From the "War on Poverty" to the "War on the Poor": Knowledge, Power, and Subject Positions in Anti-Poverty Discourses

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Abstract: Anti-poverty discourses are interrogated through a case study of articles on the websites of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and *The Toronto Star* covering a tenant activism campaign. An autonomous media article by OCAP on direct actions to "stop the war on the poor" is compared with an article in *The Toronto Star* depicting tenant-activists lobbying government in the "war on poverty." Subjectivity and power relations are analyzed by deconstructing binaries, including deserving/undeserving poor, pride/shame, and dignity/stigmatization. I find productive interdiscursive relations emerging, whereby the two discourses are mutually implicated in creating possibilities for social transformation. I also argue that critical discourse analysis needs to become a more participatory engaged methodology, taking direction from and providing accountability to its research subjects.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis; Discursive formations; New media; Alternative media; Poverty; Anti-poverty activism; Self-representation; Subjectivity

Résumé : Dans cet article, j'interroge les discours contre la pauvreté au moyen d'une étude de cas portant sur des articles relatant une campagne effectuée par des locataires militants. Ces articles proviennent des sites de l'Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) et du *Toronto Star*. En effet, je compare un article de média autonome provenant de l'OCAP sur les actions directes pour « arrêter la guerre contre les pauvres » à un article du *Toronto Star* décrivant des locataires militants faisant pression sur le gouvernement dans la « guerre contre la pauvreté. » J'analyse la subjectivité et les rapports de pouvoir décrits dans ces articles en déconstruisant des oppositions binaires telles que : pauvreté méritante/peu méritante, fierté/honte et dignité/stigmatisation. Je constate l'émergence de rapports interdiscursifs productifs où les deux discours sont réciproquement impliqués dans la création d'un contexte qui faciliterait la transformation sociale. Je soutiens d'autre part que l'analyse critique du discours a besoin de devenir une

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méthodologie plus participative et engagée, s'inspirant de ses sujets de recherche tout en étant plus responsable à leur égard.

Mots clés : Analyse de discours critique; Formation discursive; Nouveaux médias; Médias alternatifs; Pauvreté; Militantisme contre la pauvreté; Représentation de soi; Subjectivité

I grew up poor. Particularly when I was very young, it seemed there was never enough food, no proper winter boots, only second-hand or home-made clothes. Money was an issue. You did not want to break or lose anything—there would not be a new one. We had mostly working-class relatives who lived in trailer parks or tiny rented clapboard houses in rural areas. One grandfather had been an unemployed immigrant hobo, freight-hopping West during the Depression, losing track of my pregnant grandmother, only to be reunited several years later. My other grandmother was a single mother in the 1940s, and she almost lost her four children, who were put into orphanages and foster care until she could finally, working three jobs, afford a small apartment for them. The husband she left was an alcoholic drifter who died homeless and penniless. My mother was also, after the divorce, "between homes" for a time in her fifties. I myself have been a nomadic traveller, couch-surfing or squatting for periods from a few weeks to over a year. Poverty is in my bones.

The lessons of poverty are that money is not everything, people come first, and sharing can cover you. Free things carved a path into my life. Hanging out with punks and anarchists, poverty is an intentional way of life, a political anti-consumerist asceticism. If everyone you know lives in poverty, you have a community; it is no big deal. Poverty is complex in gendered and racialized lives and as it is experienced by indigenous people, people with disabilities, children, homeless people, squeegee kids, alcoholics, sex workers, people with mental health issues, drug addicts, et cetera. People living in poverty become criminalized, objects of targeted policing, automatic suspects. There is a sense of injustice, but a life of poverty has its good moments too, like any life. Travelling by freight train takes you places legal travel cannot.

The complex daily experience of poverty is difficult to convey to people who have not had similar experiences. As Michael Katz notes, "We know surprisingly little about how poor people throughout American history actually survived from day to day" (Katz, 1989, p. 160). But who is this "we"? So-called "poor people" do know. There is an extensive discourse on poverty produced by "poor people" that is hard to capture in media and policy debates, where "poverty discourse highlights the social construction of difference" (Katz, 1989, p. 5). People are labelled poor, underclass, vulnerable, or undeserving, and these categories are naturalized, as the discourse suggests that "the poor" are somehow different from "the rest of us," who are not poor. But there is something oddly immaterial about this categorization. In the troubling "us/them" construction, it takes people living in poverty neither as its audience, nor as its speaking subject, the presumed non-poor "us." Academics and journalists thus often engage the discursive formation of the "war on poverty," contributing to the development of government policy without studying the lives and discourses of "poor people" themselves, thus

(re)enacting the material and symbolic oppression experienced by people living in poverty.

Not all people engage with poverty this way. Anti-poverty activists with lived experiences of poverty engage directly with poor people's lives and discourses. We conceive of ourselves, represent ourselves, envision our futures, and build our lives through experiential knowledge and active values that include dignity, respect, mutual aid, and community. As subjects of poverty, we develop solutions to our lived problems, participate in actions, and engage in discourses, all of which creates social change. We do not see ourselves as powerless. We use the slogan "Stop the war on the poor," pointing to shortcomings in policy and legislation that make the lives of people living in poverty increasingly difficult.

It would thus seem that there are two different discursive formations on poverty in Canada that include two distinct social locations of production, notions of civic action, sets of actors, conceptions of power, and constructions of subjectivity. This article examines this discursive disjunction. I propose that although there are clearly ways in which the "war on poverty" constructs the regime of truth while failing to account fully for the experiences of people living in poverty, self-representations by people living in poverty challenge this, leading to social transformation. This is not because the two discourses are separate, I argue, but because there are many productive spaces of collision or overlap—manifested as interdiscursive relations—that create fertile possibilities for social change.

Social change is also a project of discourse analysis, a methodology that "offers a means of exposing or deconstructing the social practices that constitute 'social structure' and what we might call the conventional meaning structures of social life" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006, p. 5). Critical discourse analysis, as a cross-disciplinary approach, most often "adopts a 'critical' perspective on language in use" (p. 27), examining texts from a perspective of resistance. For Teun A. van Dijk (2001), "Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 352). CDA makes explicit its goal of social transformation through multiple subjectivities, taking a subjective approach and investigating subject positions with specific geo-historical and sociocultural locations. In studying poverty, it seems crucial to facilitate the inclusion of grass-roots organizations such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (and not just the texts they produce) in the process of research from start to finish, ensuring that we are asking relevant questions, drawing accurate and politically useful conclusions, and using discourses that emerge from and remain accountable to them. To this end, aspects of participatory action research can be incorporated into an engaged discourse analysis so that we are researching anti-poverty texts *with* (not just *by*) anti-poverty activists living in poverty and other social-movement actors.

The writer or author is often not considered relevant to textual analysis in poststructuralist theory, from which discourse analysis has evolved. Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, each in their own way, pronounced the author "dead" and suggested that we should instead interpret only the text, as there is no outside-text. Certainly we do not want to resurrect the fallacy of authorial intent; however, the

habitus of writers (Bourdieu, 1993) does serve to legitimate their work. The text is connected with the subject who produced it and whose subjectivity is thus being (re)produced by it.

This applies equally to the researcher's text, as the subject position of the researcher will impact their discourse analysis. A researcher with similar subjective experiences to the researched subject will have an analytical, experiential, and discursive perspective situated in this subjectivity. This is where my experience living in poverty and being an anti-poverty activist is important, as it gives me an interpretive framework that comes from within the discourse studied. At the same time, I am not claiming to speak for all experiences of poverty, and I must acknowledge that my interpretive framework, like my experience of poverty, is quite specific.

Case study: Two online articles on anti-poverty tenant rights activism

For the purposes of this preliminary analysis, my case study has been narrowed down to two carefully selected, closely related media texts. The first is an online article from *The Toronto Star*'s "War on Poverty" series; the second is an article from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) website. OCAP is a group in which I have been active. The articles cover anti-poverty tenant-activists organizing for improved maintenance in Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) apartments and townhouses.

TCHC was created in 2002 through an amalgamation of the Toronto Housing Company and the Metro Toronto Housing Corporation. According to their website,

> Toronto Community Housing is the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America. It is home to about 164,000 low and moderate-income tenants in 58,500 households, including seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants to Canada and people with special needs. (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2008)

In many cases TCHC has refused to maintain their properties, citing lack of funds. Were this any other landlord, the tenants could take TCHC to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, now known as the Landlord and Tenant Board, but it is run by the same government that runs the Housing Corporation.

OCAP has launched a campaign against TCHC. Most OCAP members have a direct experience of living in poverty, and some live in Toronto Community Housing (TCH). They organize around a range of poverty issues, including homelessness, affordable housing, shelters, food security, social assistance, disability, Ontario Works (welfare payments and job training), minimum wage, immigration, indigenous land rights, women's issues, et cetera. Consistent with the institutional advocacy it does, OCAP has a sophisticated intersectional analysis of poverty, understanding ways in which poverty is experienced differently by a broad range of people. A multiplicity of experiences of oppression is included within OCAP's diverse membership, which is reflected in their organizing strategies. Daily tasks at the OCAP office might include talking to street people, doing legal research and support work, engaging in immigration case work, helping people navigate the institutional bureaucracy around social assistance programs, find-

ing ways of getting people assistance cheques or paycheques that they have been wrongfully denied, ensuring that homeless people are not jailed for non-payment of panhandling or squeegeeing fines by contesting them in court, organizing memorials for homeless people who have died in the streets, organizing tenants' rights groups, and more.

As part of its organizing work, OCAP produces a fair amount of textual material, including a newspaper called *They Call It Struggle for a Reason*, a website (www.ocap.ca), pamphlets for various organizing campaigns, and posters produced by Punchclock, a "trans-disciplinary democratic organization of cultural workers, political activists and trades people" (Punchclock, n.d.). It is one particular article from the OCAP website that we will be focusing on.

The Toronto Star also produces a variety of anti-poverty textual materials, particularly in their "War on Poverty" series. Its website complements its print media reporting with video, photographs, and personal profiles. The article to be analyzed was co-written by two journalists who are frequent feature writers for the "War on Poverty" series. It includes interviews with people living in poverty and with government employees, which is typical of the series coverage.

The *Star* and OCAP articles cover the same issue, TCHC tenant activism, and came out within a few months of each other. Some differences should be noted. The OCAP article is unsigned, and thus OCAP collectively can be understood as the author, whereas the *Star* article has a byline. The OCAP article, 606 words long, appeared exclusively on the website, whereas the *Star* article, 1,820 words in length, appeared on the *Star* website and also appeared in print. The *Star* article includes interviews, whereas the subjects in the OCAP article are the collective authors themselves, so no quotations appear, and the subjects remain unnamed for confidentiality purposes. Geo-spatial references to TCHC communities in Toronto are given in each article, including Gordonridge, Swansea Mews, and Moss Park (OCAP) and Bleecker Street, Flemingdon Park, and St. Jamestown (*The Toronto Star*). The *Star* article uses a third-person description-based narrative style, alternating between tenants, government officials, and statistics and concluding with the statement of a tenant-activist; OCAP uses a first-person-plural point of view to present three short narratives of actions collectively undertaken with tenants, concluding each mini-narrative with the action's result and concluding the article with a look toward the future not unlike that of the *Star* article. Nonetheless, it is a broad difference that makes the articles useful in this discourse analysis—each serves as a representative text from a different discursive formation on poverty.

The war on poverty and the war on the poor

The Toronto Star reproduces the mainstream media and policy discourse on poverty in Canada, using the phrase the "war on poverty," whereas OCAP and other anti-poverty activists use the phrase the "war on the poor." Although both discursive formations invoke the notion of war,[1] the target of that war is different. The "war on poverty" suggests that the government is opposing poverty, whereas the "war on the poor" suggests that governments are opposing people living in poverty. These are clearly two different discursive formations, the former of which has become what Foucault (1978) calls the "regime of truth."

The term "war on poverty" contains no person within it, thus the discourse eliminates people living in poverty from its discursive formulation, whereas the "war on the poor" includes "the poor" or people living in poverty. Rather than "the poor," I will try to use the term "people living in poverty," to indicate that poverty is a material rather than an ontological condition, a condition that may vary throughout one's lifetime. Nonetheless, sometimes people living in poverty refer to themselves as "the poor," as in the activist slogan "Stop the war on the poor." I also noted earlier that "I grew up poor" and that "poverty is in my bones." There is something about being or feeling "poor," the affective experience of poverty, that may play a role in identity formation. The use of "the poor" in the "war on the poor" discourse includes the identities and subjectivities of people living in poverty.

The disjuncture between discourses of "poverty" and "the poor" has had a long history. From the 1960s through to the current day, "poverty discourse has maintained only a tenuous relation to the origins and demographics of poverty" (Katz, 1989, p. 5). The material, ontological, epistemological, or demographic conditions of individuals or groups of people living in poverty are often, quite oddly, not the subject of poverty discourse. Rather, poverty discourse "emerges as much from a mix of ideology and politics as from the structure of the problem itself" (p. 5). Dominant ideologies and political agendas preclude complex analyses of poverty, which might include ideological concepts such as capitalism, rugged individualism, or the "American Dream" (also relevant in Canada) or political concepts such as axes of oppression that intersect with poverty, including race, gender, sexuality, mental health, age, immigration status, or disability. Nonetheless, political and ideological critiques are an integral part of the discursive formation of anti-poverty activists because they are formative to our experiences.

In Canada the "war on poverty" discourse, borrowed from Lyndon Johnson's administration in the U.S., came from a round of government policies developed after the Depression to establish the Canadian welfare state, including social housing, family allowance, old-age security, universal health care, and unemployment insurance. Shereen Ismael's book *Child Poverty and the Canadian Welfare State* (2006) traces this trajectory.

Neo-liberal policies of the 1990s have seen many of these programs eroded. In 1995, under the Mike Harris Conservatives, Ontario welfare rates were cut by 21.6%, and in 2003 the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2003) found that in the eight intervening years, "the cost of living has increased by 18.9%. In total, the purchasing power of the poorest families in the province will have been reduced by 34%" (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2003, p. 4). Unemployment Insurance was replaced by Employment Insurance, which focuses, according to Ismael, on the development of "workforce attachment" (Ismael, 2006, p. 44), providing not a safety net but a "trampoline," which aims to bounce people expediently back into the work force, regardless of income level or employment relevance. Examples of this include BC's $6/hour "training wage" or First Job/Entry-Level Wage, passed in 2001 by the provincial Liberals to claw back the earlier NDP increase in minimum wage, as well as legislation passed in 2002 limiting a person to collecting welfare for two out of every five years

(Reitsma-Street & Wallace, 2004). These changes, implemented in different ways across Canada, have increased rather than reduced poverty. That did not prevent Stéphane Dion from declaring a new "war on poverty" during the 2007 federal election campaign (Hanes, 2007).

The "war on poverty" is now limited to providing for "the deserving poor—those unable to compete in the labour market" (Ismael, 2006, p. 44). The discourse of the "deserving poor" automatically constructs its binary opposite, the "undeserving poor," and indeed, that is the title of Michael Katz's book about the American context, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (1989). Binaries are mutually constitutive and disciplining, as Foucault (1977) argues; they are used to categorize people and then apply a range of coercive economic, chrono-regulatory, or juridico-legislative technologies. In the case of poverty, historically people have been jailed, put into poorhouses, and the like as disciplinary anti-poverty measures, and we continue to classify and prioritize those to whom our collective generosity, the social welfare net, should be extended. This also determines those to whom it should *not* be extended. Thus the notion of the "deserving poor" can only be understood in terms of its "other"—the "undeserving poor." This binary splits people living in poverty into two groups and only addresses the poverty of one of them, the "deserving poor."

In terms of policy, in BC for example, this is delineated explicitly by categorizing people into two groups, people on "Temporary Assistance" (the undeserving poor) and people on "Continuous Assistance" (the deserving poor), the latter of which includes "Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers to Employment as well as Children in the Home of a Relative" (Government of British Columbia, 2008). This quite officially delimits the constituency of "the war on poverty." In Ontario in 1998, then Toronto mayor Mel Lastman made a widely repeated statement that squeegee kids are "all thugs" and that they are too ugly to get jobs because of their facial piercings and tattoos. It was exactly this anti-poor (rather than anti-poverty) rhetoric that led to the passing of the Ontario *Safe Streets Act*, which made squeegeeing and panhandling illegal. In a controversial ruling, this law was found to contravene Canadian human rights law but was nonetheless upheld. As OCAP argues, "[A]lthough the judge did find the law to be in disagreement with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms he felt that it was more of a safety issue and allowed the law to stay on the books. In other words, the safety and rights of poor people are not worth as much as those of the rich" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2008, p. 3). These public acts, which generate community and income for people living in poverty, have been criminalized, rendering squeegee kids and panhandlers not just undeserving, but also subject to arrest and incarceration.

Other groups who are considered the undeserving poor, according to Katz, include "unemployed men asking for relief" (1989, p. 191) and single mothers (unless they have been widowed "through no fault of their own" (p. 191). The discourse of who is at fault is noteworthy—to be considered deserving, "the poor" should be faultless, and mothers should not be single by choice, but at the mercy of circumstance. Katz also argues that homeless people are "the new deserving poor" (p. 192), though this is not uncontroversial. Homeless people with criminal

records, people with mental health issues, people who squeegee or panhandle, et cetera, are not considered "socially acceptable" and are therefore also undeserving. Others excluded from the "deserving poor" include racialized groups such as immigrants, refugees, people without legal immigrant status, and indigenous people, who are targets of structural racism, as well as sex workers and so-called welfare moms—groups that are targets of structural sexism. The "deserving poor" is thus a category composed almost solely of "well-behaved" homeless people, innocent children, and "helpless" people with disabilities.

For people with disabilities, underlying the discourse that they deserve "continuous assistance" is the stereotype that people with disabilities are unable to work and incapable of self-care, an essentializing assumption, as many disability advocates have argued, which subjects them to social control. The category "people with disabilities," however, includes people with impaired hearing or vision, people who use wheelchairs, people with mobility limitations, people with mental disabilities, et cetera. Moreover, disability advocates challenge the standards applied to people with disabilities because they are based on the (false) assumption that "the rest of society" is 100% able-bodied. Despite these assumptions, the work force "trampoline" has been, perhaps paradoxically, vigorously applied to people with disabilities, often ignoring their self-determined needs in favour of developing their "employability" (Ismael, 2006).

On the other hand, there has been an outcry against child poverty, which has effectively silenced the discourse on adult poverty. The National Council on Welfare observed that "[i]n 1989 the House of Commons committed to ending child poverty by 2000" (National Council of Welfare, 2007, p. 1), a commitment that remains unmet. The primary assumption in child poverty discourse is that the conditions of children can be improved while ignoring parental poverty. Children, however, have no legal financial rights or responsibilities; their poverty can only be measured through that of their parents. Child poverty is thus a false construct that measures, but then discursively erases, the poverty and subjectivity of the parent(s) and removes the possibility of economic support for them and their children. Instead, programs set up to address "child poverty," according to Ismael, focus on "child development" (Ismael, 2006, p. 45), including "health, education and child care programs targeted at young children in general, vulnerable children in particular" (p. 47), all of which are good things. But because of this shift, there have been few improvements to programs addressing family poverty, such as welfare, Employment Insurance, or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) payments; minimum wage; child income supplements; or food security. For this reason, the 1989 legislation had little effect—child poverty rose from 15.3% in 1989 to 18.2% in 2001, reaching as high as 23.0% in 1996 (Statistics Canada).

The undeserving poor, according to Katz, also includes militants. "As long as [homeless people] remained supplicants rather than militants, objects of charity rather than subjects of protest" (1989, p. 186), they were the "deserving poor." OCAP activists are perhaps considered undeserving because they refuse to be silent (cf. Hanke, 2005). Discursive formations are premised upon who is speaking, taking action, and wielding power. According to Emile Benveniste, "discourse is language put into action" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 223), and I would argue

that discourse is also *action put into language*. In Foucault's terms, discourse is the source of power and resistance. "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). Anti-poverty discourse can potentially interrupt power relations that oppress people living in poverty by challenging misconceptions of who takes action and exercises power. Militants are categorized as the undeserving poor exactly because of this challenge to power.

Case study 1: The *Toronto Star* article

On September 15, 2007, *The Toronto Star* ran an article in their "War on Poverty" online series titled "A Tenant Revolution, But Is Anyone Listening?" The subheading reads, "The previously voiceless inhabitants of Toronto public housing now have a single landlord to complain to and a new breed of local tenant-activists is hoping to make an impact at the polls Oct. 10" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). This article reports on tenant-activists living in TCH who were demanding collectively that their housing be properly maintained. It introduces Katherine Wallace, "the tenant 'rep' for [an] inner-city seniors' high rise," as one of 390 such representatives across the city who are part of "a grassroots movement targeting politicians who can make changes" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). It describes her building on Bleecker Street as a "towering eyesore" and Wallace as a "tenant-activist" who is working to, "in her own words, 'give pride to the place.'" The article frames this as an uphill battle. "Pride?" they ask. "It's not a sentiment normally associated with Toronto public housing, home to the city's poorest and most vulnerable; and stigmatized as bastions of violence, drugs and decay" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). The journalists suggest that "Public Housing tenants are desperately poor—immigrants, seniors, disabled and single-parent families with incomes averaging $14,000 a year. Some have mental health problems and addictions. Others have criminal records." Tenants are interviewed, deteriorating housing conditions are described, and details regarding "government neglect and chronic underfunding" are provided. "The tenant reps have met with 19 out of 22 Toronto MPPs and the housing minister" to argue that social housing is a serious election issue. The article concludes with Katherine Wallace's words: "[W]e want to make a difference."

The name of the article series gives it away—in framing social housing as an election issue, the *Star* article participates in the discursive formation of the "war on poverty." The article reinforces the notion that, although tenants are organizing, it is the government that has the real power. The tenants are met with shrugged shoulders by members of provincial parliament (MPPs) and the minister of housing. "All say they'd like to spend more money to fix public housing, but few said they have pushed their party leaders to act" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007), reflecting the demise of the "war on poverty." The tenant-activists are shown to have little leverage, at best being able to ask someone (MPPs and the minister) to ask someone else ("their party leaders") to act. In this discourse, it seems only leaders have the power to improve social-housing conditions.

Case study 2: The OCAP article

OCAP is also organizing with TCHC tenants. In July 2007, two months before

the *Star* article appeared, OCAP posted an article to its website titled "The Worst Landlord in the City of Toronto Is . . . the City of Toronto" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007; ellipsis in original). On the website, the same article sometimes appears with the alternate title, "OCAP Challenge to Toronto Community Housing Is Growing" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). They write, "OCAP has been working for some weeks to mobilize TCH tenants to challenge the appalling conditions and terrible neglect that they live with" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). This is clearly a different discourse than that of the *Star* article, using active verbs such as "working," "mobilize," and "challenge" to describe how members of OCAP have been organizing with tenant-activists in TCHC buildings.

The first mini-narrative describes how a tenant in Scarborough, "who had suffered a stroke, had a problem that is typical of the disrespectful attitude people deal with in City run housing. When he moved into his unit . . . a large pile of earth was sitting on his balcony. He asked if it could be moved and was told this was his problem" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). Unable to move the earth himself because of his health condition, "[h]e was reduced to sealing up his balcony to block the smell" after rodents had inhabited the earth, rendering it a health hazard (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). The second mini-narrative describes a mother living with her seven children in a three-bedroom apartment in Swansea Mews with exposed wiring that had burst into flames and "burned one of the children but it had still not been fixed three years after the incident" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). The article concludes that "[t]he fight for basic maintenance and repair is central to preserving public housing and the scale of this fight is going to increase in the months ahead" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). The term "fight" implies action, similar to the discourses of "challenging" and "mobilizing." OCAP repeatedly uses the term "struggle" in its articles, as well as in the title of its newspaper, *They Call It Struggle for a Reason*. These words are part of a discursive formation of civic action (by citizens and non-citizens alike) that locates power in the ordinary person engaged in community-based grass-roots politics rather than in government bureaucracy. Social transformation, in this discursive formation, comes through collective action, political struggle, mobilization, challenging the status quo, and fighting for one's rights.

The OCAP article describes several direct actions. One of these is the case of the Scarborough tenant described above, framed by OCAP as an issue of rights and respect. Tenants have the right to move into a clean apartment, and the landlord has the responsibility to provide a fully habitable apartment. Instead this tenant was denied this particular right, he was treated disrespectfully, and his needs as a person with a disability were not considered, taking away his dignity. The discourse of respect and dignity is located within the activist discursive formation on poverty. Activists acknowledge that disrespect for people living in poverty is structural, enacted through deeper social structures, including everything from etiquette to laws, human rights to housing rights, democratic equality to government bureaucracy, and welfare provision to food security. These are spaces in which disrespect is experienced by people in lower socioeconomic classes, and dignity is thus denied them.

OCAP's solution is to take direct action:

OCAP members and some of his neighbours shoveled up the mess and piled it into seven large bags. We then took it over to the TCH area office and dumped it on their patio. We explained what we had done and why and told them that we doubted that it would sit at the new location as long as it had been on the man's balcony. (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007)

This OCAP action and the accompanying article accomplish several tasks, the most immediate of which is the removal of the dirt from the balcony. The action extends itself as a message through the article, serving notice to TCHC that tenants are willing to take action to get action, creating a perlocutionary force (Austin, 1962) through propaganda by the deed. OCAP is organizing with the tenant and "some of his neighbours," denoting the achievement of self-empowerment through collective action and mutual aid. The article broadcasts OCAP's actions through the use of autonomous media (about which more below), demonstrating that direct action achieves results. The man's balcony gets cleared as a result of this action, and the woman whose child had suffered a wiring burn "learned that a transfer to a five bedroom unit had now been arranged" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). OCAP's collective mobilization has resulted in the immediate improvement of circumstances for these two people, and what's more, they themselves have actively participated in achieving these changes.

The location of subjectivity and power in people living in poverty is crucial to the discursive formation of the "war on the poor." From this perspective, it is the government enacting the "war on the poor," whereas people living in poverty are actually the ones fighting the "war on poverty." They do this by being active in their communities, building relationships based on mutual aid, dignity, respect, and action. This location of power challenges the discursive formation of the "war on poverty," which positions the government as the only ones with power to make change. In fact, although it seems that the government is the unnamed actor in the "war on poverty" and in the "war on the poor," this analysis reveals that people living in poverty are active in both discursive formations.

Discourse and power

At times the *Star* article also shows the empowerment of the tenant-activists. The journalists, however, seem incredulous when Wallace says that she is working to "give pride to the place," which is referred to as a "towering eyesore" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). The *Star* journalists respond, "Pride? It's not a sentiment normally associated with Toronto public housing." This comes from a subject position outside of public housing, implying that social-housing tenants should feel the binary opposite of pride, shame. Indeed by using the one-word paragraph "Pride?" the article engages in a performative speech act of shaming, reinforcing the assumption that people living in poverty should feel ashamed, an assumption that is part of the regime of truth (Foucault 1978) on poverty. As a person who has lived in poverty, I experience moments of reporting such as this as disrespectful and troubling. I do not want to be ashamed of my experience of poverty. Of course Wallace would want to feel proud of where she lives (doesn't everyone?),

not to have it denounced as a "towering eyesore." There is a lack of accountability to Wallace (and other interviewees) that comes from the construction of social difference based on economic difference. As a discourse analyst, I can analyze the exclusion enacted through language, because I have experienced it myself. Furthermore, though my economic circumstances may have changed, I continue to experience the shaming and exclusion of media representations of people in poverty. I empathize with the people represented, not because they are disempowered or pitiable, but because they are just regular folks trying to get by, regular folks *like me*. It is this subject position, however, that the article disallows. It asks the reader to be surprised that "poor people" might want to feel pride of place for their home, the assumption being that the reader has no experience of poverty and has never lived in social housing. The article thus excludes social-housing tenants from the readership of *The Toronto Star* at exactly the moment they appear to have achieved representation.

These are tenants whom the *Star* article calls "the city's poorest and most vulnerable" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). This claim might be hard to substantiate, however. Do the 164,000 tenants in city housing correspond exactly to the 164,000 "poorest" people in Toronto? Not very likely. In Toronto there are thousands of homeless and marginally housed people who are arguably poorer and definitely more "vulnerable" than those who have stable public housing. Indeed the TCHC website notes that its tenants are "low to moderate-income" people. Until recently, to take a well-publicized example, politicians Jack Layton and Olivia Chow lived in city-owned Toronto rent-geared-to-income housing. Most TCHC tenants are situated somewhere between the homeless and the upper-middle-class in terms of their poverty and vulnerability.

The discourse of vulnerability, used by *The Toronto Star* as well as by Shereen Ismael, begs the question: vulnerable to what or to whom? The discursive formation of the "war on the poor" suggests that people living in poverty are vulnerable to the groups set up to provide for us—politicians (who pass anti-poor legislation), government agencies (who can refuse service, including social-housing maintenance), the police (known to target homeless people, squeegee kids, people of colour), et cetera. This vulnerability is further complicated by the ways in which poverty is experienced in conjunction with axes of oppression such as race, ethnicity, property and/or land rights, housing, immigration status, gender, sex, sexual orientation, sex work, HIV/AIDS, food security, mental health, and others. OCAP actively organizes around these issues.

The OCAP article is on a Web page that features the following four categories: "Immigration," "First Nations," "Casework," and "Raise the Rates." The immigration page deals with refugee claims, immigration claims, and illegalized immigrants, with links to groups such as No One Is Illegal and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" campaign.[2] The First Nations page deals with land treaties and self-determination. The casework page provides information about OCAP's advocacy casework. "Raise the Rates" covers issues related to social welfare rates, such as disability (ODSP), welfare, Ontario Works, minimum wage, and social housing. There are also pages for the OCAP Women of Etobicoke, which deals with issues of gender, sex, sexuality, education, child care, and other issues for women living

in poverty. OCAP has an explicit anti-capitalist, anti-oppression political analysis, evident in John Clark's article "Short History of OCAP" (2001). This multiplicity of discourses frames poverty as an issue that requires an anti-racist, feminist, anti-capitalist analysis and commitment. The OCAP case study article, for example, addresses women's issues by mobilizing with a woman with several children; it addresses health and disability by mobilizing with a man with a disability, whose health has been put at risk by the lack of housing maintenance.

In contrast, the *Toronto Star* "War on Poverty" series only rarely mentions other axes of oppression, implying by omission that poverty is not connected with systemic racism, sex/gender/sexuality oppression, youth, immigration status, indigenous land claims, sex work, food security, or other determinants of marginalized social location. Furthermore, on the *Toronto Star* website, where the case study article was found, the surrounding articles and advertisements reinforce the dominant ideology of consumer capitalism rather than an anti-poverty discourse.

When the *Star* article mentions issues that intersect with poverty—for example, in their brief description of those who comprise "public housing tenants"—the authors equate "mental health problems" with "addictions" and "criminal records," conflating causes of poverty (e.g., mental health problems or disabilities) with effects (e.g., criminalization). Furthermore, they use the term "disabled," which labels the person rather than their disability. The linguistic construction of "disabled" hides the "by whom" clause, which might reveal infrastructural and attitudinal sources by which people with disabilities become "disabled." A person who uses a wheelchair is "disabled" by people's prejudicial attitudes and/or the fact that a lack of ramps or elevators in many buildings makes it impossible for them to access services, friends' houses, workplaces, grocery stores, public transit, and the like. The term "people with disabilities" reveals that the person and the disability are distinct—a disability is something one *has*, not something one *is*.

Moreover, the *Star* article perpetuates public fear around social housing. According to Daly & Monsebraaten, the Bleecker Street apartments have been "stigmatized as bastions of violence, drugs and decay" (2007). This generalization begs yet another question: stigmatized how and by whom? People living in social housing do not naturally conceive of their homes this way. This statement, emanating from an outsider position, *enacts* the very stigmatization it names, in another performative speech act thinly disguised as a constative. It is not neutrally describing the social housing; rather, it is *constructing* social housing as "bastions of violence, drugs and decay." Furthermore, even if there are "violence, drugs and decay" in the community, this is no reason to feel ashamed, particularly if one is a victim or "vulnerable" to these social issues, but also even if one is drug addicted, has a decaying apartment, or lives in a cycle of violence.

The phrase "violence, drugs and decay," paired with the notion of "pride" that it is set up in opposition to, constructs a troubling set of binaries. As we have seen, the pride/shame binary combines with the outside/inside public housing binary to imply that pride belongs to people outside social housing and shame to those inside. Other groupings of binaries that work with inside-shame/outside-pride are violence/non-violence, drugs/drug-free, and decay/growth. As the nega-

tive terms in these binaries (violence, drugs, decay) apply to social housing, the unwritten positives of each binary (non-violence, drug-free, and growth) are associated with those living outside social housing. This brief statement implies that all people who do not live in social housing are free from "violence, drugs and decay," for which they are entitled to feel "pride," whereas all people who live in social housing are either victims or perpetrators of "violence, drugs and decay" and therefore entitled only to feel shame. This is the regime of truth on social housing in Toronto.

Social housing in Toronto, however, is quite varied, including co-op houses, high-rises, townhouse complexes, rent geared to income, et cetera, and it is geographically dispersed, so that drugs, violence, and decay can not possibly be a matter of course for all 164,000 tenants. At the same time, many people outside of social housing *are* victims or perpetrators of violence, drugs, and decay. Consider widespread drug use among celebrities, the fact that domestic violence is prevalent in middle- and upper-class families, and that in Toronto some of the most expensive housing in the Queen Street West district is surrounded by alleyways full of dumpsters, dilapidated structures, and decaying garbage.

We can also interrogate the negative valence assigned to these three terms in the first place. Decay is often a sought-after urban aesthetic, preferred by some artists, punks, anarchists, anti-gentrification activists, anti-civilizationists, graffiti artists, and the like. Anti-gentrification activists, for example, make it a point of "pride" to live in neighbourhoods that are not being gentrified, that are perhaps even "decaying." Moreover, there are positive or multivalenced aspects to "drugs," such as medical marijuana, safe injection sites used in harm reduction strategies, or pharmaceutical drugs, which arguably have some positive effects for some people.

Violence is also complex. Often discourses of violence are based on the assumption that violence is in the masculine domain, but this is challenged by women who engage in self-defence classes and other types of martial arts training. Nobody would criticize violence used to defend oneself, and even the legal system forgives it. Violence is often seen as only being legitimate when perpetrated by the state through the police or military (indeed a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence is seen as being crucial to state formation). Nonetheless, there have been several activist-theorists who have challenged this. Frantz Fanon (1968) justifies personal-political violence as a response to the systemic violence of colonial poverty. Ward Churchill (1998) deconstructs the glorification of non-violence, advocating collective armed anti-colonialist struggles for self-determination of indigenous peoples. Peter Gelderloos (2007) suggests that direct-action tactics challenge the violent/non-violent binary, falling in the spectrum between the two.

Furthermore, we must be cognizant of the stigmatization of victims of systemic or personal violence that the "stigmatization" phrase in the *Star* article (re)enacts. These victims are often women, non-white people, people with disabilities, and/or (the "/" is important here, as it reveals the potential intersections of axes of oppression) people living in poverty. The article's stigmatization relies on assumptions about poverty, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and/or disabil-

ity that limit the possibility of subjectivity and collective action. We do not want to be stigmatized. Whether we live in poverty, use drugs, are engaged in violence, live in run-down decaying housing, or have disabilities, mental health issues, or criminal records, we all deserve lives of dignity and respect.

This stigmatization can be understood at least partially as a result of the division between mainstream media and anti-poverty social movements. Bob Hanke argues that "the movements/media relation" (2005, p. 47) is asymmetrical, positioning the media outside and superior to social movements. Activists are dependent on the media for representing their side of the story, whereas the media do not have a need to represent social movements. Representations from outside social movements thus might dislocate subjectivity, disrespect "others" who are represented, and misrepresent power locations and resistance. Self-representation in autonomous media is potentially a corrective for this imbalance and lack of accountability.

Subjectivity, voice, and autonomous media

Alternative media, participatory media, and autonomous media are several media strategies taken up by media activists and social-movement activists to address the imbalance identified by Bob Hanke. "What if our political economy of practices emphasized instead marginal actors who take up, as a material condition of their symbolic work, the instruments of expression and criticism?" (Hanke, 2005, p. 45). As a group of "marginal actors," OCAP does just that, linking their mobilization to their self-produced, autonomous media.

Alternative media has been analyzed by many theorists (Albert, 1997; Atton, 1999, 2002; Downing, 2001; Duncombe, 1997; Langlois & Dubois, 2005, among others). OCAP engages in alternative media such as CKLN's "OCAP Radio" program, hosted by OCAP community members who cover anti-poverty issues. OCAP's website, however, is an example of autonomous rather than alternative media, emphasizing the autonomy of the producers to present their own analysis (van der Zon, 2005), non-hierarchical organizing (Atton, 1999), non-professionalism (Atton, 2002), accountability to community (Atton, 1999), and mobilization of activism (Schmidt, 2005). According to Langlois & Dubois (2005), "Autonomous media are the vehicles of social movements" (p. 9). They are autonomous from any corporate media structure, free from the five media filters identified by Chomsky & Herman (1988): media convergence, advertising control, limited legitimate sources, corporate media flak, and the creation of an ideological enemy. Autonomous media producers

> seek not only to provide a space for information that is an alternative to that which is found in mass media, but also to create media that breakdown [*sic*] hierarchies of access to meaning-making, therefore allowing those typically found at the grassroots to have a voice and to define reality. (Langlois & Dubois, 2005, p. 10)

The OCAP article is thus not a blog or a personal diary, nor is it simply alternative media producing alternative content, but rather it is a news article covering a series of events autonomously. The writers engage in alternative meaning-making processes through self-representation, defining reality and producing meanings in

their own collective voice. The social movement and the media produced are congruent. The binary movement/media thus does not hold—autonomous media is inside the movement.

One of the successes of autonomous media is the production of voice, identity, and subjectivity through self-representation. Chris Atton has found that social-movement actors who produce alternative media "turn to themselves, their own lives, their own experiences, and turn these into the subjects of their writing" (Atton, 2002, p. 54). The process of turning experience into text produces subjectivities, or "the capacity of the speaker to posit [her or] himself as subject" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 224). Benveniste argues that this happens through language, as "each speaker sets [her or] himself up as a *subject* by referring to [her or] himself as *I* in [her or] his discourse" (p. 225). Using first-person pronouns such as "I" and the collective first-person "we," subjectivity is established, and through subjectivity, an empowered social location can also be produced. This subjectivity, or the power to insert oneself into discourse, is called "voice." In autonomous media, the collective production of voice is important, as the use of "we" posits a collective subjectivity. It is precisely this "we" that we find in OCAP's article. If we understand discourse to include "text, discursive practice, and social practice" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 3), then the social practices of direct action and autonomous media production are intertwined in the discursive formation of the OCAP case study article. In the *Star* article, conversely, the social practice engaged by the writers is journalism, meaning that the text produced is separate from the social practices of people living in poverty, social practices that are tied to voice.

Journalists Daly & Monsebraaten (2007) call the tenants "previously voiceless inhabitants," implying that the tenants' actions and the *Toronto Star* article are playing a role in giving them a voice. However, the "previously voiceless" inhabitants remain largely voiceless, as they are unable to enunciate their collective subjectivity by speaking from the position of "I" (or "we"), which Benveniste found crucial to subjectivity and which Langlois & Dubois and Atton have all observed is fundamental to social-movement media. Nor do the activists in the *Star* article appear as the other, or the "you" of interlocution who then switches to become "I" as the dialogue progresses. Rather they appear in the third person, as a third position that is absent as a potential subject from the dialogue in total. In non-fiction prose, a person who is spoken of in the third person almost never re-appears in the first person. One might argue that direct speech is an instance of the appearance of this subject position, and yet, because the individual's words appear in quotation marks, and they are selected and presented by someone else rather than by the speakers themselves, the quoted speaking subject is still being spoken about rather than speaking in an unmediated way. The distinction between being spoken about and being spoken to is important, because when one is spoken to, one expects to respond. The subject is only temporarily "you" and is thus engaged in an intersubjective space that includes two or more subjects, alternating between "you" and "I." With the third-person grammatical form there is no intersubjectivity; rather, the placement is as a fixed object. The subject is symbolically erased and, as has been much theorized elsewhere, has no

speaking voice. So although the *Toronto Star* journalists purport to be giving voice to the tenant-activists, this is not exactly what is happening. Rather, the voice of the journalists is presented, and as such, they are the subjects, with the tenants as their non-speaking objects of representation.

We might understand newspaper *readers* to be subjects, in the sense that they are interpretive subjects. Readers can engage in a linguistic-interpretive community, and tenant-activists may also participate in this community. The position of interpretive subject does not produce the kind of "voice" or subjectivity of which Benveniste writes, however. Nonetheless, it does allow the audience to engage in what Umberto Eco calls "semiological guerrilla warfare" (Eco, 1986, p. 135), a disruption of preferred meanings through collective interpretive practices. When people living in poverty are reading about themselves, they may transform the message regarding the absent objects of the discourse. But only those who are being referred to in the third person, or perhaps those within their immediate interpretive (activist- or poverty-based in this case) community can disrupt the text through a guerrilla reading process. The message for the mass audience remains the same.

Interdiscursive relations

The two different socioeconomic locations of these two discursive formations, the "war on the poor" and the "war on poverty," are important, as they define possible subjectivities. As the latter seems to dominate, it also tends to perpetuate the regime of truth on poverty, which includes the discursive binaries we have seen: pride/shame, deserving/undeserving, subject/object, inside/outside, stigmatization/respect, et cetera. However, Foucault warns us that "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault, 1978, p. 100).

Perhaps these two poverty discourses have connections between them, rather than simply a gap separating them. Norman Fairclough (1992) calls these connections "interdiscursive relations" (p. 46). Oppositional discourses may exist in relation to one another in productive, interdependent ways. In interdiscursive relations, points of overlap or even contradiction can be moments of disruption that produce dialogue, new knowledge, and challenges. Perhaps there are spaces that can be opened up to the possibility of discursive shifts that facilitate and are facilitated by social transformation.

The title of the *Toronto Star* article, "A Tenant Revolution, But Is Anyone Listening?"—syntactical issues aside (who *listens* to a revolution?)—invokes both discursive formations. "A tenant revolution" suggests tenants are taking radical action as active subjects resisting the "war on the poor"; "is anyone listening?" implies appeals to government action in the "war on poverty." This title engages contradictory interdiscursive relations, calling into question the location of anti-poverty action and invoking a multiplicity of subjectivities.

The *Star* writers suggest that people living in TCH units are becoming "a new breed of local tenant-activists" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). The use of the hyphenated term "tenant-activist," as with the phrase "*new* breed," implies that the tenants (i.e., the term "tenant" *without* the term "activist") were formerly inac-

tive. The new tenant-activists are "hoping to make an impact at the polls Oct. 10" (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007), framing the election as the site of action and social housing as an issue of governance, whereas the term "activists" implies that the tenants are taking action themselves. Thus the double thread of the title repeats itself throughout the article, oscillating interdiscursively between the representation of tenants as actively engaged subjects and the representation of the government as the prime actor.

Interestingly, in the *Star* article, an OCAP-like action is even described. "In May, the [tenant-activists] launched their Save Our Structures (SOS) campaign by dumping their rusting faucets, soggy drywall and crumbling countertops on the doorstep of Queen's Park and demanding MPPs pay up or risk being 'evicted' in the election"[3] (Daly & Monsebraaten, 2007). This description of a direct action focuses on both the tenant-activists and the MPPs, making a strong interdiscursive connection with OCAP's article, indeed creating a genealogy between them. Similarly, the word "revolution" connects interdiscursively with OCAP's writing, as *The Toronto Star* constructs the tenants not just as supplicants, but *also* as militants.

Conversely, OCAP's article constructs the government not just as an obstruction (or perpetrators of the war on the poor), but also as people with the capacity for change; as they note, "We will be bringing this issue [Moss Park repairs] directly to the political decision makers very shortly" (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2007). This is an interesting contradiction in OCAP's discourse. They engage in direct actions to achieve their goals, some of which are quite successful, such as the dirt removal project described earlier. Nonetheless, other OCAP projects require government intervention, such as major repairs, earmarking buildings for social housing, or having a tenant moved to a better apartment. OCAP's actions and discourses are thus multi-strategied, as the case requires. They go to the location of power, which is sometimes within their community and sometimes within government. Similarly, *The Toronto Star*'s use of two apparently conflicting discursive formations disrupts the regime of truth on poverty while simultaneously reterritorializing it. There is not necessarily an accepted/excluded or dominant/dominated relation between these two discursive formations. The interdiscursive relations and the contradictions they entail reveal some of the profound complexities of representation and *mobilization* for tenant-activists and other subjects of poverty.

We might ask what the effects are of these interdiscursive constructions. "[S]ocial subjects," Norman Fairclough (1992) suggests, are "shaped by discursive practices, yet also capable of reshaping and restructuring these practices" (p. 45). He has found that

> studies of media discourse which have focused upon how particular texts are interpreted as well as upon how they are organized have suggested a highly complex picture, in which texts may be interpreted from various more or less compliant or oppositional positions, making highly problematic any schematic view of the effect of discourse upon the constitution of, for example, social subjects. (pp. 60-61)

People can instantiate their own subjectivity while navigating representations of themselves that may differ from their own self-conception without having that

self-conception destroyed. For example, in a "guerrilla" interpretation of the *Star* article, people living in poverty might laugh off any performative stigmatization. Fairclough investigates a text's effect on social subjects as well as the social subjects' reactions to or against the text. We might then ask, as Hanke does, what kinds of effects social-movement self-representation might produce, considering the possibility of greater discursive (and concomitant material) shifts when marginalized groups become textual producers.

People living in poverty collectively construct discourses about who they/we are through knowledge production based on their/our own lived experience. These collectively constituted discursive-subjective formations form the basis for organizing social actions, establishing social relationships, and developing political consciousness around issues of poverty, class, housing, and homelessness. They have the potential to challenge the regime of truth on both a discursive and a material level. Action, intuition, ideas, and lived experience are preceded by oral discursive-subjective production, *and also* precede or may be simultaneous to textual production. Discourse is thus not just language put into action, but also *action put into language*. In this cycle of action-language-action, the threesome of discourse, knowledge, and power is always-already productively active. Perhaps OCAP has shifted the discourse on poverty through interdiscursive interventions into mainstream media. We can see OCAP actions (e.g., the dumping of debris in offices of authorities, the threat of evicting the authorities) and discourses (e.g., "revolution," "tenant-activists") emerging in this article and beyond. Perhaps this reflects a shift in the dominant discursive formation.

Toward an engaged discourse analysis

The findings of this discourse analysis are limited in scope, as they are derived from only two representative texts. To analyze content or media effects, one must consider a wider range of texts from the sources studied and beyond. Alternatively, a more interdisciplinary mode of critical discourse analysis might be used to consider the people living in poverty who exceed the texts in which they are produced as and produce subjectivities. As an anti-poverty activist, I see myself "as politically engaged, working alongside disenfranchised social groups" (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006, p. 30). Discourse analysts need to be active within grass-roots organizing as allies of people living under oppression, or perhaps sharing or having shared a particular experience of oppression. However, because activist discursive formations are connected with action and accountability, in this particular research, tenant-activists should be more directly involved so that the researcher and researched can interact. The shared subject position of the researcher and researched is only partial, because I no longer live in poverty as I once did, and my research is based in academic training that extends knowledge gained from my personal experience of poverty.

Engaged critical discourse analysis must build a bridge between academic institutions and grass-roots organizations, ensuring that subjects of poverty do not become dislocated or displaced from their texts. It should thus draw the political engagement of CDA together with the action and participation facilitated by participatory action research (PAR), a methodology that shares the goal of social transformation with CDA. According to Rory O'Brien, action research adds to

research's traditional emphasis on knowledge production the idea that the process and product of the research should be both collaborative with and useful to research subjects in actively producing social change (see, for example, O'Brien, 2001). Discourse analysis is a text-based methodology that tends to remain separate from the social. PAR, on the other hand, is most often a sociological methodology that intervenes in social processes. In PAR, by using "interactive or dialogic research methods" (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 2006, p. 142), research agendas are developed in consultation with an active group, research is interpreted collaboratively with the group, and the results are meant to be useful to the group itself. For the research at hand to become an important part of the anti-poverty struggle, the research goals, data, methodologies, results, publication sites, and indeed discourses need to be developed with the input of the research participants/subjects—in this case, people living in poverty and/or OCAP members.

What I am suggesting, however, is not conversation analysis of interviews or analysis of oral narratives, nor is it a return to "participant observer" research in which the researcher is outside the milieu but then joins it in order to research it, but rather critical discourse analysis of self-representations within autonomous media, where the writer-activist participates in determining research goals, analyzing language, and publishing results. Academic language, for example, might be annoying to some community-based constituencies, and it may need to be adjusted. The risk, if we work in isolation from marginalized research subjects, is that research may inadvertently be "implicated in the project of social control, whether by the state or by other agencies that ultimately serve the interests of a dominant group" (Cameron et al., 2006, p. 132).

If there is knowledge production and knowledge sharing to be done through discourse-based research, there needs to be a relationship of reciprocity whereby researchers and the researched engage in genuine relationships based on dignity, mutual aid, and respect, the basic principles of OCAP. Researchers do not just learn about the researched, but we can also learn from and with them, transgressing the boundary between the researcher and the researched. As Fairclough reminds us, "a critical awareness of language is not wholly something which has to be brought to people from outside, it arises within the normal ways people reflect on their lives as part of their lives" (Fairclough, 2006, p. 148). This critical awareness can be shared through engaged critical discourse analysis.

While it seems clear that autonomous media is a useful tool for social movements in mobilization, self-representation, and maintenance of internal accountability, it remains to be seen whether the same can be said for academic critical discourse analysis. A continued questioning and expanding of the limits of engaged discourse analysis is thus necessary to realize the full potential of this methodology for social transformation.

Notes

1. For an excellent historically situated analysis of the first use of the term "war on poverty" by Lyndon Johnson in the United States, and in particular the effectiveness of the word "war", cf. Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor* (1989). The term "war" has been taken up in the popular lexicon not just for "the war on poverty," but also for "the war on drugs" and "the war on terror." In the contemporary context this is troubling, as one of these is really a war and the other two are not.

2. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is a campaign to get full social services, including school and medical care, for the children of illegalized immigrants. The premise is that workers at schools and health clinics, et cetera, should not ask the status of their clients, and that all families, legalized and illegalized alike, should not tell these workers their status, as the availability of these services is not predicated on the children or their parents having legal status in Canada.

3. Interestingly, the action of evicting politicians was popularized by OCAP when they evicted the office of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. Indeed the actions described here are typical of OCAP's actions and discourses, yet OCAP is never mentioned in the article as relevant to or implicated in the organizing campaign, thus this possibility remains outside our analysis.

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