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Politics and National Identity: Practices of Politicization and Depoliticization

Political theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Kari Palonen argue that politics is a form of social action, which relates to the availability of discursive spaces in which to act. In this view, politics integrally involves discursive practices that create or efface opportunities and alternatives for action. In this talk, I speculate on what a political action is: How can we *read* the political when analyzing spoken or written texts? Much work in discourse analysis tends to neglect any detailed discussion of the political. In most cases, politics is equated with the polity or media reports of politicians' actions – the political being an epiphenomenon of a particular institutional space – or is cast as the construction of differences in terms of 'us' vs. 'them'. Scant mention is given to terms such as politicization, depoliticization, policy, or polity. It is argued here that a political vocabulary is necessary when analyzing the political. The first part of this talk provides political conceptual tools combined with linguistic tools for identifying political activities. The second part focuses on a unique event that recently occurred in Austria involving a Kosovan family of asylum seekers who suddenly faced deportation. I show how one of the family members – the 15 year old daughter – effectively used the media to not only politicize the family's dire situation in particular, but also to (re)politicize the rules and regulations governing asylum within Austria.