

## CRISIS DISCOURSES: POLAND AND PORTUGAL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE MEDIA

### DISCURSOS SOBRE A CRISE: POLÓNIA E PORTUGAL NOS MEDIA DE LÍNGUA INGLESA

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Taking the whole European Union (EU) as background, the present study discusses the way a corpus of English language media articles has represented the 2009-2016 crisis and austerity policies in Poland and Portugal, the home countries of the authors. The selected corpus comprises 68 articles from mainstream English language media, namely the newspapers *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the economics magazine *The Economist*. The theoretical framework draws on the Bakhtinian notions of polyphony and heteroglossia, as well as on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. It thus juxtaposes and interprets the different voices and conflicting meanings within crisis discourses, relating them to issues of power and ideology. The Conclusion shows that despite rhetorical diversity, common politically contingent voices were identified which underpin the discourses dominating the crisis narrations in these two economically and geographically distant countries of the European Union.

**Keywords:** Hegemony. Heteroglossia. Polyphony. European Union.

Tomando toda a União Europeia (UE) como pano de fundo, o presente estudo discute a forma como um corpus de artigos de media em língua inglesa retrataram a crise e as políticas de austeridade que entre 2009 e 2016 afetaram a Polónia e Portugal, os países de origem dos autores. O corpus selecionado compreende 68 artigos de media de referência em língua inglesa, nomeadamente os jornais *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal* e a revista de economia, *The Economist*. O enquadramento teórico apoia-se nos conceitos bakhtinianos de polifonia e heteroglóssia, assim como na teoria da hegemonia de Gramsci. Assim, justapõe e interpreta as diferentes vozes e significados discordantes presentes nos discursos sobre a crise, relacionando-os com questões de poder e ideologia. A conclusão mostra que, apesar da diversidade retórica, se identificaram vozes comuns politicamente contingentes, as quais sustentam os discursos dominantes sobre a crise nestes dois países da União Europeia, geográfica e economicamente distantes entre si.

**Palavras-chave:** Hegemonia. Heteroglóssia. Polifonia. União Europeia.

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## 1. Introduction

The present study discusses the way a corpus of English language media articles represents the 2009–2016 crisis and austerity in Poland and Portugal, the home countries of the authors. Analysing the media narrations of crisis affords an insight into the forces that drive democracies. Within this process, a special role is ascribed to the English language mainstream media, whose influence shapes public opinion on a global scale.

The current literature on English language media coverage of the European crisis has contemplated various approaches: i) focusing on single cases such as that of Greece (*e.g.*, Lampropoulou 2014), ii) focusing on the whole bunch of Southern European countries (*e.g.*, Bickens *et al.* 2014), and iii) juxtaposing the crisis narrations in the English language press (and other national press concerning the countries of southern Europe) with those from the well-established and prosperous economies of the West and North of the EU (*e.g.*, Arrese & Vara-Miguel 2016). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is a dearth of articles which compare the English language media crisis narrations about a country hit by crisis and austerity (Portugal) and a so-called new EU member state (Poland). The comparison now pursued highlights the plurality of the manifestations and representations of crisis in these two countries, while it simultaneously reveals the existence of a common dominant discourse.

Hence the need for an analytic framework that interprets the plurality of media crisis discourses and the unequal status of that plurality. We argue that Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical principle, fused in the concepts of 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia', combined with Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony may contribute to the understanding of the relationships between media discourse and political and cultural domination. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin (1981, pp. 259-269) postulates that, being "a social phenomenon", verbal discourse is oriented towards dialogism. This principle claims that all meaning is relative, in the sense that it is the result of the relation between two bodies, be they physical, political or ideological (Holquist 2002, p. 20).

The concept of 'heteroglossia', understood as the presence of double-voiced discourse (two voices, two worldviews), relates the multiplicity of discursive forces to the socio-ideological context and views this relationship as a characteristic of the social and historical world. The concept of 'polyphony', developed in the context of Dostoevsky's work, is conceived as "the ultimate dialogicality" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 18). Bakhtin's philosophy of language therefore provides a strong theoretical basis for the characterization of the dialogical, even conflictual, nature of discourse (Bakhtin 1981, p. 272). However, as Bakhtin's dialogical principle presupposes a plurality of equally authoritative ideological positions, we have looked elsewhere for explaining discursive dominance.

We found in Gramsci's theory of hegemony a valid contribution for explaining the existence and persistence of a certain type of crisis discourse in the media. Gramsci stated

that political rule is not based on force or money alone, but also on the power of ideas (Gramsci 1989, pp. 113-119). Gramsci thus draws attention to the process through which meaning is produced and reproduced in society and how ideational structures play at a given time and shape power relations (Lears 1985, pp. 567-593).

In this dynamic, the discourse and the rhetorical strategies used by a dominant group are central elements in cementing its hegemony. This does not mean that the dominant discourse and its rhetorical strategies need to be authoritative and monological. They may be heteroglot and allow the formulation of oppositional discourses, but these are often enclaved in specialized publications directed at minority, elite publics. This shields them from public debate and contestation, which usually works to the advantage of the dominant groups, as argued by Fraser (1990, p. 73). By offering an interpretation for the seemingly incongruous polyphony of economic, political and social emanations of crisis in Poland and Portugal, we believe we can shed yet another light on the issues in question.

Hence, we begin by briefly characterizing the concept of austerity and its main rhetorical and ideational emanations. Following that we examine 68 English language media articles devoted to narrating the crisis in both countries. Because of the specific manifestations of crisis and its diverse characteristics, we have divided this discussion into two parts: the first one discusses the relevant discourses concerning Poland, whilst in the second part we discuss the narrations concerning Portugal.

The data corpus was selected using the ProQuest and LexisNexis databases. *The Financial Times* (FT), *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* (NYT), *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and *The Economist* were preselected for the analysis. The query terms used to find the articles included the keywords ‘crisis + Portugal’, ‘austerity + Portugal’ and ‘crisis + Poland’.

Due to the different watershed moments in the history of the events related to the crisis (the birth of the ‘green island’ metaphor in Poland and the arrival of the Troika in Portugal), the time brackets chosen for the articles related to Poland included the years 2009-2016, and for Portugal 2011-2016. The focus of our analysis lies on the decisions made by the authors of the selected articles. Specifically, we identify the overarching metaphors the authors use in order to weave the narrations of crisis and austerity and the types of data used for argumentation (*e.g.*, quantitative reports or personal narrations).

In the Conclusion, we focus on the identification and interpretation of both the diverse and the common to both countries politically contingent voices which underpin the discourses dominating the narrations of crisis in Poland and Portugal.

## **2. Austerity – the leaden years**

Having the iconic 25<sup>th</sup> April Bridge over the Tagus in the background, Paul Krugman, 2008 Nobel Prize in economics, gave an interview with the Portuguese TV station SIC *Notícias* on May 4, 2016. In this interview he discussed the state of the European economy and declared his support to the efforts of the government in loosening the harsh austerity measures imposed on the country since 2011: “I should argue very strongly that the Commission should let Portugal experiment. (...) You do not have to be imposing harsh,

harsh measures constantly. (...) The European Commission should chill out a bit” (Krugman 2016).

One of the most persistent critics of austerity, Krugman used phrases such as “strictness of the rules” and “imposing, harsh, harsh measures constantly” to criticise the economic orthodoxy of fiscal consolidation and structural reforms that has reigned over Europe from 2010 onwards. This economic orthodoxy is known as ‘austerity’. How did it become dominant in Europe, especially in the EU? Through the effective construction of an ideologic-rhetorical edifice, a whole vision of the world characterized by the renunciation to an optimistic view of the future, as Hay and Rosamond (2002) claim.

The ideologic-rhetorical edifice of austerity is built by a type of discourse that does not allow alternative explanations for the crisis. It does not recognize other perspectives or other voices. The power to mean is monopolized. In such a world, the crisis in Europe is not about the banking system, or the design of the euro itself. It is all about profligacy, about living beyond one's means, about accumulating extensive debt. The subliminal idea is that the debt crises or public-sector budgetary crises of some euro zone countries are the consequence of their own excesses, of their wasteful behaviour. This type of moral message, which sees pain as redemptive, gives credence to the austerity discourse.

Another characteristic of the discourse of austerity is the transformation of otherwise unacceptable policy measures into coherent, irrefutable common-sense necessities. Who is going to argue against the decency of “sticking to the rules” everyone has agreed on, or against the need to foster “confidence”, “credibility”, and the “long-term sustainability of public finances”? The advocates of austerity have been construing this rhetorical edifice since 2010, with Olympic disregard for opposition and the English-language media has been one of their main stages.

Finally, this power to define the crisis, its causes and the remedies proposed to solve it, is reinforced by the preferential access to the media by the advocates of austerity. The capacity of discourse access is a primary condition for the manufacture of the consent necessary to their exercise of power and dominance (Van Dijk 1996, p. 102).

### **3. English language media narrations of the economic situation in Poland**

Stories matter because they express the diversity and plurality of voices in society. Adopting this Bakhtinian perspective, we argue that the stories of the socio-economic situation in Poland between 2009 and 2016, voiced in English language economic media, reflect a polyphony of voices: their authors’, and their employing organizations’, as well as political ideologies. But stories also matter because they direct and disseminate the ideas of a dominant group, thus building the consensus necessary to its dominance. In this vein, we observe that the dialogue represented in the English media narrations of crisis/austerity in Poland echoes the discourse of neoliberalism.

The dominant/hegemonic character of this discourse is best evidenced by the striking confluence of its rhetoric in narratives stemming from the most diverse centres of democracy. In the present case, it becomes apparent that the Polish government not only resorted to arguments very similar to those used by the English mainstream media,

but also used these media to relay its own narrative of the crisis. In fact, the rhetoric of both the neoliberal Polish government and of the mainstream neoliberal media had been spinning a yarn of thriving economy and success. In his response to the opposition parties, which noted the contrast between the official upbeat mood and the announced rise of the value-added tax (VAT), prime minister Donald Tusk said that Poland “is unconditionally, everywhere in the world, pointed to as the only optimistic example in Europe of how to tackle the crisis” (“Tusk na zarzuty PiS...” [Tusk to Law and Justice’s (PiS) accusations...]).

The neoliberal, hegemonic English language media narrations of the economic situation in which Poland found itself within the discussed time span use rhetorical strategies of three principal types. The first category of texts — those which could be labelled as success stories — includes the articles which accentuate the free market transformation and praise the effects of the neoliberal agenda, pursued by the government until 2015. The second category of texts, while still painting a positive picture of Poland’s economy, discerns flaws and pitfalls in its construction. The third group of texts gives voice to the social problems which continued to plague Poland in the times of the European crisis. However, this criticism of the neoliberal positions does not entail a head-on confrontation. It merely signals the need to deal with the social costs of the chosen political trajectory.

Sometimes, the diverse crisis narratives conveniently converge on a single story used to provide a justification for actions and ideological positions. The success of the Polish economy as an overachiever of liberalism was juxtaposed against the picture of ailing European economies in the metaphor of a ‘green island’, which depicted Poland as the only country on the map of the European economy to have avoided recession. The then finance minister Rostowski wove a similar tale in *The Wall Street Journal*. He defined Poland’s economic success based on the country’s GDP growth figure, which doubled over the period of 20 years from the beginning of the systemic changes after the fall of communism in 1989. He argued that the reason why Poland weathered the global crisis could be ascribed to its economic and institutional resilience and well-designed economic policies.

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century the media continued to reproduce the hegemonic discourse by praising the state of the Polish economy and emphasizing the positive growth and the generally good status of the public finances. Borger and Pidd in *The Guardian* state that “Poland is currently enjoying its second [after the early years of transformation] economic miracle”. *The Economist* (“Mapping Europe’s debt, jobs and growth worries”) notes that Poland was the only country to record positive growth. In the same year *The New York Times* painted a very optimistic picture of the Polish economy against the background of the largely weakening Eurozone, by claiming that Poland has “one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union” (Ewing, Dempsey & Saltmarsh).

The same optimism is voiced in the consecutive years. In an article for *The Financial Times* (“Poland sees uptick in economy as recession fades”) Jan Cienski states that, although the industry orders are lower, the wages are growing, and the economy is

slowly recovering. According to him, Poland is one of “the EU’s strongest performers”. *The Economist* (“Well done Warsaw...”) observes that “risk-adjusted returns [for] Polish government bonds are a better bet than either German bunds or US Treasuries”.

At the time of the European credit crunch, Polish banks were reported to be performing exceptionally well. *The Financial Times*’s correspondent Cienski (“Income increases 40% at Poland’s largest bank”) reports that “the net earnings of Polish banks in 2010 rose by 41%”. Some banks even rose by the astounding 400%, such as BRE Bank, controlled by the German Commerzbank. *The Economist* (“Growing up fast”) summarized the gains the Eastern European countries made since joining the EU in 2005. Poland and Slovakia are named as the leaders of the pack, with gains of over 40% in GDP per person. Unfortunately, the statistics are not analysed any further.

In the first years of the second decade of the twenty-first century, English language economic media, while discerning some cracks that may have appeared, still paint a positive picture of the economy. Sobczyk’s and Wasilewski’s article for *The Wall Street Journal* notes that Poland managed to avoid recession, but that in order to keep the deficit low, the government will have to resort to cutting public expenditure. However, cracks aside, the English language media echo yet another neoliberal narrative: that of the explanatory power of macroeconomic indicators, capable of rendering ultimate descriptions. Indeed, in John Barley’s article for *The Wall Street Journal* (2011, 21 December) the good condition of the Polish economy is often viewed through the lens of macroeconomic indices. Although the strategy of explicating complex economic and social conditions by means of such measurements as the GDP or the inflation index has been long established in public discourse, it marginalised those voices which put into question the validity, and sometimes even the reliability, of such instruments, for the purpose of describing economies.

Indeed, doubts as to the truthfulness of macroeconomic indicators were raised by a narrow bunch of professionals and economic publications. For example, in their own study of Argentinian economy and in several other publications (some published as early as in the 1960’s, e.g., Morgenstern 1963) Cavallo, Cruces and Perez-Truglia (2016) demonstrate how governments and private companies manipulate macroeconomic indices to attain political goals. They argue that GDP, unemployment rates or the inflation indices are not enough to capture the social and economic state of societies and that this state could not be learnt from the analyses served by the media in focus. Those voices, while largely ignored by mainstream media, were heard elsewhere. One example is The New Economic Foundation which in 2015 published a report proposing five alternative indicators for a modern economy, which include the quality of jobs, wellbeing, environmental conditions, fairness related to income equality and quality of health services (Wallis 2016).

The examined media offer a few explanations for the positive state of the Polish economy at the time of the European crisis. *The Economist* (“Learning from abroad...”) provides an explanation of how Poland, who “has been one of the world’s great development success stories”, avoided the crisis. According to the article, the three reasons were: i) retaining the national currency and not pegging it to the Euro, ii) western



investment, and iii) the government's counter-cyclical fiscal policy. Yet another reason for the positive growth, according to the media, is the transfers of the EU funds. These were used to leverage the investment in the country's infrastructure, which helped to boost the economy. This effect was noted by *The Financial Times* and is represented by titles such as this one: "Steady ship remains attractive to foreign direct investment" (Cienski 2010).

However, the upbeat economic narrative reveals its heteroglot nature. Behind the success story of the Polish economy stand the tales of those who support the economy by contributing with cheap labour and long working hours. In his article in *The Financial Times*, under the very telling title "Poland's growth defies Eurozone crisis as hard work pays off", Cienski (2012) stays upbeat about Poland's economic strategy of offering cheap labour and long working hours to foreign concerns who enjoy access to well qualified workforce. Another part of the success story is narrated from the upmarket positions. Jack Ewing ("Poland skirts Euro zone woes, for now") in *The New York Times* noted that even though the crisis had not affected Poland until that time, it might do so in the not too distant future. However, for the time being, he focuses his attention on the luxury investments such as Daniel Libeskind designed skyscrapers in central Warsaw and luxury car saloons, which spring up in the country's capital.

*The New York Times's* Jack Ewing ("Poland finds it's not immune to Euro crisis") observes that the Polish government's policies aim to elevate the country's political status by tightening the bonds with the big neighbour, Germany: "When European leaders accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on Dec. 10, Mr. Tusk, the prime minister, sat next to Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the most powerful leader in Europe." This is also noted by the *FT.com*, where Cienski ("Poles repel fear of Europe's next recession") voices the same sentiment, aptly formulated in the following quotation: "Warsaw's ambition is to become Berlin's indispensable eastern neighbour in the same way that France is in the west."

Who gains with this state of affairs is made no secret. A manager of a car parts company cited in the article for *The Financial Times* (Cienski, "Poland's growth defies Eurozone crisis as hard work pays off") makes no bones about his perception of the labour market in Poland and the advantages for businesses resulting from this state: "Workers in the rest of Europe are simply lazier," he says. "Poles work harder than almost anyone else in the union and they cost less too". Comparisons with the policies of the countries of the south are clearly voiced. In *The Financial Times* Neil Buckley ("Economy: Nation avoided recession but risks persist") quotes Andrzej Raczko, the then central bank official and a former minister of finances: "Poland risks, says Mr Raczko, falling into a trap similar to Portugal, Italy or Spain, if it allows labour costs to rise without finding new sources of growth and improving overall productivity".

Some media, especially *The Guardian*, notice the dark side of the economic situation and look behind the veneer of macro economy. However, the hegemonic narrative of successful neoliberal policies is still noticeable as some of *The Guardian's* publications still uphold the myth of Poland as the 'green island' in the sea of European crisis. One example is Adam Carr's article, who writes that: "The view from Poland,

despite popular fears and the prospective hardship to be caused by the government's fiscal reforms, is still pretty rosy. Perhaps the Eurozone should take a leaf out of Poland's book – if it's not too late". However, most of this English daily's commentators point to neglect in social policies, which took a heavy toll on Poles.

The rhetoric of success remains essentially uncontradicted in the polyphonic narrative generally depicting Poland as a thriving state, albeit facing several setbacks, which ensue as a result of the chosen developmental trajectory. *The Guardian's* Polly Toynbee notes that the economy did well at the time of crisis, although Poland suffered from several social issues, including the worrying divisions between the rich and poor, the relatively low life expectancy or the high levels of child poverty. The article puts the blame on Poland's rejection of solidarity, once its trademark, and the adoption of the liberal economic and social policies: Poland's welfare state was remade after the end of communism, with World Bank consultants highly visible, arriving with their neo-conservative agenda in their briefcases. One unsurprising result is this high level of inequality (Toynbee).

*The Guardian's* commentators call for a correction of the errors caused by neoliberal policies. *The Guardian's* Pyzyk identifies the victims of these policies: the working class, the young and families. The article called for the Polish government to rediscover the true meaning of solidarity with the workers, whom the neoliberal government treated as the enemy. Leszczyński highlights the problems the young have to struggle with. Due to substandard social services, lack of jobs, unavailable medical care, expensive housing and the insufficient number of nurseries for children, Poland had one of the lowest birth rates in the world. Leszczyński concludes that the country is a terrible job market for the young, who often must work below their qualifications.

*The Guardian's* Remi Adekoya aptly summarized the many Poles' aversion to neoliberal policies, which explains why so many of them turned their backs on the then ruling parties in the 2015 elections despite the much-hyped official upbeat rhetoric:

While the West may have considered post-communist Poland a model of free-market success, many Poles felt marginalised in a society where successive governments espoused a 'sink or swim' attitude towards citizens, irrespective of whether it was the left or the right in power. Individual success was emphasised above all. (Adekoya 2016)

The criticism towards the so far apparently successful economic policies is also visible in other English language titles although on a modest scale. *The Economist* ("The German Test") states that Poland "has never been so rich, safe and free", yet "Poles are fed up". The same weekly ("Polish protests") observes that the then government's procrastination had led to public discontent. Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* (Sobczyk) observes that even though the Prime Minister Tusk "successfully steered Poland through the global financial crisis", low pay and tax increases led to popular unrest.

Mass emigration is also seen as a challenge to the economy. *The Economist* ("Poland's emigration headache") observes that 2.1m Poles are living abroad, most within Europe. In *The Financial Times* Cienski ("Poland braced for fresh exodus of young workers") concludes that the consequences of emigration are at times dire: children left



without parents, broken families and alcoholism.

However, before the general elections in 2015 *The Financial Times* voiced some sympathy towards the ruling party and its neoliberal policies. In the article titled “Poland’s success story merits another chapter” (2015) the author stresses that despite the high unemployment and low wages, the economy grew by 20% in the seven years preceding the elections. The sentiment towards the hitherto prevailing policies is hardly veiled: “Poland stands out as one of the EU’s brighter success stories. It is in no one’s interest to change the script”.

With the change of the government in 2015 the media note a turn against the neoliberal orthodoxy. While some newspapers, such as *The Guardian*, welcome the change or at least acquiesce in it, others, such as the more liberal *The Financial Times*, *The Economist* or *The Wall Street Journal*, clearly voice their discontent. *The Guardian*’s Alex Duval Smith notes that although ideological issues such as the attitudes towards immigration or conservative family life views may have caused the victory of the Law and Justice party, some voters strongly oppose the liberal economic moves.

In 2016 *The Financial Times* reports with unease a ‘farewell to neoliberalism’ (“Poland should take care in rebalancing economy”) announced by Poland’s economy minister Morawiecki in a Polish daily. The article claims that this is alarming news for international investors, who fear the new policy might lead Poland to repeat Hungary’s ‘mistakes’ of promoting a more nationalistic approach to the economy. In a similar vein, *The Financial Times*’s Nick Buckley (“Poland and Hungary seek more control over companies”) observes that Polish and Hungarian governments seek to secure national economies by nationalizing banks, introducing taxes on retail, banks, and the energy sectors.

The aversion to the abandonment of the neoliberal course in the economy is well illustrated by the title of the article in *The Economist* “Big, bad Visegrad” (2016) which criticizes the ‘illiberal agenda’ of the four countries. *The Economist* makes no bones about its negative assessment of the political shift. In the article entitled “For our freedom and yours” (2016) they criticize the pro-social moves of the new Polish government and especially the “fiscal pledges, including a generous child-benefit payment and a plan to cut the retirement age”. *The Wall Street Journal*’s article (Rohac 2016) formulates a warning for Poland against the adoption of illiberal policies which will result in “declining stock prices and expectations of further credit-rating downgrades”.

#### 4. Crisis discourses about Portugal

Latest domino to fall victim of austerity politics – this is the image of the Portuguese government given by Minder and Thomas Jr. in *The New York Times* of 24 March 2011:

Another European government fell victim to the politics of austerity on Wednesday when the prime minister of Portugal resigned after opposition parties rejected his last-ditch attempt to push through a package of spending cuts and tax increases.

The following day, *The Financial Times* takes the same line amidst allusions to the execrated word – bailout:

No way, Jose. Portugal's Prime Minister, Jose Socrates, has become the latest political figure to pay the escalating cost of the Eurozone debt crisis (...). A bail-out of Portugal looks inevitable (The Eurozone).

This section examines crisis discourses about Portugal published between 2011 – the first year of the aid programme from the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – and 2016. The examination is anchored in a sample of 37 articles circulated in three mainstream English-language newspapers – *The Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. This choice highlights both the discursive polyphony displayed by these news outlets and the tensions between the discourses. In the case of Portugal, these tensions are polarized into two fields – the pro-austerity *versus* the anti-austerity discourses. The former portrays the crisis through the lens of the financial markets in general and of the lenders, in particular. The latter focuses on the socio-economic consequences of the crisis and on the mechanisms that led to it.

The English-language mainstream media was a privileged vehicle for the dissemination of the pro-austerity crisis discourse, especially the *Financial Times*. This was the discourse of the European political elites. Barker *et al.* (2011) reported in this newspaper the warnings of European leaders that Lisbon must pass “the recently rejected austerity package before they would consider providing rescue loans”. However, the other newspapers also reflected the preoccupations of EU politicians. Wearden (2011, March 24) wrote in *The Guardian* that the European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso had urged the country to “stick to the latest reforms announced earlier this month”. Castle (2011, March 26) of *The New York Times* reported that the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, had called on competing political parties in Lisbon to commit to tough financial targets, in order to calm the markets. Merkel further said that “member states face many years of work to atone for past sins”, thereby pointing to the road of austerity as the path for correcting fiscal imbalances.

As the prime means of consent manufacturing, ideology is pervasively present in language (Fairclough 2001, pp. 3-4). Hence the importance of the rhetorical strategies used in the news coverage. In the case of Portugal, the rhetoric of fear marked the tone, especially in the *Financial Times*. Expressions such as ‘political crisis’, ‘political instability’, ‘on brink’, ‘debt crisis’ made the daily headlines in *The Financial Times*: “Portugal crisis threatens snap poll” (Wise 2011, March 23); “Lisbon government teeters on brink” (Spiegel & Wise 2011, March 23); “Lisbon nears bail-out amid political crisis” (Wise 2011, March 24). “Portugal vote puts investors on the defensive” (Smith 2011, March 24); “Euro shrugs off Portugal woes” (Garnham 2011, March 25); “S&P cuts ratings of Portugal's top five bonds” (Wise 2011, March 29); “Portugal and Greece downgraded” (Hope, Oakley & Wise 2011, March 30); “Lisbon calls early poll as borrowing costs hit high” (Wise 2011, April 1); “Portugal bond yield nears 10%” (Oakley & Wise 2011, April 5); “debt downgrade heightens prospect of Portugal bail-out” (Oakley

& Wise 2011, April 6).

The same negativist tenor is found in *The New York Times*'s headlines: "Portugal edges toward bailout as leader quits" (Minder & Thomas Jr. 2011, March 24); "European leaders press Portugal on austerity path" (Castle 2011, March 26); "Setbacks in Portugal and Ireland renew worry over debt crisis" (Thomas Jr. 2011, March 31); "Portugal hit with new downgrade" (Minder & Saltmarsh 2011, April 5).

In *The Guardian*, headlines stress the market pressures to accept bailout: "Euro hit by fears of Portuguese bailout" (Moya 2011, January 11); "Portugal teeters on brink of bailout" (Wearden 2011, March 24); "Portugal edges closer to bailout after debt downgrade" (Wearden 2011, April 5); "Portuguese government debt auction raises the stakes for bailout" (Stewart 2011, April 6); "Portugal bailout 'inevitable', says Moody's" (Inman 2011, April 6); "Portugal bows to pressure over EU bailout: Fears of fresh debt crisis in weaker euro countries. Lisbon has to find euros 5bn in repayments this month" (Elliott, Stewart & Goodley 2011, April 7); "Portugal bailout terms must be strict, EU finance ministers warn" (Tray 2011, April 8). The 'rhetoric of fear', combined with the analysis of the crisis based on the discussion of macroeconomic indicators that few really understand reinforces ideas of inevitability and of the need for taking imperative action. It is the typical 'totalitarian', monological discourse.

The anti-austerity discourse, by opposition, cannot be considered monological. It constantly interacts with the pro-austerity discourse. One can even argue that it only exists in function of the latter. This aspect is observed in the articles about Portugal. In "Portugal bailout: rights and wrongs", Pratley (2011, April 7) questions in the *Guardian* the economic rationality of imposing austerity policies to the crisis countries, not just Portugal: "the idea is gaining ground that piling greater austerity onto Greece, Ireland and now Portugal is bad economics. Where is the growth supposed to come from? Wouldn't it better to lighten the debt burden by forcing creditors to share some pain?"

In "European debt crisis: Portugal is latest domino to fall", Inman (2011, July 6) argues in the *Guardian* that the only right answer to avoid the risk of contagion to the whole euro area is for the richer nations of the EU to admit that "they made bad decisions when they bought peripheral sovereign debt", especially France, Germany and the UK, which are "up to their necks in bad debts". In "Portugal teeters on brink of bailout", Wearden (2011, March 24), of the *Guardian*, quotes Raoul Ruparel from the think tank Open Europe, who argues that "rather than simply taking a bailout, it would be better for Portugal in the long run to restructure its debt now". Monteiro and Sousa (2011, April 15) go even farther. In "The Likes of Portugal should default on their debt", they argue that a co-ordinated (ideally by the EU) debt default is preferable to bailout.

Fishman (2011, April 13) argued in the *New York Times* that Portugal's bailout was 'unnecessary': the crisis was not of Portugal's doing and the reasons for Portugal's bailout were not economic, as the macroeconomic indicators were under control. The reasons are political, he argued. In this newspaper Jennifer Szalai (2015, August 4) dubbed austerity the "diet of our lives, girder of our loins". Paul Krugman is an Op-Ed columnist, and this newspaper hosts since 2005 his economics and politics blog *The Conscience of a Liberal*.

In "Germany owes more to prodigal periphery", Olivier, Subramanian and

Williamson (2011, May 26) defend in *The Financial Times* that the German media narrative of the crisis as a morality play – the profligate periphery *versus* the responsible core – does not tell the whole story. The whole picture must recognize the beneficial effects of the euro to the German economy and therefore Germany should contribute more to resolving the crisis.

This thesis is defended by most critics of German-led austerity. Martin Wolf (2012, April 11) argued in the *Financial Times* that the adjustment should be shared between surplus and deficit countries inside the euro zone and that the “typical German position” defended by Mr Jens Weidmann, president of the Bundesbank, to solve the crisis is wrong. This strong adjective is used in the headline (“Why the Bundesbank is wrong”) however the whole article is rather tentative in style. In contrast, Mr Weidmann uses the modal verb ‘must’ five times to refer to the course proposed to the deficit countries.

We might be tempted to see the presence of both austerity and anti-austerity discourses about Portugal in the three analysed English-language newspapers as instances of ‘polyphony’ and ‘heteroglossia’ – a multiplicity of voices with their own perspectives and validity. However, if language shapes power relations, as Gramsci claimed, it becomes manifest that the anti-austerity voices do not mark a line in the sand. The austerity discourse dominates the debate in the English-language media about the European crisis in general and the Portuguese, in particular.

These English-language media also shows – often with unfeigned surprise – how much the austerity discourse was endorsed by the country’s rulers. Supported by the rhetoric of fear – the idea that it is necessary to comply with the European demands if Portugal does not want “to end up like Greece” – Portugal should therefore avoid voices critical of the EU and always defend the dominant position in EU debates – government officials, aided by a legion of opinion makers, insisted. Impeccable behaviour towards Europe was the order of the day. It is the ‘star pupil’ strategy.

In October 2011, that line of action was already clear. In an article entitled “Portugal and the euro: In the mire. Austerity, austerity – always austerity”, the British economics magazine *The Economist* (2011, October 22) summed up the core discourse of the Portuguese government: meeting the budget targets agreed on with the European Union and the IMF was mandatory. In the same article, the finance minister Victor Gaspar said: “we reject the illusion that less rigorous consolidation or even an expansionary policy would lead to a better outcome”.

The proneness of the Portuguese government to accept draconian economic conditions echoed in the examined media. Stewart (2012, July 17) wrote in *The Guardian*: “Portugal is seen as a model pupil by Euro policymakers, because it has managed to shrink its structural deficit – the part not explained by the recession – from almost 9% of GDP, to a predicted 2.5% in 2012, a feat the IMF describes as ‘impressive’”. Barber (2012, February 1) stated in *The Financial Times*: “In some respects, Portugal prides itself on being different from Greece. Its political classes are viewed in EU and IMF circles as more trustworthy. Portugal’s 2012 budget, rich in fiscal austerity and structural reform measures, has the seal of international approval”.

Wolfgang Schäuble said in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Zeit* (Brost

2012) that “Portugal is implementing its adjustment programme very well, the most recent examination by the Troika has just confirmed it”. Wise (2013, May 27) wrote in *The Financial Times* that “few, if any, crisis-hit European countries have followed the austerity programme more assiduously than Portugal”.

This rhetorical validation of austerity was met with opposition. Its critics argued that austerity measures were not a diktat imposed from above on a helpless government but that the government used the Troika as a window of opportunity to pursue reforms that otherwise would have met tremendous opposition (Freire & Moury 2013; Moury & Standing 2017). In an interview with the Portuguese news agency Lusa on 10 November 2013, Paul de Grauwe, Professor at the London School of economics, said that the star pupil strategy was a mistake: “Winning the austerity beauty pageant was a bad idea,” he said. “Portugal could have been the worst student in the class. That would have been better for the economy”. He concluded: “you have influence in the European Commission, but you don’t use it”, referring to what he saw as the government’s clear lack of initiative (*Público & Lusa*). These oppositional discourses failed to reach wide audiences, which raises the question of the importance, not only of the production of knowledge in society, but also of the access to that knowledge. In effect, discourse access is a condition for the exercise of power and dominance; however, the participation of multiple, albeit unequal, publics may also help expand discursive space, by allowing its members to widen discursive contestation, as argued by Fraser (1990).

## 5. The tears of Portugal

When the Portuguese finance minister Victor Gaspar admitted in October 2011 that the economy would contract by almost 5% and unemployment would reach a record 13.4% in 2011-12 (*Economist* 2011, October 22) workers’ organizations protested on the streets. The worst social crisis in decades hit the country, and these ‘tears of Portugal’ attracted the attention of the English-language media.

All three English-language newspapers have analysed the crisis in Portugal through the lens of its socio-economic consequences although this analysis may be considered more central in *The Guardian*. In 2011, Jon Henley, *The Guardian*’s European affairs correspondent travelled through Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece “to give human faces” to the euro zone debt crisis. He tweeted and posted photos, audio and video along the way. These posts highlight the mismatch between the no-alternative discourse of policy makers and the mood of the public. Tiago Saraiva, a Portuguese architect, wrote: “In my opinion, we can only overcome this crisis, in Portugal and Europe, by rejecting and fighting back against the financial policies that are being imposed” (Henley, 2011, October 14).

A year and a half later, in an article in *The Guardian* with the dramatic title “‘Brutal’ rise as Portugal’s jobless rate hits 18%”, Giles Tremlett (2013, May 9) voiced the same doubts as to the beneficial effects of austerity: “austerity has so far failed to achieve its main target of tackling the budget deficit, which increased last year from 4.4% of GDP to 6.4%”. However, the government remained adamant: “we are moving in the right



direction and there is no need to change the course” – implying no let-up of austerity, Wise (2013, February 26) reported in *The Financial Times*.

Portugal had entered its third consecutive year of recession. In “Portugal: Waiting it out”, Wise (2013, May 27) describes in the *Financial Times* a country in the wake of the worst recession in almost forty years, with tens of thousands of collapsed small businesses, record unemployment, unfavourable demographics, poor qualifications of the older workforce, and a welfare system being stretched to breaking point. These tales of woe offer a striking contrast with the picture of the unproductive, siesta-lovers southern Europeans found in German tabloids, especially at the peak of the Greek crisis.

Emigration was another face of the crisis. Portugal experienced a significant exodus of workers after 2011 and the numbers were in the media. *The New York Times* wrote that about 120,000 left the country in 2012 alone, out of a labour force of 5.5 million. Many were young and qualified workers. Tens of thousands of workers have moved to Britain or Germany, as well as more distant but Portuguese-speaking countries like Brazil and Angola (Minder 2014, May 6).

In 2014 the situation remained critical. Wise (2014, April 22) spoke of the “deep scars” left on Portuguese society by three years of recession: a “squeezed” welfare system (cuts in health, education and social security budgets) while unemployment soared.

At the end of 2015 a new government took office in Portugal that tried to break the austerity logic. The order of the day was to find an alternative to austerity that would not question EU budgetary and debt orthodoxy – a difficult task. However, following Paul Krugman’s suggestion in his 2016 interview in Lisbon, one could refuse the single, closed perspective of the monologue and say “Let Portugal experiment!”

## 6. Conclusion – analysis of media discourses

Juxtaposing the English language media discourses about Poland and Portugal has revealed profound similarities despite the superficial differences dictated by the diverse economic, social and political conditions.

In both countries the neoliberal, pro-austerity discourse appears as clearly dominant. The language used is simultaneously categorical, assertive, moralistic and conformist. It manufactures the political and social consent needed by the economic and political elites in both countries.

The main argument used is that austerity policies are the only way to tackle and solve the crisis and that accepting sacrifices without asking many questions is the only tactic. To assure the success of this tactic, it is mandatory that the governments promote an attitude of conformism and of compliance with the EU crisis politics. It’s the ‘star pupil’ strategy and the ‘green island’ metaphor. In this logic, the harsh social and economic effects of austerity are presented as externalities, dramatic but unavoidable.

Using thematic analysis, we found that in the case of Poland, the economic discourses in the media praised the neoliberal agenda pursued by the Polish government

until 2015 and reflected the interests and ideas of the neoliberal elite in the quest for the free market transformation of the country after the fall of communism. It is the success story narrative, the 'green island' metaphor, which presented Poland as a thriving economy in the sea of European crisis, resilient because of the people's willingness to embrace change. The media generally supported this rhetoric of success, emphasizing the importance of macroeconomic indices, but often revealing a lack of profound analysis of those indices, especially their relationship with the socio-economic reality.

In relation to Portugal, a country which, unlike Poland, was subjected to the heavy conditionality of an assistance programme, the English-language media under analysis largely reproduced the rhetoric of the necessity to comply with the demands of the markets and of the EU powers in order to avoid the Greek destiny of corruption and financial indiscipline. It is the 'star pupil' strategy, served by a type of discourse simultaneously technocratic (based on the discussion of macroeconomic indicators), 'totalitarian' (austerity as a no-alternative solution) and moralistic (austerity is necessary to atone for past sins). As in the case of Poland, this discourse adopts a market-bound optics based on the discussion of macroeconomic indices in a disconnected and oft incongruent manner. These characteristics of the pro-austerity discourse deny the intrinsic dialogic orientation of any discourse. They represent what Robinson (2011) termed the discursive 'death of the other'.

The anti-austerity articles about Poland focused on the portrayal of a reality of economic and social problems, hidden behind the official narrative of economic success. Especially in the pages of *The Guardian* we find the dark side of the Polish economic success: low wages, precarious employment, long working hours and rising social inequality. The victims of the neoliberal policies were essentially the working class, the young and the families. A dramatic effect reported in the press was mass emigration. However, in essence, the polyphonic reporting of the 'side effects' of neoliberal policies can be viewed as inclusive rather than exclusive of the mainstream, neoliberal narrative of crisis. For all the criticism that was levelled at some of its outcomes, this narrative is viewed as credible.

Symmetrically, and with reference to Portugal, the discourses critical of austerity policies discuss the mechanism that led to the crisis, analyse the reasons for the macroeconomic disequilibria, stress the social consequences of austerity and point out alternatives to austerity. The critique of austerity in Portugal also included the presence of the 'voices of the people'. This presence usually followed protest actions, or it occurred when newspaper correspondents spoke to people in Portugal, who testified their experiences and asserted their claims in a country ridden by unemployment, emigration, and a fragile welfare system. This presence was, however, relatively marginal in all the analysed media, although it can be considered to have had a more vigorous incidence in *The Guardian*.

Despite the oft proclaimed incapacity of the anti-austerity discourse to offer a critique that produce plausible alternative political strategies to the neoliberal thinking of the EU crisis politics, it may have opened doors. It may have expanded the public sphere to increasingly include the multiplicity and complexity of interests, identities and cultures

present in our societies, as advocated by Bakhtin.

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[Submitted on July 8, 2018 and accepted for publication on July 31, 2019]