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Discourse and Democracy: Critical Analysis of the Language of Government by Michael Farrelly, Oxon, Routledge, 2015, 138pp., £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-87235-5

Readers of this journal will be aware that in recent years critical discourse analysis (CDA) has emerged as one of a range of approaches that bring a focus on discursive practice to the critical investigation of politics and public policy (e.g., Fairclough, 2013; Fischer, 2003; 2007; Howarth, 2009). A distinctive feature of the CDA approach is its incorporation of a theory of discourse with a detailed framework for the analysis of spoken and written texts. Discourse is at its most potent as a mechanism of social reproduction when it is the most invisible and naturalised. CDA 'denaturalises it' and critically explores the contradictions, assumptions, values and vested interests that sustain the relations of power internalised in discourse – in short, how it is ideologically shaped.

Different traditions can be identified within CDA, comprising a range of theoretical and analytical models depending on the research foci (for an overview see Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Fairclough et al., 2011). In order to achieve its critical and emancipatory goals, CDA explicitly engages with other disciplines, bringing theoretical concepts from relevant fields into transdisciplinary dialogue with linguistic concepts to support a critical exploration of the research problem. *Discourse and Democracy* offers an excellent, book-length example of this approach which will be of particular interest to scholars seeking to operationalise detailed text analysis in critical policy research. It most closely follows Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 2005) although it also builds on it important ways. Firstly, it includes an extensive ethnography of the kind more typically associated with the Discourse Historical Approach to CDA (Wodak, 2009; Reisigl and Wodak, 2009). Secondly, it operationalises concepts from Cultural Political Economy (Jessop) and theories of democracy (Held, Ranciere), bringing them into dialogue with a social semiotic framework for analysing representation in discourse (Van Leeuwen). The result is an illuminating and thought-provoking exploration of the language and practices of democracy in contemporary Britain. The detailed empirical chapters examine material from other Anglophone contexts in order to explore how ideologically loaded discourses of democracy are distorting and undermining actual democratic processes in the liberal state.

The case for this study is well made: Farrelly seeks to problematize and explain what he argues is a widening gap between (political) discourses of democracy and the lived experience of democracy. His exploration is thoroughly grounded in a detailed and wide-ranging analysis of political speeches, policy texts, and a year-long case study of an initiative to 'reinvigorate democracy' at the level of local government in a UK city. The context for this work is one in which liberal governments increasingly frame their political interventions – both domestic and foreign – in terms of 'democracy' and 'democratic renewal'. Whether reshaping state-level governance arrangements (devolution, public-private partnerships, regionalisation) or calling for the (military) defence of 'our' democratic freedoms, a discourse of democracy is routinely invoked by political leaders. At the same time wealth inequalities, globally and within liberal democracies, are increasing and there is widespread disaffection with politics (Hay, 2007). This leads Farrelly to ask: is democracy really doing its job? Are current discourses of democracy adequate to the task of tackling inequalities of health, wealth and well-being? Do they provide a model for genuine democratic action?

A major theoretical contribution of this book is that it illuminates a central paradox in (Anglophone) liberal states: the discourse of democracy has become an anti-democratic political tool. Through the pervasive use of the language of 'democracy' to legitimate political decisions, democracy as a mode

of action is being undermined, taking the power to influence political decision-making out of the hands of the people. Farrelly conceptualises this as 'Democratism'; the ideological appropriation of democracy by political leaders in order to obfuscate contradictions and power inequalities in government practices. Drawing on policy documents (particularly from the New Labour government between 1997 and 2005), he demonstrates how democracy is oversimplified and routinely emptied of democratic content. A recurrent pattern throughout the material he examines is the emphasis on 'government as the location of democracy rather than government as the object of democracy' (p.63).

The first chapter traces the global reach of this 'championing' of democracy in political discourse. In speeches by Bush, Howard, Reagan, Thatcher, and Blair we see how democracy is conflated with the practices of government. It is textured in such a way as to suggest causal links with 'prosperity and wealth', while ignoring the reality of increasingly uneven wealth distribution in democratic states. Democratism is also used by Thatcher to vilify trade unions (a group whose core function is to exert democratic influence) as being a threat to democracy itself. As Farrelly reminds us, this oversimplified discourse of democracy reduces it to a quality which governments have once they win elections, thereby shielding from criticism all subsequent decisions they make in the name of 'democracy'. The second chapter examines theoretical accounts of democracy (in particular Held, Ranciere, and Touraine). This illuminating chapter provides an exemplary model of how transdisciplinarity operates in CDA. Drawing on the concept of political 'imaginaries' (Jessop, 2002), Farrelly demonstrates how prevailing discourses of democracy develop out of social practices and are necessarily partial, biased, and contain overgeneralisations. This invests them with ideological potential, reflecting (and potentially reproducing) existing power relations. One such distorting simplification which is a particular focus in this book is the conflation of democracy with representative government. This chapter compares five dominant models of democracy (ranging from Marxist to neoliberal) and extrapolates their key features as a framework against which to critically assess the empirical material in subsequent chapters. These features are mapped onto three sociosemantic concepts (social actors, social actions, circumstances) which drive the subsequent discourse analysis. The resulting, very useful, typology is summarised in Table 3.3. Chapter three presents an outline of the CDA analytical approach, including the model used to analyse the textual representation of actors and actions. The latter is summarised in Table 3.2, including brief glosses of the rather technical analytical concepts involved. Although Farrelly does an excellent job of presenting analysis accessible to the non-specialist, the reader will find this table a useful point of cross-reference when reading the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the core empirical substance. Both chapters draw on Ranciere's view of democracy as 1) a relationship among actors in a collective, 2) a process (e.g. exerting influence on decision-making), 3) necessarily separate from ('below and beyond') government. This permits critical appraisal in terms of the *status, purpose,* and *locus* of democracy as construed in the discourses examined. Chapter 4 examines Labour party election manifestoes as well as government policy texts, including the policy consultation White Paper through which the New Labour government introduced new mechanisms of 'participatory' governance at the level of local government. Farrelly's analysis demonstrates how the texts examined in this chapter routinely conflate practices of government (and of political parties) with practices of democracy. The texts contain a surface language of democracy ('participation', 'direct accountability') but this is contradicted by a set of actions and social roles which exclude the non-governing from decision-

making processes and cast them in passive roles like 'being consulted' on council decisions (rather than having a say in deciding what should be council priorities). Chapter 5 presents findings from a year-long ethnography of Area Forums, a new genre of local government designed to ensure greater 'public participation'. The analysis draws on observations of Area Forum meetings, related policy documents, and interviews with (governing and non-governing) participants. The conclusion is that despite their putative function as a vehicle for 'renewing democracy', Area Forums are not conducive to genuine democratic action. The organisation of meetings, layout of the rooms, the strict adherence to protocol which constrains the length and type of allowable contributions from the 'audience', all work to passivate, fragment, and marginalise members of the public. The final chapter brings together strands from the preceding analysis in order to remind us of this central paradox in liberal states, wherein genuine democracy is being eroded through its 'overuse' and simplification in political discourse.

In a context of democratic turmoil in Western states, this book offers a timely and thought-provoking contribution to debates about democracy. Through the concept of Democratism, Farrelly shows us how the very language of democracy acts as an impediment to democractic action. In line with neoliberal goals, these problematic discourses of democracy sideline inequality as an issue that should be tackled by government, allowing governments to claim that we are all politically equal because we 'live in a democracy' and that social and economic inequality is a matter of individual (ir)responsibility. This book offers a salutary reminder that the currently prevailing model of democracy is actually misleading and dangerous. As Farrelly concludes, what is needed is a more adequate (and accurate) discourse of democracy, which might enable us to recognise inequality as evidence that (genuine) democracy has not been successfully brought to bear.

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