Social justice communication scholarship and the need to challenge the rhetoric of market fundamentalism

This paper is positioned as a part of the ongoing efforts in critical scholarship to forestall a normalisation of structures of hierarchy and injustice in social order globally. It focuses specifically on the subject of social justice in the context of a globalised neoliberal doctrine that has been relentlessly offered as the only viable narrative for understanding the organisation of social life by its proselytisers. Based on the understanding that the social world is constructed through language and other communication practices this paper contends that media and communication scholarship has a crucial ethical obligation to forestall the attempts by the economic, political and cultural elites at national and global levels to impose a reductive understanding of the world as co-extensive with market functioning. The paper argues for a social justice communication scholarship that is not only useful for mounting a counterdiscourse against the allure of a pervasive neoliberal rhetoric but represents a core ethical obligation on the part of all those who see themselves as public intellectuals in contemporary global society. The paper further contends that developing a social justice sensibility and sharpening ones communicative imagination are essential resources necessary for interrogating the often beguiling and pervasive rhetoric of contemporary social order that Couldry (2010: .6) has referred to as the phase of ‘neoliberalism as meaning’, and for envisioning an alternative, liberating social order.

Keywords: partisan criticism, social justice sensibility, neoliberalism, communicative imagination, narrative imagination, moral intelligence, feedforward impulse

Introduction

In her 2007 article on social justice and neoliberalism, Janine Brodie offers an eloquent outline of the linkage to be drawn between the concepts of social justice and the globalised neoliberal doctrine that has become the standard mode of governance around the world. Noting that whilst the neoliberal project had stimulated economic growth and flows of trade, finance, and cross-border migration of labour, it had also led to a rapid widening of the gap between the rich and the poor within nations and globally, across the North-South divide. Whereas the local implementation of the neoliberal project had taken on different forms within national/regional contexts, there are similarities in the manifest outcomes involving the concentration of incomes and wealth in the hands of a few, the squeezing of the middle class, and the driver of unprecedented inequalities in income wealth, and life chances.

Brodie points out that a consistent indicator of neoliberal governance has been stalled, or even declining, human development and well-being at a time when the world was experiencing unprecedented economic growth and wealth creation, and that such a governing formula was replete with all manner of social injustices. As such, there have been increased calls for social justice and the subject is gaining some kind of revival after having been relegated to the fringes of public, academic, and political concerns for many years. In the face of the unrelenting grip of neoliberal governance and doctrine on the imagination of national political and economic elites across the world, and the glaring inequities that the neoliberal zeitgeist has wrought on national societies it is clear that the subject of social justice and the demands for a fairer, more just society will take a more prominent position in the politics of the early twenty-first century.

The concept of social justice

Social justice is a much contested concept which has at its nucleus the principles of equity and equality, and the view that there should be a number of specific benefits that individuals are entitled to on the basis of their membership of a national society, and by extension, on the ground of a person’s membership of humanity. In practical terms, social justice relates to the clamour for a state where the institutions of society will operate on the principle of equal treatment of all its members and a fair and equitable distribution of cost and benefits to all. David Boucher and Paul Kelly (1998) observed that social justice is normally taken to
imply matters of entitlements that individuals have a claim to on grounds of their membership of society, adding that such matters go beyond the traditional canon of liberal civil rights to include economic rights to basic welfare provision. Social justice, broadly, is the aspiration, principle, and increasingly, expectation of establishing a society and its enabling institutions that is founded on the moral principles of equal rights and fairness especially as relates to the affordances of equal opportunities and life chances for all members of a society, and in the equitable distribution of advantages and disadvantages in relation to efforts.

Not everyone subscribes to the idea of social justice, however. Two main criticisms of the principle and concept are that first, it is an imprecise term that seems to mean different things to different individuals; second, that there is no objective standard for measuring or determining social justice. But as Frey et al. (1996) have pointed:

The demand for a clear, objective measure of justice can serve as a ‘red herring’ that distracts us from acting in ways that do not require semantic certainties. Social justice is not the sort of thing that can ever be measured or shorn of ambiguity (ibid: 110).

They explain further that the call for communication research that is focused on social justice is not founded on any utopian idealism about a socially just society as a finished product but rather on advancing a social justice sensibility that can guide action in many situations of human interactions where issues of social (in) justice do occur. Also, Cooks (2000) has noted that, whereas the concept of social justice is an abstract one that is both politically and ideologically imprecise, it remains a powerful and inspiring goal worth pursuing.

Similarly, Robert Solomon (1989) makes a really useful point about the need to rescue the idea of social justice from the fastidious grip of intellectual argumentation when he contends that:

The very idea of justice tends to be so blown that it awes rather than motivates us. It seems to refer to something heroic – perhaps even divine – but not to ordinary motives, spontaneous gestures, and everyday actions. But the most striking and immediate result of any such grand conception of justice is that it is always at a distance, something other, a state to be hoped for or prayed for but just for that reason something probably unlikely, even impossible, perhaps even a delusion. Justice is out of our hands, a matter of personal concern perhaps but not a matter of individual responsibility. Justice is neither in the heavens nor is it merely in the mud of self-deception. It is ultimately, as Socrates argued, in ourselves, a virtuous state of character with the appropriate emotions, attitudes and actions (ibid: 335).

In other words, for those who are guided by moral and ethical concerns it is not that difficult to recognise injustices and the social relations that perpetuate them; the issue is whether one wishes to engage or not with the subject and with actions that promote social justice.

Social justice, partisan criticism, and engaged communication scholarship

Swartz (2005, 2006) has elaborated on a social justice sensibility and the role that communication scholarship can play in advancing the course of a democratic and progressive society. Although his work on social justice has been located within the specific social context and experience in the United States, the core principle and values have universal appeal and relevance. Swartz contends that an underlying ethics and value of critical scholarship is the assumption that academic critique must engage in the practical application of theoretical knowledge in order to draw from the heuristic and transformative potentials of praxis. He further contends that the goal of engaged scholars should not simply be to develop knowledge but crucially, should aim to both have a positive outcome for society, as well as to restitute the many injustices that prevail in society. Communication scholarship that is driven by a passion for social justice sees the fundamental objective of its work as the attempt to promote and shape democratic values by interrogating and unmasking social processes that sustain all forms of inequality; a widening gap between the rich and the poor; social hierarchies, and critiquing the institutions that promote and reify these inequities.

In a similar fashion, Artz (2001) points that the continuing interest of communication scholarship in matters of democracy, justice, and ethics, necessitates an unrelenting commitment to placing communication at the service of humanity. In enunciating his own social justice sensibility, Swartz highlights two unorthodox understandings of rhetoric that underpin his scholarship in social justice. The first is the aim to comprehend and to render visible the work-
ings of rhetoric in contemporary society with regards to the way it is deployed by the social, cultural, and economic elites to stifle opinion, cultural, and economic opportunities for those outside the ruling classes. Second, there is the goal of producing a 'liberating rhetoric' or an 'emancipatory counterdiscourse', described as 'the act of speaking truth to power' (2006: 2). Both these critical communication practices are seen as constituting a method that can engender new possibilities for thought, opportunity, and experience. Anchoring his enunciation of a social justice communication scholarship to Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination and to Engen's (2002) realisation of it as the 'communicative imagination', Swartz outlines his position on the value of social justice communication scholarship as one that can be understood as partisan and engaged critical scholarship. This is a scholarship that privileges the disadvantaged and that explicitly focuses on engaging with all manner of social injustices that prevail in social structures that disadvantage ordinary people.

Swartz (2005) identifies as central to the work of critical scholarship the unrelenting necessity to interrogate the rhetorical wiles through which our social, political, and cultural worlds as well as their associated histories are regularly presented to us as material truths that we have to live by, and the need to offer emancipatory alternative accounts that can lead to progressive outcomes. In adopting the term 'partisan criticism', Swartz purges the word partisan of its commonly held negative associations to persons partial to a particular political cause or outfit, with its attendant associations with acts or qualities of bias, zealotism, sycophancy, and prejudice. Instead, he deploys the term in the more traditional, progressive sense of political resistance and the critical proactive acts of reinterpretation and redescription toward disrupting the prevailing hegemonic rhetoric of our times. The rhetoric of market fundamentalism not only privileges a particular narrative of social reality but works tirelessly to exclude alternative and diverse voices.

In this context, Swartz argues that there could not be a worthier outcome for measuring the social utility of scholarship than the supersed- ing of social injustice. Social justice communication scholarship aims to unravel the rhetoric entailed in the systematic manipulations of culture such that these can be assessed in terms of social justice values. Here, the communication imagination underwrites the role of social justice communication scholarship to make visible the discourses and language regularly deployed by the social, cultural, and economic elites to sustain prevailing structures and processes of inequalities, hierarchies, and subjugation.

Social justice communication scholarship

Frey et al (1996) observe that a few communication scholars were already putting their intellectual efforts toward a critical interrogation of the processes and structures that sustain inequality and injustice, and described such works as being primarily about social justice. They describe social justice as 'the engagement with and advocacy for those in our society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally under-resourced' (ibid: 110). They point at the complementary benefits of this type of emerging communication scholarship both in terms of its potential for public good as well as the opportunity it affords its practitioners for broadening and transforming the theories, methods, and pedagogical practices of social justice. They did also observe, however, that communication scholarship that engages with the issues of social justice can be disparate and tended to be located at the fringes of the discipline, arguing for a wider pulling of energies and resources amongst scholars in the communication discipline to expanding the studies, practices, and teaching that promote social justice. In effect, Frey et al, used their 1996 paper to launch a clarion call to communication scholars to join the pioneering efforts of scholars such as Conquergood (1994, 1995), and Schmitz, Rogers, Phillips, and Paschal (1995) to engage with the subject of social justice to both extend and complement the mainstream activities in the discipline. It is the contention of this paper that the necessity for this call for media and communication scholars to engage with the issues of social justice has become more urgent and relevant in the context of an unrelenting globalised neoliberal hegemonic rationality.

Communication justice sensibility

Frey et al proposed four principles that should serve as a minimum basis for developing a social justice sensibility for public scholarship. These comprise elements of intellectual, moral, and social traditions:

- The first is that social justice scholarship should foreground ethical concerns where scholars aim to ask themselves questions about whose interests are being served by their research activities; as well as striving to get beyond engagement with epistemological discourse.
A second principle is in the commitment to engage with structural analyses of ethical problems. Such a focus should yield insights on the routine and taken for granted ways that dominant discourses, social structures and patterns of social interaction generate and sustain injustices.

The third principle entails the need for scholars to adopt an activist orientation. That is, commitment to social justice must move beyond highlighting specific instances of injustices to the arena of action that has the potential for transforming structurally sustained inequalities.

The fourth principle of social justice sensibility relates to commitment to identify with others. This fourth principle is not about the practice of “identity politics”. Rather, it is about understanding communication not as an insular, individual, process but as social interaction requiring that we locate our own ideas in the wider context of divergent opinions that can lead to a more reflexive understanding of issues in relation to other views.

This social justice sensibility is a critical perspective anchored on the principle that to the extent that we live our lives in a shared world with others there is an ethical obligation upon us to consider other people’s stories. One evident fact of our humanity lies in the sheer plurality of human existence such that, especially for communication scholarship, there is a fundamental ethical obligation in facilitating structures that enable a plurality of voices where people are able to express their own views, and project their unique selves onto the communal human consciousness through the communicative acts of speech and action.

The obligation to identify with others as a social justice sensibility is not a matter of being nice or charitable to others, however. Rather, it must be understood as an essential aspect of a truly human existence whereupon an integral and human community is contingent upon having a communicative space that excludes no one. In this sense, social justice is not about something that we do for others out of the kindness of our hearts but a recognition that is founded on the ethical principle that it cannot be right that some people are structurally disenfranchised and impoverished in a society and world of abundance. In this complementary sense of understanding the human condition social justice engagement is not about us offering our selfless generosity to assist the downtrodden in their fight against the forces that subjugate them; it reposes in our understanding that other people’s impoverishment and oppression negate our own freedom and contentment. This fourth social justice sensibility captures the essence of the Southern African ethical principle of Ubuntu, which perceives the dynamics of human sociality as a complex of reflexive allegiances and obligations that connect all human beings. It is a humanist philosophy that holds that to be human is to be obligated to one another, and that one cannot be human in isolation.

The sociological imagination

Both Swartz’s partisan scholarship and the communication justice sensibility of Frey et al explored above lean heavily on Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination that is worth exploring briefly here. In essence, Mills’ sociological imagination describes the ability to grasp the intricate interconnections between our private experiences and personal problems and the structural arrangements of our society, as well as the historical period that we live in. The sociological imagination refers to our ability to think outside the box, as it were, where the box is the familiar routines of everyday life. Such a practice or sensibility will facilitate one’s ability to discern those familiar routines in a critical manner and in new ways. Mills explains the sociological imagination as a sensibility for a clear grasp of the interconnections between the private domain and the public domain in society; the relationship between our personal problems and wider structural arrangements that may engender or compound these problems; the ongoing interactions between experience and social reality.

The sensibility of sociological imagination entails that a person must be able to imaginatively extract themselves from their social situation and contemplate their condition from an alternative perspective. Today, when the neoliberal doctrine and its multifarious deployment as policy and as modus operandi has become virtually coextensive with the condition of modern living, and one in which the well-resourced apostles of the doctrine regularly deploy the rhetoric of inevitability to reify its ideological values and justify the capitulation of the state to market functioning the necessity to develop and to sharpen the sociological imagination has never been more imperative.

The communicative imagination

In this context, Engen’s (2002) rearticulation of the sociological imagination as communicative imagination is useful and worth reaffirming.
Engen observes that ‘those with well developed communicative imagination are morally intelligent in that they recognise their connections to fellow human beings’ (ibid: 45). Engen notes that the communicative imagination is primarily a worldview or way of seeing pointing that those in whom this faculty is well developed possess both a very good grasp of the meaning production process, as well as the complex ways in which it operates in society. The communicative imagination is understood as a conscious critical perceptual state or sensibility in which a person is alert to both the intricacies and implication of day to day meaning production processes that are integral to human social interaction. Such consciousness affords a sharpened faculty for recognising the ways in which people are positioned by communication. This notion of a communicative imagination resonates with James Carey’s (1989) idea of understanding communication as a ritual. Here, communication is understood as the process of constructing social reality through symbolic properties.

Crucially, Carey’s ritual view of communication entails the social acts of sharing, participation and communion in human interactions. Understanding communication as a ritual process in the symbolic production of reality should alert us to its ordinariness. That is, communication is a natural act that humans engage in every time such that a lot of it goes on without much conscious effort or critical awareness. Carey sees communication as a common and mundane human experience and that the reason it is not readily considered a medium is that: ‘Communication, through language and other symbolic forms, comprises the ambience of human existence. The activities we collectively call communication...are so ordinary and mundane that it is difficult for them to arrest our attention’ (ibid: 24).

Drawing a parallel with Marshall McLuhan’s (1968) pithy remark: ‘One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in,’ Carey suggests that communication constitutes the environment of human existence. This implies that a conscious effort is necessary for understanding the ways that communication shapes our world and impacts on social relations, as well as the ways in which our own communication bears on our interactions with others.

In advancing the concept of the communicative imagination Engen identifies four components that work together in a reinforcing manner to facilitate a conscious way of seeing that could foster a more effective and humane interaction among humans. These are: symbolic awareness, narrative imagination, moral intelligence, and a feedforward impulse. Symbolic awareness is about understanding the essence of human communication as acts of symbolic exchange for the production of meaning. Drawing on the writings of Burke who had observed that human beings are the ‘...symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal’ (Burke 1966: 6), Engen points that symbolic awareness is about the importance of people becoming alert to the role of the symbolic in their everyday lives. Symbolic awareness is about being able to perceive the ways, obvious and intricate, in which social realities are being constructed both at the micro and macro levels of social formation.

The capacity for narrative imagination refers to the empathetic ability to put oneself in another person’s place; the ability to imagine or visualize what another person could be going through in any given situation. It calls forth both a cognitive and an affective disposition towards the condition of living of others that can trigger action and agentic intervention towards social change. Martha Nusbaum (1997), in musing on how the human mind might be activated to perceive that which is invisible, has pointed at the power of imagination to penetrate beneath the surface of matter to its inner world. This entails the human ability of interpretation that allows us to attribute life, emotion, and introspection to a form even though we have no direct sensory access to its innards. In the context of a humanist worldview the narrative imagination is about our ability to enter into the world of others by an act of imaginative sympathy. Nusbaum contends that the ability to imagine beneath the appearance of things (imaginative intelligence) helps us to develop not just our intellectual (analytic and synthetic) capacities, but also our moral capacities. For social justice communication scholarship the narrative imagination also entails a combination of capabilities that comprise what Dewey (cited in Hickman and Spadora 2009: 31) has described as the faculty that makes us ‘aware of the constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress’; an awareness of how we are structurally situated in a social system, and our ability to make sense of the world we live in. This consciousness is a precondition for our capability to envision and construct new possibilities.
Moral intelligence

Moral intelligence is about the ability to apply ethical principles to personal goals, values, and actions (Clarken 2009). It describes the faculty of knowing right from wrong, leading to ethical behaviour, and is considered to be vital for improving our ability to understand learning and behavioural processes (Coles 1997; Hass 1998). Lennick and Kiel (2005) define moral intelligence as ‘the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles should be applied to our values, goals and actions ... Universal principles are those beliefs about human conduct that are common to all cultures around the world. Thus, we believe they apply to all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious belief, or location on the globe’ (ibid: 7). Lennick and Kiel identify four competences that comprise moral intelligence as integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness.

Similarly, Borba (2002) defines moral intelligence in terms of the capacity to differentiate between right and wrong, to have strong ethical convictions, and crucially, to translate these into action that foster right and decent behaviour. Borba associates seven virtues with moral intelligence that children should be taught as: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness. Clarken (2009) notes that moral intelligence is connected to the way we think, feel, and act; and that the conative dimension is particularly crucial if moral values and conviction is to have transformative value. The bottom line is that moral intelligence is a complex, challenging and lifelong process that must be cultivated through critical awareness and reflection in an ongoing manner. The development or sharpening of our moral intelligence is vital for sustaining or rediscovering the value of sociality in the face of the relentless individualism and rapacious accumulation instigated by neoliberalism’s disavowal of society.

Feedforward impulse describes a positive orientation in which one attempts to have a better grip on any number of communication situation by anticipating the outcome of our messages and deploying an appropriate measure to adjust them to suit the context. It is about being ready or prepared for a given outcome in social interaction. A feedforward impulse as an element of a communicative imagination is what Frey at al (1991: 344), have described as ‘the management of messages for the purpose of creating meaning’. Engen explains further that the symbolic resources with which we shape our messages are bounded in the specific contexts in which they operate such that when words move from one context to another their meanings change. As such, it is good communication practice to be aware of the contingency of contexts in the ways that words and other symbolic features of messages mean something to others; and that a lack of awareness of this flexible ways in which meaning works can lead to the fallacy of ‘proper meaning superstition’ (Richards 1991: 107), the notion that the meaning of words are fixed irrespective of changing contexts in which they are used. In order to avoid this fallacy one must practice the communicative act of feedforward. Griffin (1994: 65) explains feedforward as the anticipatory act of imagining what the impact of our messages might be on an audience and taking the necessary care in crafting them towards achieving a desired outcome. Engen cites the work of Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1985), as offering further clarity to the concept in their explanation that feedforward is about the planning for, and anticipation of, particular outcomes for our messages which requires making choices about particular communicative acts that may be required.

A feedforward impulse is congruent with the other dimensions of the communicative imagination outlined above in that it is about developing an ability to imagine oneself in a different position in social interactions and being conscious of the kind of communicative strategy that is conducive to different situations. The utility of the feedforward component of the communicative imagination lies in two interrelated processes. First, is the need to be ever so conscious of the ways that it is deployed in many public messages by the political, economic and cultural elites as a Trojan horse for delivering particular understandings about our social world that veil the injustices and inequalities that they carry and that help to manage the reception of ideas that sustain a social order of hierarchy and injustice. An example of this is the populist slogan of ‘we’re all in this together’ that the new coalition government of David Cameron started to put about as a prelude to unleashing a highly uneven stream of economic re-adjustment policies on the British public in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Brady et al 2012; Stone 2013).

Second, is the value of feedforward communication, especially in a learning context, for aiding the development of empathy with others, for envisioning alternative possibilities that are liberating and empowering for individuals and for social groups. Developing or sharpening a feedforward impulse is useful for challenging
received wisdom about the social order and the ability to reposition the self in positive ways that is useful in problem solving scenarios. It is useful in practices of critical pedagogy for empowering learners, especially youth, to transgress the limits imposed upon them by the neoliberal order, to envision an alternative, liberating, future with more positive humanistic values.

This important communication skill can be deployed in the service of mounting a critical counterdiscourse against the pervasive onslaught of the rhetoric of hegemony and injustice. Engens explains the interconnections between the four dimensions of the communicative imagination by pointing that the ability to design context sensitive messages that feed-forward entails requires that one must first be interested in engaging in the communicative context, have a well developed symbolic awareness and moral intelligence, as well as a sharp narrative imagination. When these sensibilities are well cultivated they can facilitate the potential for creating messages that engage with the circumstance and story of another person as well as appreciate the basic fact that human beings are interconnected.

Media and communication scholarship, social justice, and the neoliberal challenge

These four components of a communication imagination outlined above coalesce with a social justice sensibility that informs a critical social justice communication scholarship and together serve as a useful toolbox, along with other radical strategies and approaches, for engaging with the challenges of the multifarious contexts and circumstances of injustices. They constitute a useful critical orientation for both defending against all forms of oppressive hierarchical social relations in general and for taking on the relentless onslaught of globalised neoliberal hegemony in particular.

Although there are numerous social conditions in which these values of social justice can and have been applied to reveal and to address the practices of inequities, systemic violation of people’s rights and dignity, and structural disadvantaging of social groups in contemporary times the neoliberal phenomenon at both the national and global dimensions takes a special case that serves to focus the attention of critical scholarship given its entrenchment and staying power. As Couldry (2010) has observed on this subject, neoliberalism remains a topic of contention into the early twenty-first century despite the significant revelations about its failings and the injustices that have been wrought through its pursuance as the choice model for the organisation of economic and social life for much of the late-twentieth century. Drawing on Richard Pete’s (2007) work and his reference to the class that has developed neoliberalism as a new economic and political rationality as the ‘centres of the creation of meaning’, Couldry distinguishes between three levels at which neoliberalism operates. The first is ‘neoliberalism proper’, which describes the market fundamentalist principle in which market logic reigns supreme, and has been privileged as the choice model for organising not only economic operations but also for both the political and social orders.

As a natural extension of this there emerged over the same period a wide range of ‘metaphors, languages, techniques and organizational principles’ (ibid: 5), which helped to establish and to entrench the second level – ‘neoliberalism as doctrine’. Noteworthy in this regard is the phrase: ‘There is no alternative’ (TINA), which was attributed to the former British premier, Margaret Thatcher (Berlinski 2008), and later became the ideological rallying call of the neoliberal disciples and apostles for the deployment and enactment of the neoliberal worldview and agenda. The third level at which neoliberalism operates today, in this account, is that at which it has become embedded and normalized, such that it has become virtually co-extensive with the rationality of everyday social organization and thinking. Coultdry identifies this as the level of ‘neoliberalism as meaning’, pointing that it is this third level that must engage the attention of critical scholarship. Indeed it is, because it is at this level that neoliberalism has mutated into a virulent form that has made it seemingly immune to criticism, and seemingly resistant to all existing ideological antidote aimed at stemming its spread throughout the organization of social life. This urges a number of pressing questions for critical scholars that a social justice communication scholarship is well equipped to address: how do we think beyond the ostensible inevitability of neoliberal rationality? Where are the alternative spaces from which to launch a counter-discourse against the beguiling normalcy of a globalised neoliberal worldview? What sorts of critical insurgency might we deploy to deflate the buoyancy of the neoliberal rationality?

Couldry makes the point that whereas neoliberalism operates as ideology (where ideology, for me, is understood as the politics of ideas, entailing the acts of representing ideas and...
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matters of private interests as truths of universal validity), we are afforded a better grasp of the phenomenon when we think of it more as hegemony. This Gramscian concept describes the social process by which social structures of domination and hierarchy are sustained and eventually surmounted largely by the manipulation of thought and systems of values in a social formation. Thus, neoliberalism functions as a ‘hegemonic rationality’ (ibid: 6) whose central goal is to render the complexities of life in a simple form. As such, the core goal of neoliberalism is to reduce the complexities of social life to one of market functioning. According to this rationality every aspect of our social world is to be understood as loci of market relations or as potential spaces for competitive transactions that call for reorganisation as markets, and occluding alternative narratives of how the social world can be organised.

Conclusion
The prevailing condition of inequalities in wealth, opportunities, life chances, and voice that define contemporary experience at national and global levels call for ever more concerted critical intervention to assail the relentless effort to realise the world as nothing more than one huge marketplace in which injustices and inequalities are acceptable collateral damage for a flawed social system in which only a tiny minority of humanity enjoys the spoils of market fundamentalism. Social justice communication scholarship and its attendant strategies of partisan criticism and engaged critical scholarship and pedagogy have a crucial role to play in helping to forestall a world in which widening inequality and injustice are accepted as inevitable and normal. A crucial step in the effort to interrogate the narrative that urges us to accept structural inequality and social injustice as ineluctable human condition lie in the attempt by willing communication scholars to help develop both the sociological and communicative imaginations in the public, especially youth.

To understand neoliberalism as a form of hegemony is to recognise that it can be resisted, especially at the level of meaning from which it draws its sustaining power, through a liberating counterdiscourse, but, more importantly, through a critical social justice praxis entailing real world engagement and activism. Language plays a central role in enacting and sustaining the material conditions in which social inequalities and oppression thrive, and to that extent, communication matters. As Swartz (2006, p.11) points out the vitality of communication rests on the understanding that the social world is fabricated through our communicative practices, and that in as much as communication creates understanding amongst human beings that makes sociality possible, it also creates misunderstandings that corrodes the quality of life, and hurts a lot of people. Scholars have a moral obligation to engage relentlessly with the ongoing transformation of all facets of our world into a singular form of the market, with all the inequalities and injustices that have increasingly been presented and often unquestioningly received as acceptable collateral damage for the gains of economic ‘growth’ and ‘progress’. This point about the moral obligation of intellectuals to engage with the efforts of the political, economic and cultural elites at manipulating public understanding of issues was so well articulated by Noam Chomsky (1987) when he observed that:

Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions. In the Western world at least, they have the power that comes from political liberty, from access to information and freedom of expression. For a privileged minority, Western democracy provides the leisure, the facilities, and the training to seek the truth lying hidden behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation, ideology, and class interest through which the events of current history are presented to us (ibid: 60).

Giroux (2004) has similarly argued for what he identifies as ‘the crisis of university responsibility’ involving the need to interrogate the underlying connection between ‘knowledge and power, pedagogical practices and effects, authority and civic responsibility’ (ibid: 80). He points that what educators teach is coterminous with the act of investing in public life and positioning oneself in civic conversation. As such, the responsibility of educators must be understood as part and parcel of the knowledge they produce and its effects, the social relations that such knowledge support and the ideologies so disseminated to society. Giroux contends that the exemplar of educational work is one that embodies a response to concerns emanating from the tensions and contradictions of public life which endeavours to grapple with and engage in particular problems that emerge from the material contexts of daily life.

In articulating his view on the nature of critical pedagogy Giroux points that educational work
is not only inseparable from cultural politics but crucially a participant in it. In this context pedagogy should aim to connect knowledge construction to matters of ethics, politics and power thereby pushing the political more into the domain of the pedagogical by engaging with how agency emerges within social contexts that are characterised by power relations. In other words, critical pedagogy aims to make the learning process into the political mechanisms for achieving tangible progressive realisations.

Media, communication and cultural studies scholarships are well positioned to engage with the neoliberal hegemonic rationality and its agenda to transform all of social life into one giant marketplace given our privileged grasp of the manner in which language contributes, often insidiously, to the sustenance of unequal relations and social injustices.

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