

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE, THE FAR RIGHT AND THE HIDDEN UBIQUITY OF NEOLIBERALISM

ELIZABETH MEADE

Abstract: This article argues that a contributing factor to the rise of the far right is a lack of knowledge and understanding of neoliberalism among the general population, specifically how neoliberalism is a leading cause of global inequalities and injustices. Drawing on the work of Fricker (2007), Medina (2012; 2013) and Spiegel (2022), I suggest that the absence of a sustained public discourse addressing the root causes of social and economic inequality can be understood as a form of epistemic injustice, as knowers are restricted in their capacity to make sense of their lives. In turn, they are more susceptible to far right rhetoric and disinformation that seems to offer them a narrative that explains their struggles. In the final section of the article, I look at one way that development education (DE) can help to address this aspect of the problem. I argue that DE needs to return to its radical roots, and refocus on its commitment to explore ‘the root causes of local and global injustices and inequalities in our interdependent world’ (IDEA, 2020: 13). Additionally, DE ought to go further still and empower people to see that neoliberalism is a choice, and not an unwavering natural condition. DE must foster pedagogy of hope in opposition to the lingering Thatcherite legacy that ‘there is no alternative’. We must dare to imagine that another world is possible.

Keywords: Epistemic Injustice; Neoliberalism; Development Education; The Far Right.

Introduction

One of the features through which neoliberalism has come to be the dominant ideology of our time, with devastating consequences for global communities and the very sustainability of our planet, is its hidden ubiquity. The hegemony of

neoliberalism renders it almost nameless, certainly in the everyday discourse of ordinary working people who have fallen prey to the dominance of market forces and the encroachment of private market interests into increasing aspects of their lives. As David Harvey wrote:

“Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005: 3).

This article argues that a contributing factor to the rise of the far right is a lack of knowledge and understanding of neoliberalism among the general population, specifically how neoliberalism is a leading cause of global inequalities and injustices. Drawing on the work of Fricker (2007), Medina (2012; 2013) and Spiegel (2022), I suggest that the absence of a sustained public discourse addressing the root causes of social and economic inequality can be understood as a form of epistemic injustice, as knowers are restricted in their capacity to make sense of their lives. In turn, they are more susceptible to far right rhetoric and disinformation that seems to offer them a narrative that explains their struggles. In the final section of the article, I look at one way that development education (DE) can help to address this aspect of the problem. I argue that DE needs to return to its critical origins, and refocus on its commitment to explore ‘the root causes of local and global injustices and inequalities in our interdependent world’ (IDEA, 2020: 13). Additionally, DE ought to go further still and empower people to see that neoliberalism is a choice, and not an unwavering natural condition. We must dare to imagine that there are socially just alternatives.

Neoliberalism: hiding in plain sight

One of the most serious problems of contemporary capitalism is socio-economic inequality (Piketty, 2014). The 2022 *World Inequality Report* finds that the poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all, possessing just two per cent of the total. In contrast, the world’s richest ten per cent own 76 per cent of all wealth (Chancel et al., 2022: 10). In Ireland, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) annual Survey on Income and Living Conditions report showed that there were 89,288 children living in consistent poverty in Ireland in 2022.

This was a 40 per cent increase from the year before (CSO, 2023). Global inequality is rising under the dominant economic ideology of our time. This situation is neither inevitable nor unavoidable.

Although initially conceptualised as an economic model, growing in global dominance over the last fifty years, neoliberalism's pernicious reach stretches far beyond our economic affairs (Brown, 2019; Giroux, 2008; McCloskey, 2022). Neoliberalism is also understood as a form of political, cultural and subject production (Brown, 2019), shaping people's social relations, desires, values and identities (Giroux, 2008). A central feature of neoliberalism, as Wendy Brown reminds us, is its 'drive to economize all features of existence, from democratic institutions to subjectivity' (Brown, 2019: 11).

Despite the extent to which this ideology has wreaked havoc around the world, it is rarely identified in popular mainstream discourse. The dominance of capitalism has come to be regarded as common sense, and unquestionable, as though it was a natural law that we must simply accept and learn to live with. This is unsurprising given that the long history of systemic violence used by the powerful to enforce this oppressive economic system is neglected almost to the point of its eradication (Angus, 2023). Consequently, the metaphysical view of human nature as inherently greedy, self-interested and competitive, which justifies capitalism, likewise commonly goes unchallenged. As the journalist George Monbiot succinctly wrote in relation to neoliberalism, 'what greater power can there be than to operate namelessly?' (Monbiot, 2016).

A central feature of neoliberalism is strong individualism and the collapsing of public issues into private concerns. Success is governed by individual effort in the level playing field of life, or so the story goes. Put forward initially as a way to address inequality by the centre-left, the idea of 'equal opportunity' convinced people that if they worked hard enough, and tried their best, their efforts would be rewarded. The prevalent belief in meritocracy serves to reinforce individualism and the mistaken faith in what Michael Sandel called 'the rhetoric of rising' (Sandel, 2020). But as Sandel argued, inequality is built into the fabric of the system. In a deeply unequal world, one's good fortune is mostly determined by accident of birth. The wealthier parties will always have the

resources to maintain the relative gap. Meritocracy is a myth. Nevertheless, for many, faith in this meritocratic myth persists. This is unsurprising given that it is reinforced by hegemonic mainstream discourse that encourages people to simply try harder. Social ‘winners’ mistakenly believe themselves to have earned their position, while those at the bottom of the economic ladder are told to blame themselves even though they could do little to change their circumstances (Monbiot, 2016; Stanley, 2018; Sandel, 2020). The ‘winners’ are also kept from seeing reality as it is. They are ‘blind to their own blindness’ (Medina, 2013: 75).

These dominant neoliberal myths often clash with the everyday lived experience of many people, who, despite seemingly playing by the rules, still struggle daily. Growing wealth and income inequality compels people to question why, despite doing their very best, they are finding it increasingly difficult to secure stable housing, access basic health care and obtain non-precarious employment. People have a growing intuition that something is amiss. However, as the ideology of neoliberalism is so embedded in the dominant culture, and dominant media, one finds little conceptual help in mainstream collective interpretative resources to answer their concerns (Spiegel, 2022). Whilst staying within the competitive logic of neoliberalism, and in the absence of the identification and critique of the system itself, it may seem logical to believe false narratives and disinformation that blame marginalised and othered communities as somehow skipping the queue or taking your fair share. If one knows that they are doing their very best, and yet they struggle daily, the lacuna created by an absence of a critique of neoliberalism can easily be filled with anti-migrant and anti-refugee narratives.

In the next section I examine how one of the causes of the recent global rise of the far right is the ability of these nefarious actors to take advantage of people’s concerns and anger and exploit it for their own gain.

Neoliberalism and the rise of the far right

In recent decades, far right parties have made huge gains and surged to power across the globe. They include: Orbán in Hungary (2010), Putin in Russia (2012), Modi in India (2014), Erdogan in Turkey (2014), El-Sisi in Egypt (2014), Duterte in the Philippines (2016) and Bolsonaro in Brazil (2018). More recently, we have seen this phenomenon spread to countries with a long history of stable democratic

institutions. For example, the Finns Party in Finland, the Sweden Democrats in Sweden and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany. We can add to this growing list the surprise success of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom in the Netherlands in November 2023. Although to date Ireland has been a notable outlier to this widespread trend, having no electorally viable anti-immigration radical right wing party, a rise in anti-migrant and anti-refugee protests since November 2022 reminds us that we are not invulnerable to the far right (Gallagher, O'Connor and Visser, 2023).

For those in Ireland still unwilling to believe that far right ideology could gain a foothold and pose a threat to the stability of democracy, the street group violence in Dublin city centre on 23 November 2023 brought the discussion centre stage. Rioters, in part spurred on by far right rhetoric and the spread of false information on social media, caused significant public damage and disorder. We have yet to see if the rise in far right discourse will lead to the growth of an electorally viable political party, but we must accept that it is certainly a possibility.

A welcome report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) into the online ecosystem of mis- and disinformation and conspiracy theories in Ireland, revealed that judging by online interactions the influence of the far right is growing (Ibid.). The report examined how the mis- and disinformation ecosystem has been co-opted by far right actors who have 'diverted attention towards targeting vulnerable communities' (Ibid.: 4). The report also claimed that the far right took advantage of the chronic housing crisis and lack of action by government to increase basic services in certain areas, to spread misinformation and exploit this anger (Ibid.). A similar point was made by academic Rory Hearne who argued that Ireland's unprecedented housing crisis is 'a gift to far-right fearmongers' (Hearne, 2023).

The connection between people's anger and frustrations at growing inequality, dissatisfaction with the failure of mainstream politics to improve their situation, and a turn towards far right politics, has been widely researched and acknowledged (Bonanno, 2019; Brown, 2019; Clewer, 2019; Fuller, 2023; Havertz, 2019; Rossi, 2023). Rossi's work points out that it ought not to be understood as a simple overt opposition to neoliberalism, as populism and

neoliberalism are more intertwined and complex than a simple opposition might imply (Rossi, 2023). Stressing an important point, Rossi argued that although ‘populism’ is ‘effectively tapping into the discontent created by neoliberal economic policies’, often the rise of ‘populist’ parties has actually strengthened neoliberalism (Ibid.: 2). Rossi referenced the work of De La Torre (2017), who showed that in Latin America, for example, the rise of populist discourse among leaders was combined with the actualisation of neoliberal economic policies (Ibid.). A similar point is argued by Bonanno (2019), who stressed that although many commentators viewed the turn to ‘populist’ parties and agendas, such as Brexit, as a revolt against neoliberal globalisation, these changes did little to address the problems and ushered in more of the same, ‘enhanced deregulation of markets, the dismantling of welfare programs, the stigmatization of labour unions and the implementation of reforms that benefit the upper class’ (Bonanno, 2019: 16).

Bonanno’s point reinforces the argument in this article. I contend that a reaction to the consequences of neoliberalism ought not to be understood as a conscious reaction to neoliberalism. An important distinction needs to be made here. A rejection of the consequences of neoliberalism is not the same as a rejection of neoliberalism itself. If one does not have the epistemic insights to identify neoliberalism as the problem, then they can be more easily persuaded that the problem lies elsewhere. Those who have been persuaded by far right discourse have found erroneous counter narratives that speak to their dissatisfaction and offer an explanation for the relative hardships of their lives. A turn to the far right could be seen as an indication that they have failed to identify neoliberalism as the problem, as the far right does not offer an alternative to neoliberalism. As many scholars have rightly pointed out (Rossi, 2023; Clewer, 2019; Bonanno, 2019), the far right has done nothing to address the problems that fuel people’s anger and resentment,

“Mobilising hatred, it likewise relies upon ignorance. The demagogue has very little to say about the real causes of human suffering under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism which are mystified and personified as the product of the maleficence of those constructed as ‘enemies of the people’” (Clewer, 2019: 498).

The framing of the discourse in relation to the far right in mainstream media and politics has also contributed to these phenomena. Mondon and Winter (2020) argued that dominant discourses around the rise of the far right contributed to their legitimisation and diverted attention away from the systemic and structural causes of racism and inequality which are firmly rooted in the policies, practices and ideologies of the liberal mainstream. Framing the problem as solely an issue of racism and xenophobia, attributed to certain communities, they argue, can be used to reaffirm classism and distract people from an important class analysis (Ibid.). In the absence of a sustained analysis of the legitimate source of many people's anger and frustration, the attraction of the far right may seem more appealing to people who see that their concerns are being overlooked. Sadly, the evaluation of the multiple crises that haunt us, offered by the far right, is steeped in bigotry, racism and xenophobia. Once attracted to far right misinformation, racism and xenophobia are easily spread through tropes designed to convince people that their way of life is threatened by fictionalised and vilified 'others'.

This analysis is supported by the work of Cas Mudde (2019), who showed that mainstream media can often contribute to the rise of the far right by creating a breeding ground for such ideology. This is seen in the xenophobia and racism spread by tabloid media, even if they do not state explicit support for far right actors who look to benefit from the spreading of such attitudes (Mudde, 2019). Aaron Winter made a similar point when interviewed for the 'Resisting the Far Right' report, noting that many of the ideas and attitudes of the far right, such as racism and Islamophobia, 'are institutionalised in European liberal democracies' (Cannon et al., 2022: 15). In order to counter the far right, there is a need for a wider discourse and education around the root causes of systemic racism, injustice, inequality, and a focus on the need for radical system change.

The 'Resisting the Far Right' report highlighted the need for the state to pay more attention to inequality issues that often bolster the attraction to the far right who piggyback on such issues to gain attention (Ibid.). The report stressed the need for education and awareness building. However, despite the finding that inequality creates anger and frustration that can be co-opted by the far right, there

is no explicit mention of neoliberalism as a leading source of such inequality and, as such, no focus on the need for education around neoliberalism in particular. Due to the large body of scholarship in this area, it is clear that the felt consequences of neoliberalism add to people's dissatisfaction with mainstream politics. However, as I have noted, dissatisfaction with the consequences of neoliberalism is not the same as an identification of neoliberalism as the source of the problem. I am arguing that an important missing piece of the puzzle is a clear identification among the wider public of neoliberalism as the root cause of many of the problems that concern them.

In the next section I propose that the exclusion of a discussion of neoliberalism in mainstream political discourse can be understood as an epistemic injustice issue. This can be seen as an infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduces their capacity to avail of epistemic resources that would otherwise help them to understand the world. I argue that the omission of class from political left discourse and practice in recent decades is of particular relevance to the growth of the far right.

Neoliberalism and epistemic injustice

Epistemic injustice is an area of epistemology that is interested in the cross-over between epistemology and ethics in our everyday epistemic practices. Miranda Fricker's pioneering work in the area examined epistemic interchanges that are negatively affected as a result of people's social positioning, prejudice, and social identity (Fricker, 2007). An important insight provided by Fricker was how social power can constrain one's ability to understand their experience and make their experience intelligible to others. Fricker named this phenomenon 'hermeneutical injustice'. For Fricker, hermeneutical injustice occurs 'when a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences' (Ibid.: 1). Fricker went on to explain collective hermeneutical gaps as preventing 'members of a group from making sense of an experience that is in their interest to render intelligible' (Ibid.: 7).

Although stretching the concept beyond Fricker's original formulation, I am proposing that a lack of attention given to neoliberalism in mainstream discourse, accessible to the general population, leaves communities at a

hermeneutical disadvantage in their attempt to understand the conditions of their lives. Fricker understood hermeneutical injustice as the absence of the epistemic resources needed to communicate marginalised experiences. It is when interpretative resources do not exist owing to the exclusion of marginalised groups from collective meaning making practices. Fricker's specific understanding of hermeneutical injustice is not applicable in this case as neoliberalism is a known and identified ideology and is certainly part of the vocabulary of certain communities, such as academics and activists. However, I am claiming that the absence of an accessible discourse naming, and making neoliberalism known in mainstream politics, culture and media, renders many communities ignorant of its existence and therefore impaired in their ability to understand the world. Furthermore, it is in the interest of these communities that neoliberalism be known and understood.

The concept of epistemic injustice has been broadened considerably since Fricker's original work. José Medina has shown how differently situated subjects have varying access to certain forms of knowledge; 'a complex society often contains diverse publics with heterogeneous interpretative resources and practices' (Medina, 2012: 210). There are a variety of hermeneutical interpretative resources, belonging to differently situated subjects. In an unequal society, knowledge is also unequally distributed. Social power has an impact on collective forms of social understanding. Kristie Dotson's work on 'epistemic exclusion' articulated another form of epistemic injustice whereby epistemic resources do exist but are blocked or excluded from the dominant systems (Dotson, 2012). Dotson explained how the epistemic insights of marginalised subjectivities can be excluded from the dominant culture and the prominent shared hermeneutical resources. The exclusion of a discussion of neoliberalism is not quite the same, as in this case it is the omission of epistemic resources that would help to explain the actions of the powerful that are obscured and hidden from the public. This safeguards power that rests on the exploitation of others. Intentional or otherwise, this prevents a widespread understanding of neoliberalism and the realisation that the dominant economic, political and cultural *modus operandi* is a choice and therefore can be overturned. Common to both cases is that the exclusion damages not only individual knowers but also 'the state of social knowledge and shared epistemic resources' (Ibid.: 24).

In his article 'The Epistemic Injustice of Epistemic Injustice', Thomas Spiegel argued that the lack of attention given to class and classism in research on epistemic injustice is itself a form of epistemic injustice. He convincingly argued that this lacuna serves to uphold existing structures of hermeneutical injustice and, although perhaps unintentional, the omission of class from research on epistemic injustice lends support to the continuation of neoliberalism (Spiegel, 2022). We can apply this analysis to society more generally. The lack of attention given to the socio-economic subordination of people contributes to the epistemic oppression of these communities. As Spiegel said, 'the vast majority of people are being systemically misled by neoliberal propaganda about their standing in the social world' (Ibid.: 85). Hegemonic political and economic discourse mainly reinforces and defends neoliberalism, even when done so unwittingly, as those who benefit from the continuation of the system may themselves be unaware of their blind adherence to this ideology. It has become an article of economic faith. The proliferation of neoliberal propaganda is a supra-personal phenomenon that serves to uphold a type of collective social blindness.

This problem is compounded by the wider contemporary neglect in left politics of class as a concept for understanding social injustice more broadly. Recent decades have seen a marked shift away from an emphasis on class as a crucial concept in the political left's discourse and practice in favour of a focus on forms of systemic violence in relation to cultural and identity categories. Nancy Fraser (1997) framed this separation as a shift towards centring systemic injustices related to a 'politics of recognition' and a neglect of socioeconomic injustices that calls for a 'politics of redistribution'. The erosion of class politics has coincided with the growth of identity politics. A lack of conscientisation around class, as a crucial concept for understanding growing inequality under neoliberalism and capitalism more generally, leaves an epistemic gap that can be exploited by far right discourse. Furthermore, the prioritising of identity politics to the exclusion of socioeconomic injustice can breed social polarisation and affords the far right the opportunity to position certain identities as gaining at the expense of others in a fabricated zero-sum game. In addition to exploiting a decrease in political class consciousness, Kenan Malik has argued that the reactionary right has further

gained from an embrace of identity politics as far right ideology often appeals to right wing identitarianism (Malik, 2023).

The multiple forms of systemic violence created and upheld through neoliberalism, and capitalism more generally, affect the lives of different communities in intersecting and interrelating ways. In contrast to a politics defined by solidarity and universality that seeks to unite and build capacity across various struggles and movements, identity politics can sow division. Additionally, movements that focus on cultural and identity issues in isolation from the class content of capitalist domination negate the transformative and emancipatory potential of their demands (Santos, 2024). As Santos (Ibid.) has rightly stated, when social justice analysis also contains an explicit focus on redistribution it poses more of a threat to neoliberalism than when the focus is on cultural and identity issues alone. What is called for is a universalist perspective grounded in solidarity that works towards capacity building across various struggles and movements (Malik, 2023), with demands that call for radical transformative solutions that seek to address the underlying root causes of all forms of systemic violence (Fraser, 1997). This must include a focus on socioeconomic inequality, redistributive justice, and a foregrounding of class as a crucial concept for understanding and working to eradicate capitalism in all its forms.

Reflecting specifically on the rise of the far right, Mondon and Winter argued that the framing of the mainstream discourse around the far right can be seen as a decoy 'diverting our attention away from new political imaginaries' (2020: 6). In turn, by not adequately addressing the concerns of people who are attracted to the far right, existing inequalities are reinforced and knowers are diverted away from considering radical alternatives to the current system (Ibid.). The absence of a critical understanding of neoliberalism renders people more susceptible to disinformation. Sadly, the growth of the far right sows division and hatred, turning communities against one another, vilifying the oppressed and preventing solidarity across communities who are all suffering as a result of neoliberalism.

The possibility of building solidarity across global communities, amongst people who are suffering as a result of our broken system, is severely

hampered in the absence of critical knowledge of neoliberalism. In the final section I argue that foregrounding a critical focus on neoliberalism as a root cause of global inequality and injustice is one contribution that DE can make to address the problem of the rise of the far right, particularly in the informal and community education sector.

How development education can help to address this problem

Education can serve to accentuate or alleviate hermeneutical gaps and silences that have been created over time through unequal social practices and positioning. As a critical understanding of neoliberalism is a public epistemic gap, facilitated by the dominance of neoliberal propaganda, education is one way to help to address this need. Paul Carr and Gina Thésée argued that a greater focus on political literacy in education can assist in countering neoliberal ideology and empower marginalised groups to organise and resist (Carr and Thésée, 2008). They emphasised the need for a politically literate population, ‘supported and nourished through public education’, as a key consideration in the discussion on neoliberalism (Ibid.: 177).

Given the origins of DE and its focus on tackling the root causes of poverty, injustice and inequality, one would imagine it to be well placed to address neoliberalism through a focus on global injustice (McCloskey, 2022). Sadly, this is often not the case. In many instances DE leaves neoliberal growth and globalisation ‘in the shadows’, or worse, provides implicit support (Selby and Kagawa, 2011: 25). The recent report by Harm-Jan Fricke shows that neoliberalism is a neglected focus in DE in Ireland. Although limited in scope, Fricke’s research found that the DE sector ‘appears to give little attention to a systemic exploration of root causes of poverty, inequality, injustice’ (Fricke, 2022: 42). Despite DE’s origins in critical pedagogy, regrettably the mainstreaming of DE has seen a shift away from a critical focus marked by an increasing political detachment. In his research, Fricke explored the question of what might be preventing the DE sector from critically addressing neoliberalism despite the necessity to do so in order to stay true to its radical roots and intent. Two such noted possibilities, based on the responses by DE practitioners, were a fear of a loss of funding and that international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have perhaps become comfortable operating within the very system that sustains

the many crises they seek to address (Fricke, 2022). Although often unintentional, it would seem that DE has weakened its analysis and practice, and consequently its transformative potential as a result of becoming co-opted to work within neoliberalism.

Thanks to the work of Bracken and Bryan (2011), we can see that a focus on understanding and assessing the root causes of global poverty and inequality is also a neglected area in the post-primary curriculum in Ireland. The new emphasis on global citizenship education (GCE) provides a welcome opportunity to reassess this omission, provided that the approach is one of critical GCE. In the absence of a critical approach, GCE is in danger of becoming another educational placebo that serves as a pretend treatment to society's ills without substance or effect (Gillborn, 2006). A non-critical approach risks playing into the hands of neoliberal propaganda as it can be used to point to a focus on social justice education in schooling, despite not addressing the root cause of many of the problems. An uncritical approach to GCE can be demonstrated through the almost wholesale acceptance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) despite an underlying emphasis on the need for rapid economic growth (Klees, 2024). As Steven Klees reminds us, 'we will not grow our way out of our multiple crises' (Ibid.: 2) and many of the noble SDGs can never be achieved whilst staying within the neoliberal paradigm.

Racism and racial inequality cannot be systemically contested without opposing the power of neoliberalism (Robbins, 2003). Through critically addressing neoliberalism, DE can also help to challenge nativism, xenophobia, and racism, which are spread and exploited by the far right. The politics of racial superiority is not a recent development and predates the acceleration of neoliberalism. However, centuries of colonialism, and the continued presence of the 'coloniality of power' in shaping the world, is an important historical context that ought not to be overlooked (Quijano, 2000). As a late stage of capitalism, neoliberalism is deeply interconnected in the history of racial oppression (Quijano, 2000; Andrews, 2021). The invention of 'race' to justify the subjugation and exploitation of black and brown bodies for profit provides an important contextualisation that helps to understand the continuation of such practices through neoliberal globalisation. Effective DE ought to enable people to

make connections across local and global social justice issues. As Bryan has argued, this can help people to see how their lives are deeply interconnected with the lives of seemingly distant others, and how their decisions and the decisions of powerful forces in the global North impact communities around the world. The growth of such awareness can help people to see the connections between local policies and practices and many push factors that force people into migration (Bryan, 2011).

For those of us in social justice education, a failure to address neoliberalism and make it known and understood is, I believe, an example of what Medina called ‘a failure in hermeneutical responsibility’ (Medina, 2012: 215). By not critically addressing the leading ideology of our time, DE is contributing to the continuation of this death economy and the continuation of the myth that capitalism is natural, unchangeable and everlasting. We need to go further than mere critique, and empower and encourage communities to dare to imagine other radical possibilities for collectively managing our economic and political lives. We need to fuel imaginations and challenge hopelessness by exploring economic alternatives to neoliberalism, such as, for example, participatory economics (Hahnel, 2022; Albert, 2004). Continuing the legacy of Paulo Freire, for decades Henry Giroux has been one of the most prominent writers arguing for a foregrounding of critical literacy in education:

“There is no radical politics without a pedagogy capable of awakening consciousness, challenging common sense, and creating modes of analysis in which people discover a moment of recognition that enables them to rethink the conditions that shape their lives” (Giroux, 2022: 142-3).

Concluding thoughts

I have argued that despite neoliberalism being a leading cause of global inequality and injustice, it mainly goes unnamed, unnoticed and unaddressed in mainstream public discourse and educational spaces. The hegemony of neoliberalism and the prevalence of propaganda to ensure the proliferation of dominant neoliberal myths make it very difficult for many people to name and understand this ideology. I have proposed that this can be understood as a form of epistemic

injustice. This injustice breeds many other forms of injustice. In the absence of this knowledge communities are left more vulnerable to far right narratives that erroneously claim explanatory power for the issues that trouble them. Far right hatred and nativism channel people's anger in the wrong direction, orientating them to look down the social hierarchy and blame marginalised others for their struggles, rather than looking up towards the powerful who orchestrate the system. This sows hatred among communities that are suffering from the effects of the same system. Perhaps if people were armed with an understanding of neoliberal globalisation, and an awareness of how the system creates mass involuntary migration, displacement, racism, and inequality both at home and abroad, communities could work together to grow solidarity and direct their collective energies to addressing the real culprit.

An additional loss that can be thought of as another consequence of this particular epistemic injustice is the loss of the freedom to imagine economic alternatives. Consequently, we lose possible futures that we could stand to gain through a collective mobilisation of global communities who suffer as a result of neoliberalism. An old saying comes to mind: 'the greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist'. But neoliberalism does exist, and it is turning the world into a living hell, with literal fires and floods consuming homes and habitats around the world. As hyperbolic as that may sound, it is sadly true, and without radical system change in the very near future, such effects of the climate crisis will only increase (Kahn, 2008; Kahn, 2010; Wissen and Brand, 2021). In doing so, it will further drive inequality, displacing ever increasing numbers of people, pushing involuntary migration, and destabilising global living conditions. In turn, this will create more anger and frustration that in the absence of understanding the true source of the problem could shift more people towards an increasingly extreme far right. We must defy Thatcher's legacy, and the false claim that there is no alternative. 'Things do not have to be this way' (Mondon and Winter, 2020: 4).

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Elizabeth Meade lectures in Global Citizenship Education, Social Justice and Philosophy of Education in the Department of Education in Maynooth University. She is also a member of the Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy in Maynooth University. Her main research interests are in critical GCE, democracy and education, and the community of philosophical inquiry as public pedagogy.