

Believing in a Just-World: The Neoliberal Rationality and the Everyday Legitimation of Social Inequality

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Abstract : Neoliberal rationality is currently changing the ways concepts like freedom or equality are framed. As an omnipresent and context-sensitive paradigm, homo oeconomicus is continuously taking place in realms of life previously insulated from economic and market-driven principles. This presentation is based on the argument that, more than ever, this paradigm is nowadays framing institutional and everyday discourses in regard to social problems. Although neoliberal rationality is based on the putative ideological basis that everyone is equal, equality seems to be reshaped by specific meanings apprehended by this rationality. In this sense, an illusion of equality seems to be relevant to legitimize different social inequalities (e.g., access to health care or to habitation). Political psychology has studied how ideology is relevant to legitimize market and unequal systems, but still the specific relation between markets, (in)equality and neoliberal languages is not widely addressed. The goal is to discuss the smithereens of the neoliberal rationality when it comes to legitimizing social inequalities by contesting the arguments of meritocracy, progressive freedom and minimal guarantees obeying to market-rules and principles. This analysis can be helpful to grasp for instance the continuously dismantlement of the welfare-state in different countries of the global north and how it is turning the regulation/emancipation tension inside out. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the breaking up of a paradigm that is still too big to capture, too depoliticized and chameleonic to fully acknowledge the biopolitics of power that is helping to create it.

Keywords : discourses, legitimacy, neoliberal rationality, social inequality

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