments remain committed to using the IWC for decision-making (Epstein offers a social field-based explanation suggesting that they will) and fail to converge on a single set of meanings, the three-quarters rule will have a separate effect on decision-making. The notion that discourses create subject-positions for actors to assume is an intriguing way to analyse the impact of actor 'identity'. While handling whichever identity is foregrounded at the moment in a fruitful way, Epstein's approach does no better than competing approaches at solving the analytical challenges posed by the fact that political actors have and can move among multiple identities as they engage in political interactions.

Epstein offers theoretically-inclined readers a good introduction to and sophisticated application of postmodernist discourse analysis. Readers interested in whaling, even those not fully persuaded by the details of the explanation, will learn from her account of the assembly and dissemination of new arguments favouring smaller-scale whaling in the 1990s.

M.J. PETERSON  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*  
 USA  
 e-mail: [mjp@polsci.umass.edu](mailto:mjp@polsci.umass.edu)

doi:10.1017/S0376892909005402

**Beach and Dune Restoration**

BY KARL F. NORDSTROM

xi + 187 pp., 25 figs, 25 × 18 × 1.5 cm, ISBN 978 0 521 85346 0 hardback, GB£ 70.00/US\$ 140.00, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008

As demand for space near the coast continues to rise, one solution has been to develop new beach and dune landforms to support recreational requirements and offer protection to communities within these areas. In *Beach and Dune Restoration* issues pertaining to the need for restoration and the tools involved in designing and conducting restoration projects are addressed over eight chapters. The book is aimed at those working within environmental conservation such as coastal scientists, engineers and managers, though the information contained may not go into as much depth as required by environmental professionals. Some of the information has been repeatedly covered in other texts, though this book is novel in that it addresses the need for compromise between different user groups and how past management techniques have focused on the negative aspects of environmental loss, rather than the opportunities that the development of new landforms generates. This additional angle makes this book a useful resource for undergraduate students interested in the future of coastal management.

Nordstrom paints quite a bleak view at the start of the book by outlining the immense destructive impacts humans are having on beach and dune systems, but positively addresses the issues throughout chapters 2 to 4. The author realistically discusses the unlikelihood of ever returning to pristine ecosystems, and instead focuses on the compromise between human reliance on coastal systems and the need to conserve and manage what little is left of the natural environment. Chapter 4 critically reviews