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While reading *The Discursive Construction of Economic Inequality*, I thought Gramsci would have much liked this book; therefore, I was pleased to find a reference to the Italian philosopher in the conclusive words of the last chapter by Wolfgang Teubert, who challenges the very notion of western democracy as an effective political form of collective and all inclusive participation. Teubert uses Gramsci's (1971) construct of hegemony, according to him more powerful than Marx's economic supremacy, to explain how the citizens of such a rich country as the UK can accept that 30% of its children live below the breadline. In his chapter 'The democracy we live in', Teubert challenges the notion of Western democracy as synonymous with citizens' collective decisions and shows how our societies are still governed by the interests of the few (p. 161). As Dorling notes in his afterword, usually it is poor countries that tend to be afflicted by inequality (p. 183). Yet, in Europe the UK has the embarrassing record of being the most economically unfair nation.

The edited volume by Eva Gomez-Jimenez and Michael Toolan deals exactly with what surrounds, supports and makes acceptable severe economic inequality in the UK. It analyses the discourses of hegemony that have been circulating and explores how such dominant narratives present in policy documents, parliamentary proceedings (Hansard), historical political propaganda, party conference papers, printed and TV media texts have 'naturalised' (Fairclough, 1995) the economic imbalance between social classes in British society since 1900. Framed within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the contributions to the volume seek to unveil the hidden or

not immediately visible meanings in public discourse that have become accepted as normal to encourage 'emancipatory objectives' and possibly political praxis (p. 146). This is not solely a good book; it is an important and much needed volume to understand the social reality we live in. It helps us make sense, if not make us aware, of the potency of language (Fairclough, 2002) to edulcorate the often unacceptable conditions of a huge section of the population that is excluded and marginalised. As a scholar interested in marginalisation (Piazza, 2019, 2021), I much appreciated and recommend this eye-opening volume that invokes a real interpretation of democracy as an inclusive and fair form of living.

The editors' introduction successfully sets the frame and context of the book and explains such core concepts as the 'market economy' and the difference between 'having' and 'being' a market economy. Among many others, this concept is taken up in the insightful afterward by Danny Dorling, for whom the term doesn't refer to economics, but rather indicates a society where everything is on sale, and where – contrary to the period 1913 to 1939 when 'we were much more equal' (p. 187) – inequality rules because of the mantra 'he who wins deserves to win the most' (p. 185) and, contrariwise, according to a persisting out-dated Darwinian law, he who is left behind is not fit for the system and deserves to fail.

After presenting the rationale for the topic of the book and contextualising the economic inequality in British society both at present and through history, the chapters engage with the discursive representations of a wide variety of topics. Lorenzo-Duz and Almaged analyse the portrayal of poverty and social exclusion in the speeches of Conservative and Labour leaders in 1900 and 2014 and found more similarities than differences in the use of the two different narratives of finance and hardship. The most important finding, however, is that both parties construct poor and disadvantaged people as idle and passive, hence both parties perpetuate the neo-liberal narrative of 'he who does not win, does not deserve to win' as Dorling phrases it (p. 185). Toolan's chapter on child poverty focuses on its representation in *The Times* during the 1970s and 2000s. The rationale for the choice of this topic comes from the growth in the number of children living in utter poverty in 2019 (an increase by 200,000 with respect to 2017-8, p. 69). The study's results are most revealing. Despite the alternation of Labour and Conservatives in both decades (1970-74 Conservative, 1975-79 Labour, 1979-1997 Conservative, 1997-2010 Labour, 2010- Conservative) and despite the newspaper's political leaning, a shift from one narrative or 'script' to another is noticeable. In the '70s there was a call to the government to address child poverty by investing in social housing and schools; in the later decade, child poverty is portrayed as a parents' responsibility rather than a result of society's choices. Interestingly, Toolan's corpus, resulting from the Opinion and Editorial sections of the *Times* in the two periods, shows how the finger is pointed in particular to 'lone' and 'single' parents with fewer instances of 'married parents' (p. 80). Among the many tangible manifestations of economic inequality is obesity, whose crucial impact has often caught the attention of media scholars (Bonfiglioli, 2015). Obesity is the topic of Jane Muderrig's chapter, which points out how overweight issues are intrinsically social and claims that the UK's anti-obesity policy 'helps reinforce, rather than challenge' (p. 107) the

inequalities and unfairness that lower classes suffer in the UK. As described on its website[1], *Change4Life* 'aims to ensure parents have the essential support and tools they need to make healthier choices for their families'. While this programme appears as an ostensive invitation to stay fit and healthy, through a multimodal analysis, Jane Mulderrig shows that the Change4Life policy is nothing more than a smokescreen hiding a determination to perpetuate the status quo and continue to favour the 'advantaged commercial stakeholders' (p. 122)

Many of the chapters take a longitudinal perspective and compare different historical stages in the development of British neoliberal society. This is the case of the contribution by van der Bom and Paterson who investigate welfare discourses in *The Times* between the 1940s and 2000s and identify a relative persistence in that narrative across time; Ras' chapter that compares press narratives of corporate fraud and modern slavery in two similar periods (2000-14 and 2000-16, respectively) and suggests that press reporting tends to obliterate individual responsibilities or hint that governments and public institutions should be responsible; and Jeffries and Walker's analysis of *austerity* in the printed media in 2009-10 and 2016-1 that identifies a change from a term in association with inequality to a word 'akin to democracy, freedom and equality' (p. 141). Most commendable is the fact that the volume doesn't just focus on printed texts but concerns itself with TV news too, as in the chapter by Thomas combining content and text analysis of words and images of news bulletins about the financial crises in 2007 and 2014.

Gomez-Jimenez and Toolan's volume is not solely rewarding for the insightful foray into the many ways in which hegemonic discourses have supported economic injustice since WWII (as discussed in the historical chapter by Spencer-Bennett). Based on a corpus discourse approach, the volume offers excellent methodological guidance with regard to compiling and mining corpora (besides ably combining 'rehumanising' qualitative analysis in association with statistical findings, as Thomas explains on p. 149). Lorenzo-Duz and Almaged punctually list the sequential steps they followed in their study (p. 19), thus providing a most useful tool for the students reading the book. Similarly, Toolan, convincingly explains how different databases can be effectively combined and how corpora of visible disparity in size can be productively used in a study like his. Most crucially, he makes a useful distinction between linguistic studies aiming to trace specific aspects of language and those investigations like his that are critically analytical.

In conclusion, *The Discursive Construction of (British) Economic Inequality* uncovers the subtle process of normalization of injustice, poverty and inequality that is realised through language. Although it brings into the limelight often disquieting information, or maybe precisely because of this, it is a must read and a very important volume from both a critical content and a methodological perspective. Both CDA scholars and students can hugely benefit from this innovative and eye-opening work.

Notes

1. https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/about-change4life

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