

The materiality and *semiosis* of inequality and class warfare in contemporary Spain: From *Critical Discourse Analysis* to *Corrupt Discourse Analysis* and ‘anything goes’

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Abstract:

The topic of this paper emerges against the backdrop of the deep economic crisis in Spain and the activity of the *Partido Popular* (PP) government from mid-2011 to early 2016. In it, I discuss the way in which class warfare is carried out by the haves against the have-nots in contemporary Spain, focussing specifically on critical moments in the ongoing conflict generated by home evictions, which have risen dramatically in recent years, as well as the corruption scandals which have arisen in the ranks of the PP. I begin by discussing key terms such as ideology, inequality, class warfare and semiosis, before considering how over the past five years the PP has fought a discursive battle over issues such as home evictions and corruption, attempting to impose an interpretation of events that frames its opponents as illegitimate citizens and therefore unworthy of being taken seriously. My point is that inequality and class warfare play themselves out in the discursive realm, as key stakeholders battle over representations and understandings of real world events and processes. However, I also bear in mind that the material realm is not necessarily affected by such discursive battles and inequality and class warfare indeed (and surely) exist independently of such representations and understandings of it. I end with some further thoughts on discourse, suggesting that there is perhaps the need for a sub-area of Critical Discourse Analysis called *Corrupt Discourse Analysis*. The latter refers to the study and analysis of both discourses of corruption and what we might see as the corruption of language and other forms of communication in the attempt to win symbolic battles.

Key words:

Spanish politics, inequality, class warfare, corruption, *semiosis*, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, *Corrupt Discourse Analysis*

N.B. This is draft paper which represents more or less what I intended to say in my talk given at 2nd International Conference on Cultural Political Economy: Putting Culture in its Place in Political Economy, 26 August 2016. It is, to say the least, rough around the edges and somewhat inconclusive in its current form.

Introduction

As in many parts of the world, inequality in Spain has risen markedly since the beginning of the economic recession of 2007/2008 and one aspect of this state of affairs is the crude reality of many individuals and families who cannot pay their mortgages or rents and therefore are evicted from their homes. This chapter is about inequality and class struggle and warfare which both engender and are engendered by events such as home evictions. It begins with an attempt to make clear what is meant by inequality and class struggle, drawing on a range of work: from Plato's (2007 [360]) and Rousseau's (1984 [1754]) early reflections on the topic to more current scholarship (e.g. Atkinson, 2015; Dorling 2011, 2014; Duménil & Lévy 2011, 2014; Harvey 2014; Piketty 2014). There is then a discussion of how inequality and class struggle and warfare are made in context, both materially and via *semiosis*, or multimodal meaning making (Fairclough 2010). The chapter then moves to the concrete example of home evictions and examines how inequality and class struggle and warfare come together around them. It ends with some thoughts about approaches to the analysis of the kinds of discourses encountered in the course of the article.

Inequality, class struggle and class warfare¹

References to inequality can be found as far back as the fourth century BC, when Plato, discussed both the inevitability and danger of inequality, writing that while a state 'always contains at least two states, the rich and the poor, at enmity with each other' (Plato 2007:124), 'there should exist among the citizens neither extreme poverty nor, again, excessive wealth, for both are productive of great evil' (Plato 2014: npn). Some centuries later, Rousseau (1984 [1754]) wrote about two 'species' of inequality: physical inequality, about *natural* differences among individuals in terms of body, mind and health, and *moral* or political inequality, based on convention (i.e. established, accepted and authorized by society), which leads to differences in wealth and power in society. Rousseau developed the idea, novel at the time, that existing stratification in society is not just about the natural abilities and propensities of individuals; rather, there are social conditions, human-made to be sure, which create, strengthen and maintain existing political, economic and social orders. Significantly, Rousseau positions the ownership of property, when '[t]he first man who after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, "This is mine"' (Rousseau 1984 [1754]: 27) as what Marx (1990: 873) would later call the 'original sin' of political economy, and as the wellspring of inequality. Rousseau asks: 'How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how many misfortunes and horrors, would that man have saved the human species, who pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditch should have cried to his fellows: Be sure not to listen to this impostor; you are lost, if you forget that that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody!' (Rousseau 1984 [1754]: 109)

More recently, Göran Therborn (2006) further develops the notion of inequality as a moral concern, arguing that it is based on difference. First, it is about difference which limits the life possibilities of the disadvantaged, either directly, by concentrating resources among the privileged, or indirectly, via social psychological mechanisms of humiliating signals of superiority and inferiority. Second, as a type of difference, inequality is too large and harsh to be accepted by a substantial proportion of society, even those who might benefit from it. This, because it goes against notions of fairness in society, giving undeserved, unfair advantages to people on the basis of their position in society rather than work and sacrifice. Of course, such notions of fairness have not always been in operation, as we see in recent discussions such as Piketty (2014).

With this understanding of inequality in mind, Therborn goes on to outline a typology of inequality. First, there is *vital inequality*, which is about basic life and death chances and individuals and collectives' relative exposure to: (a) life-threatening natural phenomena, such as disease, famine, flooding and drought; (b) self-inflicted human conditions, such as violence, alcoholism, and obesity; and (c) larger human-made disasters, such as war and pollution. Second, there is *existential inequality*, which is about systems of oppression which deny individuals and collectives what are understood today to be basic human rights. Social structures such as patriarchy, slavery, caste systems, racism, religious persecution, homophobia and other forms of social ostracism, or attacks on ways of being, fall into this category. Third, there is *resource inequality*, which refers to the variable access that individuals and collectives have to a large number of different though interrelated material and symbolic resources. These include property, income and wealth, as well as Bourdieusian notions of cultural and social capital and the recognition, legitimacy and respect that go with them (Bourdieu, 1984).

As authors such as Duménil & Lévy (2011, 2014) and Piketty (2014) have noted, from roughly the late 1940s to the mid-1970s, the economies of the wealthy countries of Western Europe, North American and elsewhere operated according to a dominant Keynesian social democratic consensus (*de facto* or conscious) and during this period inequality was reduced. However, since the mid-1970s, and the rise of dominance of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology, economic policy and rationality in contemporary societies, there has been a considerable increase in Therborn's *resource inequality*. This can be seen especially as regards material inequality, as the aforementioned Keynesian consensus was first of all discredited and then effectively dismantled to a great extent. This turnaround came about as neoliberal economic policies and practices rose to prominence, albeit in very different ways across different geographical locations (Mirowski 2013; Peck 2010). These policies and practices have generated social and political changes which have brought with them greater differences between the rich and the poor and the weakening and diminishing of the traditional middle class, not only in economic and material terms (around the ownership of assets, the relative stability of employment and the amount income), but also in terms of the status and legitimacy which accompany it. In addition, and to make matters worse, this inequality has increased even more rapidly in the years since the current economic crisis first began to emerge in 2007-2008 (Piketty 2014). In the midst of this situation, it is worthwhile to note how among the populations of those countries most affected by the crisis, such as the southern-most states of the EU, there is a growing realization that the persistence and growth of *resource inequality* leads inevitably to a concomitant increase in *vital inequality*, the collateral negative effects that come with society-wide impoverishment, such as ill-health (both physical and psychological) and a decrease in the quality of social services and publically available resources (Dorling 2011, 2014).

My starting point for exploring how stratification and inequality are *made* in the ongoing flux and flow social events, activity and communication is the premise that we are living in times of class *struggle* as class *warfare*, where class is understood in terms a *constellation of dimensions* model (Block 2014, 2015, 2016a). This model draws on the foundational political economic work of Marx (1990); the later, more sociocultural models of class elaborated, successively, by Durkheim (1984), Weber (1968) and Bourdieu (1984). It frames class in terms of long list of factors, including property owned, material possessions (e.g. electronic goods, clothing, books, art, etc.), income, occupation, education, social networking, consumption patterns, symbolic behaviour,

pass-times, mobility, neighbourhood and type of dwelling inhabited. These dimensions of class cluster together and index points of contrast between and among individuals in class-based societies where class struggle and class conflict are a part of daily life, albeit in ways that are often subtle and equally often, go unnoticed.

Eric Olin Wright defines class struggle as ‘conflicts between the practices of individuals and collectives in pursuit of opposing class interests ... rang[ing] from the strategies of individual workers within the labour process to reduce their level of toil, to conflicts between highly organized collectivises of workers and capitalists over the distribution of rights and powers within production. (Wright, 2005: 20–21). In recent times, it is easy to see that class struggle, endemic to capitalism, has transformed into *class warfare*, as the neoliberal policies adopted over the past four decades around the old have constituted not only a point of conflict and struggle in the ‘pursuit of opposing class interests’, but an actual attack on the well-being and even survival of the popular class in countries around the world. Nowhere has such an attack been more evident than in the transfer of capital assets from the less wealthy in society to the wealthiest since the beginnings of the economic crisis in 2007. In an attempt to understand this trend, David Harvey (2010, 2014) updates Marx’s notion of ‘primitive accumulation’, discussing what he calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’. Primitive accumulation was Marx’s term for ‘historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production’ (Marx 1990: 875) which began with waves of land expropriations going back as far as the late 15th century in England. These expropriations, which ranged from the feudal lords being dispossessed of land by the emerging industrial capitalist class to the reformation-era spoliation of land held by the Catholic Church, had the common effect of divesting the peasant class of access to a livelihood as they were driven towards their historical destiny as the industrial proletariat.

Moving to more recent times, Harvey sees accumulation by dispossession in the range of activities and practices carried out by governments and financial institutions, which have the function of transferring wealth from the less well-off to the wealthy. On the one hand, there is the privatisation of state-owned and operated industries and services which began in earnest some four decades ago. More recently, there is the sale of state-owned assets (which are public and therefore, in theory, belong to ‘the people’) to private investors, often from other countries and therefore that much further removed from the realities of the local contexts where the purchased assets are physically located. On the other hand, there are the activities of a financial sector such as ‘Ponzi’ scandal in the United States (Frankel 2012) or the *preferentes* scandal in Spain (Sánchez Ponz, 2013). In the latter case, individuals on modest incomes or pensions turned over their life savings to financial advisors who told them that their money would be invested for profit and that they would be treated preferentially as prized clients. When the financial current crisis arrived, and their banks failed and had to be rescued, these individuals lost most or all of their invested money. Finally, and most relevant to this chapter, there are the massive home repossessions which have come with the current economic crisis. In this case, the executors are banks, aided and abetted by governments serving the interests of capital over citizens at large, an alignment of interests, a phenomenon denounced long ago by Marx (1973, 1990; see also Marx and Engels 1998).

Given the discussion above, in which we have moved from inequality to class struggle warfare fairly rapidly, there is the key issue of how one operationalises these constructs in empirical research, or perhaps better said, how one documents how these phenomena

are constituted in, and indeed how they emerge from, the social world of events, activity and communication. I turn to this issue in the next section.

Critical discourse analysis

In order to explore the issues identified above, I draw on the work of Norman Fairclough over the last several decades (Fairclough 2006, 2010; see also Wodak & Meyer 2012). Central to Fairclough's approach is the study of *semiosis*, or the making of meaning via the use of semiotic resources (speech, written script, visuals, body movement, gaze and so on) as a way of understanding how power relationships are symbolically established and reproduced in society. Fairclough defines discourse as 'a complex set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write and in other ways communicate with each other, but also, for example, describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles, etc.) and more abstract and enduring complex discourses and genres' (Fairclough 2010: 3). Crucially, he sees relations between discourse and other ... complex 'objects' ... in the physical world, persons, power relations and institutions, which are interconnected elements in social activity ...' (Fairclough 2010: 3). It is also worth noting that discourses, as defined above, are always 'positioned' and 'interested' ways of presenting social practices and the world and life in general, which means that they are not casual, but always *come from somewhere*. In addition, discourses about social events and phenomena do not normally exist in isolation; indeed, the norm is for there to be multiple discourses around a same social reality and for these to be contested and in conflict with each other.

A final point about discourses is that they often exist as integral historical artefacts, which means that they are potential resource for communication in the present. In different ways, both Bakhtin (1981) and Kristeva (1986) capture this general notion in their respective work on 'heteroglossia' and 'intertextuality'. For his part, Fairclough (1992), drawing on both scholars, discusses 'the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth' (Fairclough 1992: 84), calling property 'interdiscursivity'. Of interest here are cases of interdiscursivity (or heteroglossia or intertextuality, in which elements from texts produced in the past are constituents of texts in the present. This can mean, for example, a mixing of genres (e.g. personalising a formal speech with anecdotes), or the adoption of a variety of recognisable social voices in the telling of story (often the choice of voices tells us a great deal about the person producing them), or the use of simplified versions of material and discursive realities from the past (as we shall see below, all too often, references to Hitler and the Nazis are used as a quick and easy way to discredit an interlocutor or political opponent).

The setting: *Partido Popular*, the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* and *escraches*²

In this discussion of inequality and class warfare, there are two key participating collectives. First, there is the *Partido Popular* (hereafter PP), the Spanish conservative party, which governed in Spain with an absolute majority from late 2011 to late 2015, and then from the latter point in time until the present (September 2016) has acted as a sitting government, as a general election in December 2015 produced no government (the Spanish version of a 'hung' parliament) and a second election in June 2016 led to stalled negotiations in late August 2016. From early 2012, the PP began to apply

extreme austerity measures according to the dictates of the ‘troika’, composed of the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. The measures included across-the-board (*and* ongoing) pay cuts for civil servants and cutbacks in funding for essential services (especially universal health care and education). By the end of 2014, a slight amelioration of the profound economic crisis in Spain in macro-economic terms was a reality, as the country consistently manifested higher quality growth rates than its EU partners. Still, while the PP has always tended to exaggerate such developments, the ‘troika’ has generally shown a degree of scepticism. In any case, even if the Spanish government could claim that in macro terms the economy was emerging from the recession by late 2014, the majority of the Spanish people were not feeling the effects and this, coupled with massive corruption scandals (the majority of which have involved prominent past and present members of the PP) has only served to submerge the population, if not in outright despair, in a kind of uneasy generalised malaise. One key development arising from the economic crisis from 2011 onwards was the increase in home evictions, a phenomenon which led directly to the formation and rise to media prominence of the second key participating collective in this discussion, the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (literally, ‘Platform for those Affected by Mortgages’; hereafter, PAH).

The PAH is a grassroots organisation which campaigns on behalf of individuals and families who because of unemployment or other events find that they are unable to make mortgage or rent payments and therefore are either threatened with eviction from their homes or are actually evicted. Evictions normally occur with no provision whatsoever of alternative accommodation and they can be extremely traumatic experiences for those who are evicted, sometimes ending in the suicide of the evictee. On the PAH’s webpage, one finds the following explanation of how the campaign began:

Text 1:

This campaign was born in September 2011 in the street ... The motives behind the campaign are simple: they steal our homes and condemn us to continue paying for them. We are left in the street without any housing alternative. Banks, including those which were rescued, continue to display an antisocial attitude, evicting families and accumulating a huge stock of empty houses disregarding the social function of housing. The government protects such actions: it neither stops them nor offers solutions such as social rent, putting a halt to evictions or waiver of payment. PAH’s social project consists of a campaign of occupations and the recovery of the right to housing in response to a generalized state of housing emergency generated artificially and intentionally by banks and the government. To address this situation, we propose the recovery of empty housing held by banks for the homeless and our main demand is a social rent for families, in accordance with their income. The social project connects seamlessly with the trajectory of the PAH: the defence of the population when their rights are amputated, disobedience to recover these rights and in this way force solutions. (PAH 2014: npn; Author’s translation from the original in Spanish; see appendix 2)

Importantly, this text is discursively framed according to notions of class struggle and class warfare, as outlined above. It suggests a clear division between the empowered capitalist class (backed by the government) and the relatively disempowered popular

classes (with little or no formal institutional support). In effect, the former - 'they' - act against the interests of the latter - 'we' - thus engaging in a form of class warfare which is denied by the government and most of the media, but surely identified and felt by the popular classes. In the text, 'we' refers to the population in general (or 'families') and those members of the general population directly affected by the unfair mortgage law. In Therborn's (2006) terms, the text makes clear that the inequality that exists in contemporary Spanish society involves *resource* inequality (as unequal access to material and symbolic resources), which is inextricably linked to *vital inequality* (in this case the lack of access to adequate shelter) and *existential* inequality (as unequal access to political power and civil rights).

It is worth noting at this stage that the Spanish mortgage law which was passed in 1946 and remained unaltered through 30 years of the Franco regime and then for almost 40 years of democratic rule, was extremely biased in favour of the interests of banks. It left home buyers and renters with very few rights if they could not make mortgage payments or pay their rent. The most abusive, and as a result controversial, section of this law was the impossibility of waiving the remainder of a mortgage, even after home eviction for default and the permanent cession of one's home to the lending bank had occurred. In essence, mortgage defaulters not only lost their homes, along with all of the money they had paid up to the time of default, but they also were still legally bound to paying off the remainder of their mortgage at such point in time when it was deemed (by the mortgage holders) that they were able to do so. A new law passed in May 2013, with the sole support of the majority PP in parliament, alleviated some of the more egregious and crueller aspects of the earlier law (preventing the eviction of families living in absolute destitution), but the obligation to pay off mortgages, even after home cession to a bank, remained. And as regards the prevention of evictions, it is hard to say if the law has had any effect. Official statistics from the Spanish National Statistics Institute show that between 2014 and 2015, the number of evictees for mortgage default decreased from over 34,000 to roughly 30,000. However, it may well be the case that these numbers, descending to be sure, reflect at least in part the fact that from 2008 to 2015 the number of new mortgages contracted annually had decreased substantially compared to the period 2000-2008.³

In the midst of this drama, members of the PAH developed three types of activity. First, they held assemblies, during which information was shared about past or impending evictions and victims were provided legal, practical and emotional support. Second, they set up and maintained an active webpage on which new and updated information was constantly posted on a range of topics, including explanations of Spanish laws, media reports of evictions and other related phenomena and strategies for dealing with an eviction and/or other abuses perpetrated by banks. Third and finally, there was direct action, which included a physical presence at evictions, with the aim of stopping them, and participation in mass demonstrations. More controversially, in 2013, some members of the PAH began to engage in another form of direct action, called *escraches*, which were more focussed demonstrations in which groups of activists protested outside the homes and/or workplaces of politicians. The objects of *escraches*, individuals deemed to have decision-making capacity with regard to the legislation of banks and practices such as home evictions (mainly, PP members in the parliament). It is precisely these more 'in-your-face' demonstrations which lead to a very public discursive conflict with the PP in 2013.

Home evictions and *escraches* are, without a doubt, material events involving the physical presence of actors (evictors and evictees, and *escrache* protesters and the objects of *escraches*) and physical spaces (homes, streets). But what actually occurs in a home eviction and an *escrache* when these events are framed as acts of semiosis which exemplify and structure inequality and class warfare? Lorenzo (2013) provides a vivid portrayal (via written text and a photograph) of a home eviction in which we first of all note that there are two main actors, protestors and the police or military. There is a physical confrontation as police officers physically remove protestors from the entrance of a building in which evictees live, while the protestors do everything in their power to prevent this from happening. The use of violence by the police, provoked or not, is not uncommon in evictions, consisting of anything from the pulling of hair and pushing, to the use of batons to strike protestors. The corporality and positioning of the police officers during a home eviction stands in contrast to those of the protestors: while the former are only focussed on the removal of evictees, the protestors are engaged in a range of activities which include attempts to talk to the police officers and outright physical resistance, such as hanging on to rails and other fixed objects to prevent physical removal from the scene. Protestors are likely to use phone technologies to contact associates or the press and above all to take photographs of unfolding events. There is, thus, a contrasted *semiosis* of the two groups in conflict. What this contrast means to those observing a home eviction will no doubt depend on their views on a range of issues, from the morality of home evictions to the role of the police in society (as guardians of security and order or as the oppressive arm of the state ideological apparatuses and the interests of capital).

Applying the parameters of inequality outlined above to the home eviction as event, we see that it is an instance of Therborn's *vital inequality*. Evictees in effect have their physical integrity compromised in that they are at risk of not having access to basic shelter. The eviction also raises issues around Therborn's *existential inequality*, and what Grusky and Lu (2008) have elsewhere called '*civic inequality*', as it may be seen as an act of denial and withdrawal of the evictees' basic human rights (the right to housing). Of course, the root of the problem is the evictees' lack of economic and political assets in contrast with the substantial economic and political assets possessed by banks as the ultimate instigators of eviction for mortgage default. And further to this, there is the state as guarantor of the banks' interests. On the other hand, the PAH enters the conflict, providing political, cultural and social assets to the victims of eviction to counter-rest the political, cultural and social assets held by the banks and the state. In effect, members of the PAH are well informed about the legality and procedure of home evictions and they are well organised, with well-established networks. Importantly, in this battle of assets, it is sometimes the PAH that wins, as they are often able to stop an eviction and/or rehouse a family.

Meanwhile, the *escrache* shows us a very different *semiosis* from the home eviction, even if the same two parties, members of the PAH and police officers, are involved. However, the two groups' behaviour differs here, as we move from evictees as the focal point of the activity to politicians. In *escraches*, the objects of the activity are seldom seen, unless it is when they rush from their home or office to an official car, so as to avoid contact with protestors and the press. By far the most interesting contrast between an eviction and an *escrache* is the behaviour of the police officers: while they are very active in home evictions, executing eviction orders, in an *escrache*, they are relatively static as they stand, wait and contain. Indeed, for most *escraches*, the police only

intervene when the target appears, ostensibly to prevent any possible physical contact between the latter and the protestors. Meanwhile, the PAH has always maintained that they neither engage in physical attacks on their targets nor use abusive and insulting language towards them, and there has never been any reliable evidence to suggest the contrary, despite uncorroborated claims by some members of the PP. At the most, there have instances in which PAH demonstrators have shouted phrases such as '*sin verguenza*' ('shameless') at their targets. Life threats and harsher language do not seem to be a part of the normal repertoire of those participating in *escraches* and the PAH has publicly expressed low tolerance for such extremism. More typically, protestors are hold placards with slogans, such as '*no criminalización*' ('no criminalization'), in reference to the way that from 2012 onwards, parts of the media and the PP began a campaign to frame many forms of public protest as illegal⁴.

The response to *escraches*⁵

The PP did stand idly by while the PAH's discourses around the unfairness of home evictions, the unethical and uncaring actions of banks and the inactivity and insensitivity of the government gained traction in the media and among the public at large. However, PP politicians were finding it difficult to defend their position in public given that in the run-up to the passing of the 2013 mortgage law, it had become clear that they would be offering only minor palliatives to the rising number of people affected by mortgage default and the inability to pay rent. Above all, they made clear that they would not be changing the most controversial aspect of the 1946 law, whereby mortgage defaulters not only lose their home, but they are still forced to pay off the remainder of the mortgage.

The arrival of *escraches* changed matters substantially for the PP. For many people in Spain, moving protests to outside people's homes, and therefore very close to the border between the public and the private, was a questionable tactic. Perhaps seeing this, the PP embarked on a frontal attack on the PAH and attempted to shift public opinion such that its members were no longer seen as saints, rather as something akin to political thugs. On 13 April 2013, as the number of *escraches* was increasing in the run up to the parliamentary vote on the new mortgage law, Maria Dolores de Cospedal, the General Secretary of the PP, made the following statement during a meeting of PP party members (see Appendix for transcription conventions):

Text 2:

... harassment/physical and verbal violence/attacks on people/on their homes/ their families (3) that only reflects a totalitarian and sectarian spirit/and that's the most contrary to democracy(1) [applause] we have in our memory/fortunately it is well documented/how in the 30s certain people were pointed out/for belonging to certain political/ethnic/cultural/or religious groups/and they said/*there they are/and you have to go and attack them* (1) but what is this attempt to violate the vote? (1) this is pure Nazism (1.5) I know they are going to criticize me for this (1.5) [smiling] but this is pure Nazism ... (Rachide, 2013: npn; Author's translation from the original in Spanish; see appendix 2)

Cospedal words received a good deal of media attention, not least because of their incendiary content. However, they were not improvised or idiosyncratic: rather, they were integral to an organized campaign by the PP to get a particular message across about *escraches* and, of course, about the PAH and its members. Just one day later,

Esperanza Aguirre, the then General Secretary of the PP in Autonomous Community of Madrid, wrote about members of the PAH in similar terms in a blog on her webpage:

Text 3:

Spanish society, its legitimate political representatives and, of course, the state's judicial and police forces must react to and stand up to the impudence, insolence and impunity with which emulators of the worst forms of totalitarianism in history have decided to harass, insult and intimidate members of the Partido Popular who have been elected by their fellow citizens. No one, with even the slightest sense of democracy, can or should show complacency when faced with the spectacle, which is becoming habitual, of fanatics who with total impunity disrupt the home life of some members of the Partido Popular. These violent stalkers set themselves up as models of all that is good but they are merely followers of the worst totalitarian tactics of the last century: the harassment with which the Hitler Youth or Castro's patrols tried and try to intimidate those who do not submit to their designs. And they are also imitators of the bullying tactics of the followers of ETA in the Basque Country, this bullying that has prevented the citizens of this part of Spain from living in freedom. (Aguirre, 2013; Author's translation from the original in Spanish; see appendix 2)

The Cospedal and Aguirre texts are clearly designed to shift the focus of debate from government support for the interests and actions of banks, to a claim of victim status for members of the PP. Or, put another way, they aim to shift the debate away from class warfare perpetuated by the ruling class on the popular classes to a dubious debate about democratic principles. The Aguirre text is, above all, one aimed at discrediting members of the PAH via name-calling. There is mention of PAH members' 'impudence, insolence and impunity', and they are described as 'fanatics', 'violent stalkers', 'emulators of the worst forms of totalitarianism in history' and 'imitators of the bullying tactics of the followers of ETA'.

Both texts are highly interdiscursive, as they involve 'the insertion of history into a text and of this text into history' (Kristeva, 1986: 39). They also employ what Ruth Wodak *et al* (1999: 85) have called the 'topos of history as teacher' and more specifically what Bernhard Forchtner (2014) has called the 'rhetorics of judging by others', a discursive strategy which 'links the data (a past wrongdoing committed by an out-group) and the conclusion (that similar actions proposed today by *others* should be avoided)' (Forchtner 2014:26). In short, '[s]ince history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to' (Forchtner 2014: 26). Using wording such as 'certain people were pointed out/for belonging to certain political/ethnic/cultural/or religious groups', and lexical items ranging from the bald 'Nazism' to 'totalitarian tactics', the two PP members draw on a discourse which frames the horrors of the Nazi era in Germany: PP party members, who are the object of *escraches*, are the persecuted Jews of our time, while PAH members (home evictees and those who help them) are Hitler's henchmen. In Aguirre's blog entry, we also have ETA and Cuba (and victims of terrorism and political repression, respectively) added into the mix, in an attempt to hammer the point home further.

Indeed, the analogy and semantic stretching going on here is so extreme is that both texts serve as good examples of what Wodak has called 'anything goes'. 'Anything

goes' refers to 'discursive and rhetorical strategies which combine incompatible phenomena [home evictees victimising the powerful], make false claims sound innocent [that PAH members 'are merely followers of the worst totalitarian tactics of the last century'] ... [and] 'say the 'unsayable' and transcend the limits of the permissible' [likening PP members to the persecuted Jews of Nazi Germany is surely beyond the pale]' (Wodak, 2013: 32-33; my additions in square brackets). And apart from 'anything goes', there is also the outright crassness and insensitivity to the descendants of holocaust victims: comparing what PP members have had to endure with what the Jews endured in Nazi German (and indeed in other European contexts) is frivolous to the extreme.

However, the entire edifice of PP's intertextual exercise is extremely shaky and does not hold up under scrutiny for at least two important reasons. First, there are Spain's well-documented contacts with the Nazi regime both before and during World War 2. From 1936 to 1939, Spain was occupied with the Spanish civil war, during which Nazi Germany provided Franco's insurrectionary fascist forces with valuable material and logistical support, among other things, bombing Spanish cities and transporting forces (Beevor 2006). After Franco's victory in 1939, Spain was then officially 'neutral' during World War 2, as Franco sought and achieved formal recognition of his regime by the allied powers after the war. Such historical events (and I apologise to readers for the elliptical nature of this foray into Spanish history) mean that references to the Nazis and Hitler in the Spanish public sphere often ring hollow, and they never have the kind of visceral value and impact among Spaniards that they would have with British or French audiences, to cite just two examples. Second, the PP itself has clear and unequivocal historical links to the Franco regime, as its earlier incarnation, the *Alianza Popular* (Popular Alliance), was founded in 1978 by a former Franco era minister, Manuel Fraga. In addition, some of the policies and practices of the PP today- its close relationship with ultra-conservative elements in the catholic church, its latent authoritarianism (see endnote 2), its overt support for and celebration of 'national symbols' such as bullfighting, and so on- are consistent with *nacionalcatolicismo* (national Catholicism) which was the ideological base of the Franco regime, dependent on the support of both catholic fundamentalism and fascism. In sum, the PP arguably has far more links to the persecutors of Jews in 1930s Germany than the persecuted Jews themselves and the PAH-as-Nazis intertextual turn therefore comes across as a cynical rhetorical ploy. Finally, it is worth recalling Derrida's (1989) notion of iterability, and specifically how the incorporation of textual elements from the past into texts in the present is never simply a repetition of the same production of texts. Rather, the disembedding of genres, voices and other discursive features from their original sociohistorical milieu and their subsequent re-authoring and re-animating in newly generated communication, constitute *semiosis* in need of interpretation and analysis in the present and in its exact location (social, psychological, spatial, geographical and so on).

These caveats notwithstanding, members of the PP, led by Cospedal and Aguirre, showed no sense of what Forchtner (2014: 28) calls the 'self-critical narrative of *our* past failing', and they went on to use the Nazi-based topos of history as teacher for a period of time in 2013. Ultimately, this was an attempt of Orwellian proportions to do what governments defending capital (in this case the interests of banks) have always done: turning reality on its head and then trying to convince the general public that it is true. In other words, the PP's claim of victim status is a classic example of Marx and

Engels's (1998: 42) metaphor of ideology as a 'camera obscura' as '[actors] and their relations appear upside down'. But did this strategy work in the sense of allowing the PP to win the battle of ideas with the PAH (to win, in short, a symbolic victory over the PAH)?

This is a difficult question to address and answer because it is hard to find direct evidence in one direction or the other. Thus while monthly reports provided by the official Spanish statistical office, the Sociological Research Centre (the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*- or *CIS*), show that home evictions are never cited as being among the top problems facing Spaniards on a day-to-day basis, this could hardly be expected in a country facing persistently high unemployment and a continuing parade of corruption scandals. Still, if we consider that the responsibility for economic problems such as unemployment are generally attributed to the government in power (the PP) and the fact that the PP is by far the political party most associated with corruption, then it seems that in both the short and long term, the effect of the attack on the PAH for *escraches* could only ever move the right-wing media and unconditional supporters of the PP cause. It seems then that the obvious absurdity of the two-part equation- PAH = Nazis and PP members = persecuted Jews- has militated against the prospect of any kind of general and/or clear symbolic victory of the PP over the PAH with regard to *escraches*. Meanwhile, the material victories of the state and capital over evictees in the ongoing class war, exacerbated by the economic crisis, continue. To say the least, the materiality and *semiosis* of inequality and class struggle and warfare is complex and multi-levelled in its characteristics, a veritable moving object over time and space.

The struggle continues

As I indicated above, the episode 'PAH = Nazis' occurred in April 2013, but matters did not end there as it proved to be difficult for the PP to abandon their discursive battle over *escraches*, and indeed anything associated with the activities of social movements such as the PAH and the new left parties such as *Podemos*, which were founded in 2014 and 2015. For this reason, over the past several years there has been a continuous campaign (undeclared and unacknowledged by its actors) to discredit new left political rivals. One key element of this campaign is to claim that members of these new political formations are not legitimate social and political actors and that they therefore do not deserve the same treatment as those who are considered legitimate citizens (i.e. those affiliated to and supportive of traditional parties, such as the PP and the Spanish socialist party, or new parties which are deemed to be sufficiently committed to economic liberalism, such as *Ciudadanos*).

As I note elsewhere (Block, 2016b), a particularly noteworthy example of this trend occurred in the wake of incident which took place in Madrid on 16 February 2016. On this day a group of about 200 municipal police officers participated in a demonstration against the city's head of security, Javier Barbero for the dismantling of the *Unidades Centrales de Seguridad* (Central Security Units), or UCS, also known as *Unidades Antidisturbios Municipales* ('municipal anti-disturbance units'). It should be noted that Barbero is a member of *Podemos* and part of a municipal government lead by independent new left associations and *Podemos* (with the unenthusiastic support of the Madrid socialist party). Previous to taking this post, he was an activist with a documented history of engaging in street protests. During the demonstration, Barbero was booed and insulted (documented epithets included 'gordo', 'rojo de mierda' and

‘hijo de puta’ – roughly translatable as ‘fat’, ‘fucking red’ and ‘son of a bitch’), and even abused physically by some of protesters (according to witnesses, some protesters kicked Barbero and then shook his car).

When asked about this incident a day later, Jorge Fernandez Díaz, the then sitting Minister of Interior, said that he lamented what had happened, although he focused his attention on Barbero and not the police officers who acted in a violent way. Among other things, he noted:

Text 4

Getting a taste of your own medicine makes you realise how much what you were doing wasn’t exactly something that could be considered freedom of expression’. Until recently those actions termed *escraches* were mainly suffered by other people, and in a greater proportion, without a shadow of a doubt, by public officials in the Partido Popular. And those who carried them out said that it was freedom of expression. What we can’t accept is that when you do them, they are, and when you suffer them, they are odious or criminal behaviour.

(Europa Press, 2016; Author’s translation from the original in Spanish; see appendix 2)

Thus, rather than condemn unequivocally the actions of the violent officers, or indeed everyone who participated in the demonstration, Fernandez Diaz opted to condemn the victim for his alleged participation in *escraches* against members of the PP in the past (an allegation denied by Barbero, even if he has always had close contact with members of the PAH). In any case, Barbero and PAH members who had participated in *escraches* in the past were quick to point out that what happened to Barbero was not an *escrache* but a violent demonstration. They pointed to the fact that there had been no PAH-organized events in which violence was perpetrated on targets and that the organization has always distanced itself from personal insults and the use of epithets directed at the objects of their protests. Nevertheless, it served the purposes of the right-wing media and the PP to group together all forms of street protests as *the same thing*.

Significantly, in Fernández Díaz’s complete statement, there is no attempt to establish a parallel between the behaviour of the police officers and the Nazi era (following Cospedal). Nor is there any reference to ‘the impudence, insolence and impunity with which emulators of the worst forms of totalitarianism in history have decided to harass, insult and intimidate members of ~~the Partido Popular~~ [Podemos] who have been elected by their fellow citizens’ (following Aguirre). There is only the disqualification of an adversary, giving the impression that a government minister –and a sitting one at that– can act in sectarian manner without consequences. In effect, there is more ‘anything goes’ and more ‘transcendence of the limits of the permissible’, alongside minimal reference to the defense of order, certainly the most common and noteworthy element in Fernandez Diaz’s discourse since he was first appointed Interior Minister in 2011. There is more of Marx and Engels’s ‘camera obscura’, that is, the world upside down, as PP continues to defend, on the one hand, its interests as a political party holding power, and, on the other hand, the interests which it most directly represents (the banks, landowners, the municipal police Madrid who attacked Barbero and so on). Combining cynicism with a twisted use of history, the PP seems to be immersed in an endless battle to perpetuate itself in power via the dissemination of a particular worldview.

Conclusion

Inequality and class struggle and warfare are on the rise around the world and in particular in countries like Spain, where the recession has hit particularly hard. As noted above, inequality is multidimensional, existing, as it does, around and through unequal basic life and death chances (*vital inequality*), unequal human, civil and material rights (*existential inequality*) and unequal access to material and symbolic resources (*resource inequality*). And these dimensions mediate specific instances of class struggle and warfare, as defined and exemplified in this chapter, where I have provided a brief and admittedly limited analysis of how inequality and class struggle and warfare are constructed via discursive strategies such as interdiscursivity, the topos of history as teacher and anything goes'. I have done this by focussing on the specific case of home evictions in Spain, a material phenomenon leading to a parallel discursive realm in which actors produce conflicting versions of events and phenomena.

In my view the discursive juggling of the PP constitutes a kind of corruption although it is not corruption as the term is generally understood, that is, when 'bribes, kickbacks and embezzlement [occur and] are supplemented by practices such as illicit gifts, favours, nepotism, and informal promises' (Breit, Lennerfors & Olaison, 2015: 319). Rather, it is a kind of moral corruption, a corruption in the modus operandi of those who practise it. It is, indeed, a kind of corruption of language and other forms of communication in the attempt to win symbolic battles. I hasten to add here that I am not using the term 'corruption' with regard to language and communication in the prescriptive sense of suggesting that there is a correct and incorrect way of communicating. Rather, I refer to a phenomenon identified by scholars such as Ruth Wodak (2016), who has always been concerned with uses of language to form opinions and manipulate, albeit without making reference the 'corruption' of language or communication. .

To further clarify what I mean by corrupt discourse, I provide one further example of a PP member attempting to cover up wrongdoing or manipulate understandings of events in a way that is favourable to the survival of the party. The example is taken from a press conference held on the 25th of February 2013. Maria Dolores de Cospedal, cited previously, was asked by a journalist why the PP had continued paying its former treasurer Luis Bárcenas, indicted for fraud at the time, a monthly salary of €21.300,08, when they had previously claimed that his contract had ended more than two years earlier. Cospedal, notably nervous, attempted to explain the anomaly as follows:

Text 5

the negotiated compensation/was a deferred compensation (.5) and as it was defer/deferred (.5) as/effectively/a simulation/simulation/or what would have been delayed/in parts of a/of what was previously a remuneration/he had to have social security remuneration/because if not it would have been (1.5) now there is a lot of talk about withholding payments/that do not have social security remuneration/right?/well here we wanted/we wanted to do things/like they are supposed to be done/that is/with social security remuneration/ (Author's translation from the original in Spanish; see appendix 2; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzyHbjgrx8U>)

Here my English translation makes little sense for the most part and this is because the original in Spanish makes little sense. Cospedal is being evasive, constantly searching

for the *right* word or expression so as not to say the *wrong* (for the interests of her party) word or expression, and her short pauses of .5 seconds are eloquent in this regard. In addition, her disfluency is accompanied by a gaze which is, for most of her intervention, fixed on a small part of the audience (or indeed an individual), which makes the proceedings seem more unreal. In effect, Cospedal seems to be in a trance. The latter is broken somewhat abruptly when she surveys the audience and smiles while explaining that that the PP did what it did because it was the only legal option that they had. This comment and the smile which accompanies it are revealing, as doing the right thing should go without saying and should be done without even thinking about other, presumably less legal, alternatives. The 1.5 second pause that comes when she does not complete the utterance ‘he had to have social security remuneration because if not it would have been ...’ is significant in that Cospedal seems to avoid pronouncing the word ‘illegal’, which would have been the most natural lexical choice to terminate with. Meanwhile, throughout the excerpt, Cospedal's hand gestures are also very telling. From an opening, quasi-didactic accordion-like movement of her hands, she moves to the more supplicatory gesture of open upward facing palms, seemingly imploring the audience to believe her.

Cospedal's behaviour is not surprising when one considers that she was trying to explain the unexplainable, that is, why Bárcenas had been paid an extremely high salary for two years if the PP had indeed dismissed him because he was corrupt. The generalized suspicion among the general public at the time, and to this day, is that the former treasurer knew everything there was to know about financial corruption in the PP and that the two-year salary was hush money. Bárcenas had, after all, occupied his post for some 20 years, and as he was later to divulge, he had documents showing that, among other things, just about every prominent member of the PP (including the prime minister, Mariano Rajoy) had accepted what in essence were salary top-ups, paid tax free in brown envelopes at the end of each month.⁶

Cospedal's statement is a classic in evasiveness with the clear intention to conceal wrongdoing, and it is not surprising that the recording of her explanation, posted on YouTube, went viral for several months. The 40 seconds of awkward speech, accompanied by Cospedal's trance-like expression, is perhaps the ultimate in corrupt discourse – corrupted communication about corruption in the classic sense, that is, hush money paid to a fraudster who knows where all of the party's bodies are buried. In the world upside down of the PP, such corrupted discourse has come to be the norm for party politicians since 2011, when the current wave of corruption scandals first began to be making their way through the judicial system. And in the world doubly upside down of Spanish politics, in national elections held in December 2015 and June 2016 (the latter being the re-run of the December 2015 elections due to a hung parliament), the PP was, by some distance, the most voted party in Spain. And this something worthy of further exploration.

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Appendices

Appendix1: Transcription conventions

Slash (/) shows the end of a chunk of talk, normally paced.

Pauses are timed to the nearest second and the number of seconds is put in brackets: (.5).

Question mark (?) indicates question intonation.

Square brackets [] are used for comments.

Italics indicate the adoption of a second-party voice as a rhetorical device.

Appendix 2: Texts in original Spanish

Text 1

Esta campaña nació en septiembre de 2011 en la calle: no se consiguió detener el tercer intento de desahucio de una familia, pero al cabo de tres días se la realojó en esa misma vivienda. Los motivos que sustentan la campaña son sencillos: nos roban las viviendas y nos condenan a seguir pagándolas. Nos dejan en la calle y sin alternativa habitacional. Los bancos, incluso los rescatados, siguen con su actitud antisocial desahuciendo y acumulando un gigantesco parque de viviendas vacías, vulnerando la función social de la vivienda. El Gobierno lo ampara: ni lo detiene ni ofrece soluciones como, por ejemplo, el alquiler social, paralización de los desahucios, dación en pago... La Obra Social de la PAH es una campaña de ocupaciones y de recuperación del derecho a la vivienda que responde a un estado generalizado de emergencia habitacional generado de forma artificial y deliberada por los bancos y el gobierno. Frente a ello, se propone la recuperación de viviendas vacías de bancos para los desahuciados y la principal reclamación es el alquiler social para las familias, en función de su renta. La Obra Social entronca de forma natural con la trayectoria de la PAH: defensa de la población cuando se le amputan sus derechos, desobediencia para recuperarlos y así forzar soluciones.

Text 2

... los acosos/la violencia física y verbal/los ataques a las personas/a sus viviendas/a sus familias (3) eso no refleja más que un espíritu totalitario y sectario/ y eso es lo más contrario que hay a la democracia/ [applause] ... tenemos en el recuerdo/y se ha ilustrado mucho afortunadamente/ como en los años 30 se iba a señalar a las casas de ciertas personas/por su pertenencia a ciertos grupos políticos/ étnicos/ culturales/ o

religiosos/y decían/*están ahí*/ y por tanto *tenéis que ir a atacar*/pero qué es esto de tratar de violentar el voto? (1) esto es nazismo puro (1.5) ya sé que esto me lo van a criticar (1.5) [smiling] pero esto es nazismo puro/

Text 3

La sociedad española, sus legítimos representantes políticos y, por supuesto, la Justicia y las Fuerzas de Seguridad del Estado tienen que reaccionar y plantar cara a la desfachatez, a la chulería y a la impunidad con que unos émulos de los peores totalitarismos de la Historia han decidido acosar, insultar y amedrentar a los políticos del Partido Popular, que han sido elegidos por sus conciudadanos. Nadie, con un mínimo de sentido democrático, puede ni debe mostrar la menor complacencia ante el espectáculo, que se está convirtiendo en habitual, de unos energúmenos que, con total impunidad, irrumpen en la intimidad familiar o doméstica de algunos políticos del Partido Popular. Estos violentos acosadores se creen el paradigma de los buenos sentimientos pero sólo son simples epígonos de las tácticas de los peores totalitarismos del siglo pasado: el acoso con que las juventudes hitlerianas o las patrullas castristas en Cuba trataban y tratan de amedrentar a los que no se someten a sus designios. Y también son imitadores del matonismo de los seguidores de ETA en el País Vasco, ese matonismo que no ha dejado vivir en libertad a los ciudadanos de esa parte de España.

Text 4

Probar el sabor de la propia medicina te hace dar cuenta hasta qué punto lo que estabas haciendo tú no era precisamente algo susceptible de ser considerado como libertad de expresión. Hasta no hace mucho tiempo esos hechos calificados como *escraches* los padecíamos otras personas fundamentalmente y en su mayor proporción sin ningún género de dudas cargos públicos del Partido Popular. Y quienes los protagonizaban decían que era libertad de expresión. Lo que no podemos aceptar es que cuando tú los haces lo son y que cuando tú los padeces son conductas odiosas o delictivas.

Text 5

la compensación negociada/fue una indemnización en diferido (.5) y como fue una indemnización en difer/en diferido (.5) en forma/efectivamente/de simulación/simulación/o lo que hubiera sido en diferido/en partes de una/de lo que antes era una retribución/tenía que tener la retención a la seguridad social/es que si no hubiera sido (1.5) ahora se habla mucho de pagos que no tienen retenciones a la seguridad social/verdad?/ pues aquí se quiso/se quiso hacer como hay que hacerlo/es decir/con la retención a la seguridad social/

Endnotes

¹ This section and the one following it is a slightly revised version of sections on the same topics in Block (2017a).

² The discussion in this section and the next one draws closely on sections in Block (2016b, 2017a, 2017b)

³ If we compare 2006, the peak year of the property boom in Spain, with 2015, the first full year of economic recovery, we see that the number of home mortgages granted by banks was 1.342.171 and 244,827, respectively (*Idealista*, 2015).

⁴ This campaign culminated in the passing of a new public order law in March 2015, the *Ley Orgánica de Seguridad Ciudadana* (Organic Law of Public Security), known to many as the *Ley Mordaza* (the gag law), with the sole support of the PP. This law severely limits the right to freedom of speech in Spain, affecting not only activities such as *escraches*, but also more traditional forms of protest.

⁵ The analysis in this section follows very closely that found in Block (2017a, 2017b).

⁶ The documents, *los papeles de Bárcenas* (the Bárcenas papers), have been much commented on in the media since they first appeared in 2013. However, they have not been accepted in the courts as admissible, hard evidence, which has meant that none of the individuals appearing on the illegal payroll (a veritable Who's Who in the PP) have been prosecuted on the grounds that they accepted illegal payments.