Negotiating the discursive intersection of the government of others and the government of self in the face of climate change

Laura Bang Lindegaard
Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark

The paper demonstrates how empirical discourse analysis can contribute to the study of two issues of particular significance in recent studies of governmentality; namely, firstly, the observation that the relationship between power and resistance is specifically contradictory, resistance marking both a boundary and a constitutive moment of government, and, secondly, the realisation that governmentality is somehow intertwined with the continuous becoming of ethical subjects, or, in other words, with continuously negotiated practices of subjectivation. The paper pursues and enforces the theoretical argument that practices of subjectivation should be understood as an aspect of the continuously negotiated interdependence of power and resistance, that is, that subjectivation should be understood as accomplished at the intersection of power and resistance and, by implication, as an element of governmentality, and, furthermore, it importantly suggests that this theoretical insight can be fulfilled in empirical research if studies of governmentality is connected up with membership categorisation analysis and conversation analysis. To demonstrate the benefits of such an approach, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of focus group data stemming from sessions in a small Danish village in which citizens accomplish the contested discursive intersection of, one the one hand, a municipal strategy aimed at 'greening' the citizens’ transportation conduct and, on the other hand, the citizens attempt to conduct their own conduct. In this way unravelling the subjectivation that unfolds as the government of others and the government of the self intersect in discursive interaction in the face of climate change, the paper can be seen as contributing more specifically to the yet underdeveloped area of studies of governmentality that explores the various forms of practices of subjectivations around climate change.

Keywords: Resistance, Membership categorisation analysis, Subjectivation.