

Dorling, D. (2020) *Afterward*, E. Gómez-Jiménez and M. Toolan, *The Discursive Construction of Economic Inequality: CADS Approaches in the British Media*, London: Bloomsbury, pp.183-191, 9781350111288.

Afterword

Danny Dorling

As Eva Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan explain in the Introduction to this book, high economic inequality has, in the past, been associated with high inflation, as was the case in Germany in the 1930s, and/or with much faster than average growing debt, as has been the case in the United States until very recently. Income inequalities, and the extent to which they are high, can be measured in many ways, but the Gini coefficient is the most widely used one and hence I will use that below. It makes little difference as to which measure is used.

As I write, in late 2019, the OECD reports that the most unequal of its larger member states include both Chile and Mexico, but inequalities have fallen greatly in those two countries in recent years as the grip of the United States on their ideology slowly recedes. However, they have not fallen fast enough in Chile where the president (Sebastián Piñera) is a billionaire and widespread protests against inequality broke out in October of that year. The next most unequal is Turkey. Its income inequality Gini coefficient is 0.40 and it is ruled by President Erdoğan. Following Turkey is the United States with a Gini of 0.39, ruled by President Trump who occasionally threatens Turkey. Next most unequal of all the dozen large OECD states is the UK, where the latest Gini reported in 2019 was 0.36 at the time when Prime Minister Johnson was in power. All three states are now more unequal than Israel, where Netanyahu is Prime Minister and the Gini stands at 0.34 and Russia with a Gini of 0.33 where the president has been Putin for some time. Inequality and despots tend to go together; but which comes first – the inequality, the man with the policies promoting inequality or the background of inequality that strongly encourages many voters to turn (in their frustration) to a reactionary strongman – is hard to determine.

By contrast, the most equitable of OECD countries are listed below with the Slovak Republic and Chile at the extreme points (the former being twice as equitable as the latter). I have not added the names of presidents and prime ministers to the list below because who they are is relatively unimportant in more equitable countries and they are often not household names because of that. It is well worth researchers remembering that not everywhere in the rich world is like Chile, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel or Russia. In fact, they are the outliers. If you are reading this book you probably live in one of the two states that ironically has 'United' at the start of its name. It is much more common to live somewhere more equitable. Furthermore, the majority of poorer countries in the world are currently experiencing a fall in income inequalities within them (if not between them). Poor countries tend to be more unequal; but they also tend to be seeing historical inequalities falling more

often than not in recent years. People rarely know this, or celebrate it, because if they did then the pressure to continue the trend would wane and inequalities would quickly be increased again through the actions of the rich and greedy. It is possible to gain greater equality. It is possible to preserve greater equality. But to do so you need to know what happens when you don't do that and how the greedy take back control. This book shows how the UK and its media have been an object lesson in the greedy – for now at least – taking back control.

High inequality is associated with a greater rate of crime, especially the most violent crimes of murder and rape. Furthermore, almost all indicators of social progress stall when economic inequalities rise, health improvements end, educational outcomes among children begin to falter and more people find themselves homeless or very precariously or expensively housed. Given all this you might have assumed that inequality would be a gift to the press as it would enable journalists both to talk about things they talk about most often, but in more depth, and to construct a wider narrative between the stories of woe that the media so often concentrate on. However, as Eva Gómez-Jiménez and Michael Toolan in the introduction of this book explain by brilliantly summarizing Michael Sandel: 'we have passed from having a market economy, to being a market economy' (Sandel, 2012) and that has altered the nature of the game that is being played and what the media then does.

When you live in a market economy you live in a world where the normal human relationships of reciprocity have been eroded away. The term 'market economy' is utterly misleading. It is neither about a market nor about an economy. A market is a place where people come together to trade. A market has a boundary around it and rules within it (which do not apply outside of the market). You might, in the past, have travelled to the market town. When you arrived you would then go to the market. At that market you might sell what you were carrying with you and then buy what you wanted. When you left the market, you left that space of exchange that was often with strangers and went back to the normal world of social interactions based on mutual respect, feudal order, clerical oversight or whatever, but you were no longer in the market.

Table A.1 The Most Equitable OECD Countries in the World as Reported in 2019

Most Equal OECD State	Gini Coefficient Reported 2019
Sweden	0.282
Belgium	0.266
Finland	0.266
Norway	0.262
Denmark	0.261
Iceland	0.255
Czech Republic	0.253
Slovenia	0.244
Slovak Republic	0.241

Source: <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm> (accessed 8 October 2019).

The market was a place you had to go to, often the place where it was decreed by law that the market should be. There was nothing especially moral about such markets. For centuries they included slave markets. But there was a reason why they were bounded and controlled. People knew that interactions within the market tended to devalue people and life. This was one reason why markets were bounded, so that they could be controlled. It was not simply that the market was a geographically convenient place to meet. It was that the market had to be controlled, and that control included the levying of taxes.

The 'being a market economy' is not about economics but about becoming a particular type of society where everything is for sale, all the time, everywhere. Hopes, dreams and aspirations can be bought and sold. A university degree in a market economy is something you are sold with the promise that it will fulfil a dream. It is sold on false pretences. You are told, often subliminally through images of happy smiling students on university webpages, that securing it will make you happy, and, later, successful and rich.

When that does not occur and you complain, they send you to the counselling service and so the university can look as if it is caring (and defend itself against a future lawsuit), but the message you are really given is 'more fool you', you are just one individual example of market failure, but your dashed dreams are part of the creative destruction of the market economy ideology – the fire of brutal competition out of which the winner (who rightfully takes all) always emerges like a phoenix.

Being a market economy means being unequal and driving up inequalities. There are always a few spectacular winners; there must be when inequality is very high. A few people have to secure a great proportion of all the resources available at a place and time to properly become a market economy (rather than being a society with available but well controlled and limited markets).

The market economy society runs to a particular mantra. He who wins most deserved to win most. Those who lost out did not try hard enough or were unlucky. And who wishes to be unlucky? If men so often do so much better than women, well that is just what the market decreed. Nothing is out of bounds because that would be interference with the market. The market is a god, a god that is omnipresent and rewards most highly the true believers. So, believe in the market or perish.

The vast majority of people who win most when the market is god are men. But it is women who are often presented as winners. In the introduction to this book several celebrity women, Beyoncé and the Kardashians (Khloé, Kim and Kourtney) are singled out. We only know them and their stories because of media outlets holding them up high. A couple of generations ago Beyoncé would have been a singer, today she is a phenomena and tomorrow she will be just a shadow of her celebrity memory. Kourtney was born in 1979, Kim in 1980, Beyoncé was born in 1981 and Khloé in 1984. They all became famous in their twenties when they were most saleable. They are all products. The newspaper and cable TV channels they appear on are products. The journalist is a product that can be bought and sold, hired and fired. Everything has a price. Every product has its time, and always there is a new product, a new trend, an emerging market – all the time, day and night – this has occurred to every society that has become a market. Eventually the money lenders set up stall in what used to be temples.

We are easily attracted to faiths. Being a market economy is a kind of faith. It has its own peculiar sets of rewards and punishments. As Jane Mulderrig explains in Chapter 6 of this book, being in the market economy means that a rise in childhood obesity is presented as an increase in the failings of those who have not tried hard enough (the working class). The mantra is repeated again and again that if (if only) they had tried harder they would not be working class. It is the fecklessness of these failures (people) that has caused them to be such bad parents that their children grow so fat. As the few winners rises up and up with their perfect smiles and beautiful bodies, beneath them is a sea of consumers and their fat children. That is what you are encouraged to think and say when you become a market.

When you live in a society that has become a market then none of the rise in childhood obesity is the responsibility of the food and drink industry. To curtail that industry would be heretically to intervene in the market. The market faithful stay thin, the market faithful write the news stories, the market faithful sit on the sofas on the breakfast TV programmes, having quietly vomited up their croissant in the toilet minutes earlier to ensure they fit well into the different size eight dress or fitted suit and appropriate tie each morning. The faithful write the script and hire and fire those who get to write the news. Those who are presented as being most faithful of all, like those at the top of the hierarchy of some organized religions, the most powerful of all, may not in fact be particularly 'faithful', at least in private, knowing that it is a con, an exploiting of others' credulousness. However, these people are painted the most successful just because they own entire newspapers, TV companies, huge new corporations or even entire industries, and they spend their profits promoting the faith and funding far-right think tanks to spread it even further.

And the market faithful know how to party.¹ Work hard and play hard is part of the faith. Those who call for greater equality are, above all else, no fun. The adherents of the UK being a market economy are true believers, as Richard Thomas shows in Chapter 8 of this book. By 2014 – five years after the seminal and aptly named text *The Spirit Level* was published explaining so clearly just how damaging inequality is – both the BBC and the ITV were defending the UK as a free market (otherwise called the neoliberal approach), whereas they rarely mentioned inequality. The UK is the most economically unequal state in Europe. It is the bridgehead from the United States for spreading the market economy faith. A safe place for those who resolutely believe that they have become rich because the market (god) meant them to become rich, and seeing things another way would be heresy. And through their actions they have influenced and purchased everything else, including entire political parties.

As Nuria Lorenzo-Dus and Sadiq Altamimi Almagd make clear in the first chapter of this book analysis of one million words of Britain's political leaders at their annual party conferences over the course of the last century reveals that both of Britain's two major political parties presented the poor as a group to be acted on, to be 'helped', encouraged to try harder or occasionally given a leg up. At no point did any Labour leader suggest that those suffering poverty should act to change their own circumstances. They never, in effect, said – if you are poor, if you identify with the poor because you are poor, then vote for me. The reason they do not say this is because in a very unequal society that might put off the average and modest majority who might

not want to be associated with the poor. Between 2001 and 2014 both Conservative and Labour Party leaders, essentially interchangeable at that time in their approach to the economy, 'moved towards a more aggressive stance towards PSE [Poverty and Social Exclusion], increasing their use of combat metaphors'. It will be interesting to see how the speeches since 2015 are deemed to have changed when they are analysed. It may not be by as much as you may think; but they will have changed because from 2015 onwards the Labour Party began to move towards becoming a socialist party again, and the Conservative Party began to move to the far-right. (It was allied in the European parliament with *Alternative für Deutschland* in 2014.)

There was a time when we were much more equal. From 1913 all the way through to 1939, income and wealth inequalities in the UK were falling. Joe Spencer-Bennett in Chapter 2 of this book explains how, during the Second World War, the Ministry of Information (Orwell's Ministry of Truth) thought it had found a way of using language to control the masses, and to an extent it had. However, that control had been most overtly exercised at home. When the men came back from war in mainland Europe and voted in 1945, what they did shocked the establishment. They were supposed to have voted Winston Church in as leader out of gratitude. Instead they awarded Labour a landslide victory. Labour, which had been running the country at home, as the home minsters of the national government, was prepared. By contrast the Conservatives had been running the war abroad while Labour politicians were learning how the machinery of government worked during the Second World War. Labour quickly nationalized most of what could quickly be nationalized, and despite only being in office for one term of government, managed to secure the continued reduction of income inequalities and change the behaviour of subsequent Conservative administrations that ruled from 1950 through to 1963. By then, the UK was almost unrecognizable as compared to its pre-war stuffiness and deference. When Lady Chatterley's lover was finally deemed not to be obscene in 1960s, the jury laughed at the prosecuting barrister's concern for what their wives and servants might think of the book. The prosecution was unable to make a substantial case against the novel and, at one point, prosecution counsel Mervyn Griffith-Jones shocked the jury by asking: 'Is it a book you would wish your wife or servants to read?' The jury had no servants, not all of them had wives, inequality had fallen. Only states with very high income inequality can have people being forced to be servants.

Economic *equality* continued to rise across the UK throughout the 1960s. Its high point was reached in 1976. By then, of all large European countries, only Sweden was more equitable than the UK. The UK was a market economy. It had markets and they were well bound and well regulated, and they did not extend into all walks of life. In the UK in 1976 the market had almost no place in health, a tiny (if damaging) role to play in education and was entirely absent from a third of all housing. So how was this lost? Isabelle van der Bom and Laura Paterson in Chapter 3 of this book explain how the beginnings of the surge in becoming a market economy, rather than having a market economy, began. They analysed the content of the *Times* Newspaper from the Second World War through to 2009 and showed (Table 3.1) that the welfare state had been most accepted and least commented upon in the *Times* in the 1960s and 1970s. The attack began in the 1970s but only gathered much pace in the 1980s. The critical word 'dependency' was not used in any *Times* article to refer to the welfare state until

1987, and then very frequently thereafter. Rupert Murdoch had purchased the *Times* in 1981. Rupert plays a slow game.

In Chapter 4 of this book Michael Toolan compares how the *Times* talked about child poverty when Britain was most equitable, in the 1970s, with how it later did in the early 2000s. He found that in the 1970s an analysis of articles on children and poverty was especially telling. Once the search words and almost identical ones (child and poor) were discarded, the most frequently returned words associated with stories on children and poverty in the 1970s were ‘allowances’, ‘families’, ‘benefit’, ‘supplementary’ and ‘income’. In the 2000s the most frequent words were ‘says’, ‘parents’, ‘families’, ‘people’ and ‘schools’ (Tables 4.1 and 4.2). Thus *allowance, benefit and supplementary income* had been replaced by *says, parents, people and schools*. Michael’s full analysis is far more detailed and subtle than this, but he concludes that by the start of the current century, the *Times* has changed its tune from talking about rights and allowances to claiming: for those impoverished parents who cannot afford a decent home and school for their children, ‘it is unfortunate but simply in the nature of harsh reality that their children must accept inferior housing and schooling. There is no reasonable and affordable alternative.’

So how did the neoliberal headbangers win? As Ilse Ras explains (in Chapter 5), by 2004, if not earlier, most journalists in Britain had learnt, no matter what story they were covering, that it was their job to allow corporations to get away with whatever it was they had to do to succeed. She was looking at two types of stories and how these had been covered between January 2004 and December 2014 by the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, the *Sun*, the *Times*, the *Financial Times*, *Mail on Sunday*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph*. This learning may have been subconscious, but it was certainly effective. As she says in her chapter, the ‘newspaper coverage only covers what is already pretty clear, and fails to dig into the structural factors that continue to allow these corporations to “get away” with exploiting people and market vulnerabilities, thereby allowing the already economically powerful to continue enriching themselves to the detriment and at the expense of those less economically powerful and less well-informed.’

What will it take to escape from being the market? In Chapter 9, and in concluding this book, Wolfgang Teubert argues that we are unlikely to escape the rule of the headbangers anytime soon. He shows that very similar arguments are used in Britain today to justify very wide social divisions as were used in South Africa under apartheid. These arguments imply that it is fine for the majority to have badly funded education and to be kept subdued, and the arguments have been used just as they were used under apartheid in South Africa. In 1964, on trial for sabotage and at risk of the death penalty, Nelson Mandela delivered his four-hour speech ending famously describing a democratic and free society as ‘an ideal for which I am prepared to die’. In that speech Mandela decided to quote some school spending statistics (now he is dead it is time Nelson was made the Saint of Statisticians):

According to figures quoted by the South African Institute of Race Relations in its 1963 journal, approximately forty per cent of African children in the age group between seven and fourteen do not attend school. For those who do attend school,

the standards are vastly different from those afforded to white children. In 1960-61 the per capita Government spending [someone coughs] on African students at State-aided schools was estimated at R12.46. In the same years, the per capita spending on white children in the Cape Province (which are the only figures available to me) was R144.57.²

The most privileged of white children in South Africa had almost twelve times as much spent on their education as black children each did in the 1960s. In Britain today the fees at Eton are £42,501 a year which along with ‘extras’ and the registration fee (but no music lessons) rises to about £45,000 a year, and far more if school trips arranged during the holidays are included. The amount has been rising in recent years. By contrast, state school funding in English schools was reduced by the government by 8 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2018 to £5,870 per child per year or £16 per child per day; as compared £123 per child per day at Eton or roughly eight times more. Britain in 2018 was not quite as bad as South Africa in the 1960s when it came to school funding inequalities. However, as Teubert says in the penultimate chapter of this book: ‘It suits the propertied classes if those less lucky are kept in the dark, first by substandard schools and then by the mainstream tabloids.’

A little later Teubert continues:

The working class today is characterized more as a culture than by a solidarity of interest directed against their oppressors. People rather want to move up class-wise, and they want to be accepted by those above them as respectable people. Hardly anyone still yearns for a change of the political system. While the gap between the rich and the poor is wider than ever, Marx’s ‘spectre of communism’ is haunting no one. How did that happen?

And concludes:

It is this discourse, exemplified by the *Telegraph* for the more conservative-minded, the *Times* for the managers, the *Guardian* as the official press organ for disgruntled social workers, teachers, and academics, the *Daily Mail* for the lower middle class, the *Mirror* for aspiring working class families, the *Sun* for the lower orders, that creates the acceptance of a system designed and continuously redesigned to further the interests of those at the top.

So, having read the above arguments about *The Discursive Construction of Economic Inequality* what do I conclude? Or could I say ‘what should we conclude’, if I were trying to take you and your opinion, imaginary reader, with me? I think we can see how it was done and how we were fooled, more and more clearly the more time that passes. But that does not mean we know what will happen next, or what to do.

What will most English *Telegraph* readers think when their home – the property in which most of their savings are sunk – continues to fall in value? What happens



Figure A.1 'Here's to the brave new world!' By Illingworth, Leslie Gilbert, published in the *Daily Mail*, 2 December 1942.

Source: Associated Newspapers Ltd/ British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent, www.cartoons.ac.uk See also: http://toynbeehall.brix.fatbeehive.com/data/files/william_beveridge_spreads.pdf

as the global economy continues to slow and the managers find it harder and harder to return the profit that their shareholders demand? And how does the jolt of Brexit make that any less of a 'uncomfortable but still behaving frog in increasingly hot water' experience? How does the disgruntled social worker, teacher and academic react when they can rent a room and work – can be a servant – but can never start a family. At what point do the lower middle classes who buy the *Daily Mail* realize they have been taken for a ride. Or – more likely – at what point does the *Daily Mail* begin to change its tune in order to keep its market? It did in 1942.

And what does the no-longer-quite-so-young journalist really think – the one in one hundred that is successful, and gets to play the left-wing patsy on late-night TV, on Sky TV or the BBC, when they discuss 'what the papers say'? At what point will she no longer sit there, taking the fee, without mentioning that both the host of the programme opposite her and the right-wing commenter sitting next to her 'for balance' are both rolling in it and would never dream of using state education for their children, state health care for their parents or state housing for themselves. At what point does she say: 'You lie well, but it is beginning to wear thin?' because eventually, and always, whenever economic inequality rises it eventually falls. It just does so differently each time.

Notes

- 1 For example, David Koch, who died in 2019 and who was one of the richest men in the world, spent a huge amount of money on the far-right financing market economy libertarians. He owned a mansion in Southampton, New York, 'palatial homes on Park Avenue in Manhattan, in Aspen, Colo., and in Palm Beach, Fla. He kept a yacht in the Mediterranean for summer getaways and rented it out for \$500,000 a week. His friends and acquaintances included Bill and Melinda Gates, Prince Charles and Winston Churchill's grandson Winston Spencer Churchill.' <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/23/us/david-koch-dead.html>
- 2 <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/i-am-prepared-to-die>

