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ABSTRACT

Although dominant discourses of various kinds are frequently reproduced on talk radio, the fundamentally collaborative nature of the medium also means that it is able to serve as a channel through which to challenge these discourses. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, this article examines how neoliberal ideology structures discussions around 'service delivery protest' on South African talk radio, and explores some of the roles that talk radio is, and is not, able to play in constructing resistance to neoliberal ideology. Our analysis yielded two discourses, namely: *naturalisation of the commodification of everyday life*, and *market over welfare* – both of which seemed to cohere with neoliberal frameworks and rationalities in different ways. We conclude by suggesting how radio can be used to denaturalise neoliberalism's impulse towards making common sense conditions that enable economic oppression and exploitation.

In South Africa, many poor and working class black[1] communities have limited access to basic services, such as water, housing, sanitation, electricity, adequate food, and health care. Added to this, people living in these communities are largely excluded from participation in South Africa's supposedly democratic decision-making processes (see Friedman, 2019). While the current democratic government has the enormous challenge of redressing apartheid legacies, including a backlog of service provision, many issues facing contemporary South Africa cannot be attributed to historical factors alone (Bond, 2000; McDonald & Pape, 2002). Through the adoption of numerous economic programmes, South Africa's post-1994 liberal democracy has seen the implementation of neoliberal capitalist reforms that exacerbated the country's high levels of poverty through a 'hollowing out' of the State, privatisation and undermining of redistributive justice (Saul, 2001). Although the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's ruling political party since 1994, has overseen an expansion of service provision in the country – including the provision of social grants – access to social services is constrained by people's (in)ability to pay for these (see McKinley, 2001; Von Schnitzler, 2008). Limiting people's access to the fulfilment of basic human needs in this way threatens the safety and well-being of millions of,

mostly black, South Africans. Such restricted access to basic services like water, sanitation, food, housing and healthcare renders neoliberalism a kind of structural violence.[2]

In response to the structurally violent character of neoliberalism, South Africa has seen a marked increase in public protests over the last decade. Indeed, despite discrepancies in the total reported number of protests, the trend across all available datasets indicates an increase in public protest frequency over the last decade (for specific statistics, see Powell, O'Donovan, & De Visser, 2015; Runciman et al., 2016). These protests, often referred to as 'service delivery protests', are seen by many as a response to service delivery failure nationally. However, there is some contestation about the use of 'service delivery' to characterise such protests as the term is said to capture inadequately the complex underlying political issues, such as citizenship, social inclusion and human rights of people living in marginalised communities (see Mottiar & Bond, 2012; Pithouse, 2011).

These protests reflect a contradiction in the shift from the ANC's promise of a retributive – and even socialist – democracy to the reality of liberal capitalist democracy which entrenched apartheid inequalities and reified the country's historically constituted socio-economic injustices (Alexander, 2010; McDonald & Pape, 2002). Although these protests range in their political orientation, ideological stance, effectiveness and methodology, constructions of protesters within hegemonic discourses are typically dislocated from the realities of structural violence (see Drury, 2002; Robins, 2014). Indeed, discourses of this kind are guided, shaped and informed by the tenets of neoliberal doctrine, which, in its most basic premise, attempts to subject human freedoms to free, or marginally regulated, markets, wherein almost every aspect of social life is privatised and/or marketised (see Harvey, 2005). These markets are, however, 'free' only insofar as they structure the life of citizen populations, and the State may be called upon to intervene in economic markets on behalf of the finance sector, as was observed in the 2008 global financial crash (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2014). It is against neoliberalism's hegemonic, and therefore 'commonsensical', logic that within public discourse, particular protests (that is, those that are least socially and financially costly) are deemed legitimate, lawful and/or ethical, while others (typically, those that are socially disruptive, economically costly and/or do not conform to legislative regulations) are constructed as less legitimate.

There has been some debate over the extent that public protests contest the hegemonic neoliberal order (for a fuller discussion, see Alexander, 2010; Booysen, 2007; Runciman, 2016). However, whether or not a protest is expressly concerned with neoliberal policies and/or challenging the system of neoliberal capitalism more broadly, every protest is, in part, a reaction to specific outcomes of deleterious neoliberal policy. As Runciman (2016, pp. 431–432) emphasises, it is important to acknowledge 'the incremental and often contradictory ways in which resistance to a hegemonic force will be forged'. Furthermore, it is useful to unpack how discourse sustains, manages and challenges neoliberal ideology, as well as the discursive limitations thereof.

Despite talk radio's potential for disrupting hegemonic discourses through its affordance of a democratic public sphere (Bosch, 2011), most research on talk radio in South Africa has relied on content analyses. Indeed, while research in other contexts has utilised discourse analysis to explore the role that talk radio plays in sustaining ideological dominance (e.g. Krebs, 2011), little contextually-sensitive discursive interpretation has been extended towards South African radio (Bosch & Mullins, 2012). Accordingly, in responding to a recent call by Graham and O'Rourke (2019) to undertake more research on neoliberal

ideological dominance, the discursive mechanisms of this dominance as well as discursive resistance to neoliberalism, this article draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how neoliberal ideology is discursively constructed on talk radio shows focused on the rising levels of so-called 'service delivery protests' in South Africa.

Neoliberalism and ideology

Neoliberalism is an umbrella term that has been employed to encompass different phenomena by different scholars. Resultantly, neoliberalism has undergone a conceptual stretching to include nearly all contemporary economic and political change over the last fifty years (Harris & Scully, 2015). However, for our purposes, we understand neoliberalism as a contemporary mode of capitalism which posits State monopoly over market regulation, and the internalisation of production and finance over democratic governance (Saad-Filho, 2017). Springer (2016, p. 1) notes that neoliberalism's 'policies affect our relationships to each other, its programmes shape our behaviours, and its projects implicate themselves in our lived experiences'. Thus, neoliberalism – like earlier capitalist modalities – is an imperialist political project that 'positions the market as salvationary to ostensibly irrational and violent peoples' (Springer, 2011, p. 90).

The growth-first model of neoliberalism that guided mid-twentieth century global development policy has, today, led to the commodification and marketisation of almost all of social life all over the world. This kind of modernisation, which stemmed from post-war development policies, resulted in the deregulation of markets and deletion of social protections which, consequently, amplified people's reliance on market-related income. Although it is the poor and working classes that suffer most under neoliberalism's economically marginalising policies, histories of slavery and colonialism have meant that the forms of social degradation facilitated by neoliberalism are particularly acute in the Global South, especially among peoples considered 'black' (Harris & Scully, 2015). Yet, as Connell and Dados (2014) remind us, neoliberalism was not simply imposed on the Global South by the Global North. Rather, it was adopted by many political elites in the Global South, thereby 'assuring long-promised economic growth needed to maintain legitimacy while at the same time weakening the position of domestic industrial workers and unions who were most often their most fierce opposition' (Harris & Scully, 2015, p. 423).

In addition to being a set of socioeconomic and political policies, neoliberalism is also, fundamentally, an ideology. Hegemonic ideologies constitute the ideas that legitimise a dominant system, and are concerned primarily with power. Neoliberal ideology thus works to naturalise economic inequality and exploitation by taking hold of the norms and discourses through which everyday life is constituted and enacted (Mirowski, 2013). Ideologies are both expressed and reproduced in discourse (van Dijk, 1995) and it is through discourse (i.e. how we discursively construct and perform particular knowledges in certain contexts), rather than language, that ideologies find material effect. If we are to understand the oppressive elements of neoliberal ideology, and if we are to form meaningful resistances to these, we must examine particular discourses in relation to ideological hegemony (Eagleton, 1991).

Through condemning certain violent acts (including, and perhaps especially, damage to property) as irrational, neoliberal ideologies are able to fuse notions of rationality with

legitimacy (Springer, 2011). As such, rational neoliberal subjects are ideologically constituted as individuals that conform to the 'common sense' of the unregulated market, while irrational neoliberal subjects are a homogenous and dangerous 'Other' that refuses to discursively participate in the rationality of neoliberalised rituals and routines. Considered as such, almost all protest against neoliberal policy will be construed as irrational by the ideologies – and subsequent discourses – that govern neoliberal capitalist societies. This does not mean that neoliberal ideology is foreclosed. To the contrary, it is always met with resistance. However, as Eagleton (1991) demonstrates, dominant ideologies are able to co-opt such resistances, limiting our imaginings of egalitarian futures.

Neoliberalism in South Africa

In South Africa, leading up to the country's first democratic elections in 1994, dominant notions of how the post-apartheid government should operate focused on ideas of mass participation, 'redistribution, community control and grassroots democracy' (McDonald & Pape, 2002, p. 3). These ideals, however, proved antithetical to the neoliberal policies which were eventually implemented (Desai, 2003). Such policy saw rapid financial and trade liberalisation, large tax cuts for corporations, privatisation, fiscal austerity and monetarism (Bond, 2004). Although during apartheid South Africa faced economic sanctions that isolated it from global and continental economic forces, Bond (2000) explains that prior to the 1994 election, the World Bank had already begun working with political and economic leaders in South Africa to implement the neoliberal Washington Consensus at both micro and macro-economic levels. This was done without requesting global reparations or the easing of debt that was accrued during apartheid. The post-apartheid ANC government also relied on loans provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (both of which financially supported the Nationalist Party apartheid government) in order to secure international investment (Bond, 2004).

The shift to a State-led welfare-first orientation observed in some South African social assistance programmes contradicts neoliberalism's so-called growth-first logic, meaning that there are State programmes that operate outside of neoliberal axioms (Harris & Scully, 2015). The adoption of various social programmes, such as 2013's National Development Plan, has meant that the South African State is not one that is entirely or 'purely' neoliberalised (Bond, 2004). A large portion of the country's national budget is allocated to, among others, pension, disability and child support grants (for a discussion of the effectiveness of these social assistance programmes see Harris & Scully, 2015; Paret & Runciman, 2016). The South African government has also increased social spending from 2% of the GDP in 2000/2001 to 3.5% of the GDP in 2009/2010 (Runciman, 2016). These few freedoms experienced under neoliberalism should not be attributed to the benevolence of the system, but rather as having been won through sustained political struggle (Harris & Scully, 2015). All of this points to a central contradiction in the South African government's ideological commitment to free market policies, namely: the production of a 'strong, visceral distaste for "welfare" and "dependency" among its leadership' (Marais, 2011, pp. 401–402), and a commitment (albeit a somewhat partial one) to select social services.

During apartheid, the rates boycott was a call for impoverished communities to refuse to pay the illegitimate apartheid government for rates and services. After the official

dismantling of apartheid, one of the ANC's central priorities was the resumption of payment for services provided by the local municipalities (von Schnitzler, 2008). Accordingly, in February 1995, the ANC launched *Operation Masakhane* ('Let Us Build Together') which called for communities to pay for basic services. In essence, *Operation Masakhane* implemented a cost recovery regime that focused on impoverished communities and recasting an apparent culture of non-payment as irresponsible (see McDonald & Pape, 2002; Naidoo, 2007).

Cost recovery came to have a considerable influence on the then Department of Constitutional Development's (DCD) notion of basic service levels. In 1997, through the Municipal Investment Infrastructure Framework (MIIF), the DCD set the basic service level at pit latrines and a five- to eight-amp electricity supply for urban residents earning less than R800 (54,77 USD) a month, which was an extraordinarily low service standard that acted to link service delivery to cost recovery. This boiled down to 'you get what you pay for', which translated into 'you get what you deserve' under neoliberalism's myopic meritocratic reasoning. Nonetheless, despite provisions of free basic water and electricity, prepaid metres are an increasing means of delivering services. Resultantly, when credit for basic electricity allowance is depleted, the metre shuts off until the new monthly allowance is 'topped up'. However, due to a large portion of the population being unemployed or in precarious, low-waged employment, it is impossible to ensure uninterrupted services (Paret & Runciman, 2016). Free 'lifeline' provisions for those who are indigent provide a minimal 50 kWh of electricity and 6 kl of water per household per month. The meagerness of this amount exposes the scale of inequality that remains unaddressed in South Africa.

Service delivery initiatives like *Operation Masakhane*, as well as basic service levels more broadly, are underpinned by a responsible citizenship discourse which holds that national reconstruction is dependent on individual citizens acknowledging the duties and responsibilities (i.e. paying for services) which apparently accompany national liberation (von Schnitzler, 2008). Enforcing this responsible citizen discourse enables the criminalisation and public condemnation of those who have reconnected themselves to basic services (such as electricity and water) without paying; defines the legislative parameters within which legitimate resistance to inadequate service provision can occur (allowing for the prosecution of those who do not adhere to this); and, paradoxically, constructs the protester as antithetical to democracy (see Friedman, 2019; McDonald & Pape, 2002; von Schnitzler, 2008).

While various media platforms have challenged South Africa's embrace of neoliberal policy, these platforms have also presented considerable defenses of a more general neoliberal ideology. With radio being one of the most consumed and accessible media platforms in the country (Bosch & Mullins, 2012), it presents an interesting medium for studying how neoliberal ideology becomes entrenched in everyday discursive practice. The interactional nature of talk radio in particular allows for an especially nuanced reading of the discursive constitution of neoliberal ideology.

Neoliberalism and South African talk radio

In forming public discourse – itself intrinsically involved in the reproduction of ideology (van Dijk, 1995) – journalism is central to disseminating popular opinion and shaping the news agenda (Graham & O'Rourke, 2019). The relations between discourses,

communications and publics are complex and even obscure, and play an important role in manufacturing consent to neoliberal policy and ideology (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2014). During apartheid, the State-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) ensured that all radio broadcasting functioned primarily for the purposes of State propaganda (Bosch, 2006). Since the official dismantling of apartheid in 1994, substantial changes have been made to the field of broadcasting. Principally, the State broadcaster has been reframed as a public broadcaster (Bosch & Mullins, 2012), and a three-tier radio-broadcasting system has been adopted: community, public and commercial radio (Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2013). By providing a platform for listeners to engage with talk show hosts as well as other listeners on a variety of contemporary socio-political issues, these shows are typically listener-directed, relying on 'open-lines' which allow listeners to phone in and send text messages to suggest topics of discussion (Hungbo, 2017). The areas of discussion of talk radio shows in South Africa thus reach beyond that of the mainstream press, all while facilitating public engagement with a variety of – sometimes controversial – topics. Consequently, theorists have suggested that although talk radio is able to facilitate a 'democratic public sphere' that allows for a 'collective deliberation of salient issues of public concern' (Bosch, 2011, p. 85), it can also provide a platform for concealing and defending neoliberalism's unequal relations of power (Graham & O'Rourke, 2019).

Despite radio being one of the most popular kinds of media consumed in South Africa, there is a dearth of research on South African radio programmes (Bosch & Mullins, 2012). Research examining South African talk radio in particular is a small but growing field that has considered a number of issues, including the role of talk radio in democracy and citizenship (see Bosch, 2011); race and identity on talk radio shows (Bosch & Mullins, 2012); as well as talk radio and identity mediation (Hungbo, 2017). This research has suggested that by producing connections between the audience and various socio-political topics, 'talk shows assume a very significant role in the setting up of the space for discourse and creating a platform for deliberation which is akin to the idea of a public sphere' (Hungbo, 2017, p. 52). In going beyond the articulation of personal opinions and everyday talk 'towards a collective deliberation of salient issues of public concern reveals commercial talk radio as a "democratic public sphere"' (Bosch, 2011, p. 85; see also Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002).

One avenue by which to explore neoliberal ideology is through the kinds of protest that disrupt the structurally violent tendencies of neoliberalism. In this article, we have chosen to examine talk radio discourse on South African 'service delivery protests'. Media reports on protest in South Africa have, in general, exhibited a disproportionate focus on violent protests, as well as moments of violence and/or disruption within specific protests (see Duncan, 2016; Runciman et al., 2016). Added to this, the majority of news reports under-represent protesters' voices, and rely largely on 'official sources' such as those sanctioned by government (e.g. those of police officers). Duncan's (2016) analysis of media reporting on four protest sites in South Africa suggests that much mainstream South African journalism subscribes, albeit inconsistently, to the 'protest paradigm' (i.e. reporting patterns that lean towards negative coverage). Studies have found that media coverage of protesters frequently position them as irrational and emotive; fundamentally criminal; without agency and context; and/or primarily responsible for instigating any and all violence that occurs at a protest event (Duncan, 2016; Robins, 2014). The protest paradigm

highlights mainstream media's propensity to marginalise public protest by detracting from the primary concerns that protests seek to raise.

In addition to discursive content, neoliberal ideology structures the very form of talk radio. Indeed, participation in talk radio discussions is dependent on one's level of social and economic capital, such as owning a phone, having the time to participate in radio discussion and understanding the language of the show in question (Hungbo, 2017). In this regard, while talk radio presents a relatively accessible communicative medium in South Africa, it is by no means entirely democratic in its constitution or even available to the public as a whole (Bosch, 2011). The institutionally ascribed identities within the talk radio space results in an asymmetrical distribution of power between radio hosts and listeners, where the host is generally in a stronger position to control the direction, form, outcome and progression of the discourse (Krebs, 2011; Thornborrow, 2001). Further, although South African radio is not monolithic, it does rely heavily on advertising and is thus closely aligned with capital generation. Talk radio shows have been shown to justify inequality as well as provide a platform to corporate social actors, themselves instrumental in shaping neoliberal policy (Graham & O'Rourke, 2019). Certainly, the economy's role in determining radio's discursive field 'will allow policy to be operated at a distance' (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2014, p. 42), meaning that both actually existing policies as well as the frameworks by which we understand possibilities for policy change are discursively constituted by neoliberal ideology. All of this is to be kept in mind when studying the ideological embeddedness of neoliberalism on talk radio shows.

In short, although radio is not an entirely accessible medium, nor is it exempt from neoliberalism's relentless drive towards profit making, it can offer researchers insight into how ideology is formed and sustained, how it can be and is resisted, as well as the limitations thereof. Talk radio allows discourse to emerge in a less controlled, rehearsed and presented manner than other media formats. Added to this, talk radio – while not doing away altogether with an imagined audience – is typically more interactive, generative and multifarious than other commercial media (Graham & O'Rourke, 2019). With respect to 'service delivery protest' in South Africa, we may gain insights into how neoliberal ideologies function, and indeed how people are able to speak back to the dominant ways by which mainstream media constructs protest. Indeed, it is by analysing talk radio discourse that we may begin to get a handle on understanding the discursive and interactional nature of neoliberal ideology, which may then inform discursive and material resistances to neoliberalism.

Method

The study's data corpus consisted of 60 transcribed South African radio shows that discussed 'service delivery protest' in the country. The data were drawn from three English-medium South African talk radio stations, namely: *Cape Talk, 702* and *SAfm*. *Cape Talk* (broadcast in the Western Cape) and *702* (broadcast in Gauteng) are sister stations under *Primedia Broadcasting*, whereas *SAfm* – the SABC's national English language public radio station – is broadcast nationally. Based on the most recent available data (March 2019–October 2019), the average weekly listenership for these stations is 517,000 for *702*, 174,000 for *SAfm*, and 68,000 for *Cape Talk* (BRC, 2019). *Cape Talk's* listenership demographic breakdown has been recorded as 63% white; 18% coloured; 4% black;

15% Indian; with the average household income of its listenership being R24,000 (1,646,89 USD) per month (Primedia Broadcasting, 2017a). *702's* listenership demographic break-down is 56% black, 43% white, 11% Indian, 6% coloured, with an average household income of R31,000 (2,127,24 USD) per month (Primedia Broadcasting, 2017b). The demo-graphic profile for the *SAfm* listenership is 74% black, 14% white, 6% coloured and 6% Indian (SABC, 2014). The average monthly income for the *SAfm* listenership is unavailable. The listenership of all three stations is predominantly middle- to upper middle-class, and reflective of the elite minority of the South African population.

In the data collection phase of this study, the entirety of the publically available online archives for each of these radio stations was scanned. Any podcasts in which 'service delivery protest' was discussed was included in the final sample. Examples here include discussions on protests around housing, sanitation, electricity, water, prepaid metres, demarcation as well as service delivery more generally. The selected podcasts cover a variety of interactions, including those between talk show hosts and members of the public who have phoned in; hosts reading aloud and responding to text messages sent in from listeners; hosts speaking with journalists reporting from protest sites; hosts interviewing 'expert guests' (e.g. researchers, academics and members of civil society); hosts in discussion with government officials; and hosts interviewing protesters. These interactions occurred through open-lines, directed conversations and interviews, and news and traffic segments. All of the shows except for the news segments involved audi-ence participation.

The transcripts of the podcasts were analysed using CDA which focuses on how resist-ances to and enactments of social power and dominance are constructed in talk (Van Dijk, 2008). Important in this respect are the social and political interactional contexts in which talk is constructed (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). In South Africa, with its history of racial capit-alism and exploitation, studies of this nature should emphasise the relationship between language and context, while focusing on how particular discourses exist in relation to broader sociocultural practices and structures. As CDA enables analysts to consider protes-ters as situated within particular socially determined power relations and structures of dominance (both of which are constituted by neoliberalism), challenging power relations becomes possible through exposing their discursive formations (Van Dijk, 1993). It is in this regard that CDA allows us to explore how political economy becomes manifest in every-day talk, as well as how agenda-driven talk structures public conversation and makes common sense corportists narratives (Graham & O'Rourke, 2019). Following this, our analy-sis examines how neoliberal ideology shapes everyday talk on protest in South Africa, as well as how neoliberal ideology is resisted and sustained within and through particular dis-cursive interactions.

Analysis and discussion

Two discourses were identified in the analysis, *naturalisation of the commodification of everyday life*, and *market over welfare*. Within the first discourse, *naturalisation of the com-modification of everyday life,* protest is constructed with reference to a culture of non-payment, cost-recovery, and the criminalisation of protesters. In the second discourse, *market over welfare*, the cost of protest to the economy is discursively prioritised over issues of welfare and the living conditions of protesters.

Naturalisation of the commodification of everyday life

This discourse sought to legitimise rampant commodification by establishing discursive linkages between an apparent culture of non-payment, cost-recovery programmes and the criminalisation of protesters.

Extract 1:

```
1    H:   Eh an SMS.³ "Getting everyone to pay is the problem.
2         Whenever people don't want to pay they want to burn and
3         destroy things." Er, one says, "They must protest all they
4         want, and get arrested. If not, Eskom⁴ has to recover that
5         that debt"? Mohamed: "Prepaid means they have to pay for
6         electricity. No more free power from Eskom. It's like taking
7         away a perk." Okay, (2.0) ah, let's get then, you know- I wanna
8         hear from people in the community. Talk to us about the
9         communication process, what are you opposed to? What's the issue
10        ah- here? Do you feel like you're being charged more with
11        prepaid? You don't want prepaid because then ah you can't use
12        free electricity? Ah, is it that they didn't tell you- they said
13        they would send you an sms and they didn't send you an sms? What
14        exactly?
```

Throughout the data, cost-recovery and the commodification of services are constructed as essential to the functioning of everyday life. In the above extract, at line 1 ('Getting everyone to pay is the problem'), the text message positions protest not as a reaction to the commodification of essential services (in this case, electricity), but as stemming from a fundamental problem of non-payment, thereby casting a pejorative assessment of an apparent culture of non-payment. By relying on a de-historicised and moralistic construction of such a 'culture', non-payment becomes discursively delinked from its history as a resistance strategy to apartheid and neoliberal policies, and is rendered instead as a characteristic failing of particular (poor) people. Following this, in lines 6–7 ('Prepaid means they have to pay for electricity no more free power from Eskom. It's like taking away a perk'), the text message constructs the commodification of electricity as a social requisite in facilitating people's acquiesce to the commodification of everyday life. In other words, commodification becomes a site of purely pragmatic politics that forecloses the possibility of more equitable economic measures. Healing historical wounds is thus positioned by the discourse not as a process of addressing the consequences of South Africa's past as they exist in the present, but as one of recovering debt, with protest constructed as antithetical to the 'essential' project of cost-recovery. The economism of neoliberalism becomes, in this regard, a means through which to discursively erase particular histories so that adherence to a capitalist economic package is legitimised, and the State is evaluated against criteria that are dictated by neoliberal ideology, rather than people's livelihoods.

In lines 2–3 ('Whenever people don't want to pay they want to burn and destroy things') as well as 4–5, ('They must protest all they want, and get arrested') a protest – despite being a constitutionally reified means of democratic expression in South Africa (Duncan, 2016; Friedman, 2019) – is made synonymous with the discursive fixities of criminality and laziness. The protest is then discursively resituated in line 7 ('no more free power') by characterising this community as one that does not pay for electricity. In this way, the community becomes signified in the discourse as one that does not pay, and

indeed is not welcome to the fruits of South Africa's liberal democracy. It is also in this way that anti-apartheid rates boycotts and the anti-neoliberal refusal to pay for basic services become recast as evidence of the community's criminality and baseless entitlement. Later, in lines 7–8 ('It's like taking away a perk'), such myopic neoliberal recontextualisation is once again employed to construct basic social services as a 'perk'. Much of this reasoning relies on meritocratic discourse that understands freedom or access to the good life as attainable through hard work, thereby discounting structural and historical barriers to capital accumulation, as well as the legitimacy of resistance to neoliberalism. The production of inequality within this framework situates income disparity as a natural byproduct of individual differences within a neoliberal economy (Mutua, 2008), with individuals who – or the social groups which – fail to thrive in the free market being a 'problem', unable to garner the discursive legitimacy required by neoliberal ideology.

Considering the relatively high average income of this radio station's listenership, the majority of people sending text messages may be assumed to carry more social and economic capital than the protesters in question. In the above excerpt, the discourse's exclusive focus on the protesting community as the 'problematic group' fails to acknowledge those who are calling and listening in as implicated within the same system; that is, the audience is positioned as external to the spectacle of protest from which it is rhetorically – but, in actuality, certainly not systemically or materially – removed (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). In adhering to a very particular discourse of middle class respectability, this broadcast offers inequality as anomaly within, rather than a constitutive element of, the neoliberal economic package. It is in this regard that talk radio cannot, in every instance, be understood idealistically as a democratic public sphere. Instead, like all communications, it is constrained by particular classed interests and ideologies that can be conformed to or – as we shall see – resisted in different ways.

Extract 2:

```
1    C:    It's not that people don't wa- they don't want to pay.
2          Majority- Majority of the people they are not working.
3          And prepaid is too expensive. And what about the pensioners?
4          I'm one of the pensioners. I can't a ord this. It's
5          too expensive.
6    H:    But Daniel, prepaid is not expen- it's- it's it's- you
7          pay for what you use, do you not?
8    C:    Yes.
9    H:    And you pay for it in advance, which means that you
10         can't use it for free?
11         (1.5)
12   C:    Ja, but it's too- it's too expensive! Now, here's
13         winter, here's winter, here.
14   H:    So you're saying the rate of
15         prepaid and the rate from the old system, they're di erent?
16         (0.5)
17         Are you paying electricity now?
18   C:    Look here
19         Look, if- if- there's no jobs- MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE
20         ARE NOT WORKING!
21   H:    Oh okay.
22   C:    MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE ARE NOT WORKING! THEY CANNOT
23         AFFORD IT! I'm- I'm one of them!
24   H:    Mmm mmm eh, Daniel, do you know that there is a system
25         where you, as pensioners and people who are described
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26          indigent that is extremely poor ah, can be, you know, eh
27          subsidised or that you do not have to pay the same
28          as someone who is working?
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In the above extract, the caller draws on his identity as a 'pensioner' who cannot afford prepaid electricity, thereby harnessing the collective experience associated with a particular social identity as a means through which to resist neoliberal discursive readings of non-payment (see Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002). Evoking his status as a 'pensioner' also mobilises particular discourses that are associated with this identity category, such as vulnerability and the inability (as opposed to unwillingness) to work, which strengthens the caller's resistance to a neoliberal reading of non-payment. However in doing so, the caller's subject position is, perhaps unwittingly, visibilised and made to represent a single viewpoint. The host's subjectivity, by contrast, is muted and made to seem ever more impartial, objective and aligned with material reality *as it is* through a (silent) adherence to neoliberal ideology (see Pratto & Stewart, 2012). It is in these subtle ways that neoliberal ideology comes to structure this discursive interaction, limiting and constraining its dialogical possibilities, and guiding listeners to identify with discursive positions that are, often, dominant within society, and are therefore not held to the same expectations and discursive constraints as dissident views. In this respect, the discursive landscape mirrors the inequalities of neoliberalism, meaning that dominant discursive positions emerge as commonsensical, where oppositional views are made to seem counter-intuitive, and are thus 'subjectified'.

Following this, the caller's discourse is subjected to the discursive terms of engagement that are set by neoliberal ideology, which repeatedly interprets systemic oppression as individual failing. Consequently, if the caller is to retain rhetorical legitimacy, he cannot overtly proclaim that he does not pay for electricity. Instead, he must interactionally manage his response in accordance to neoliberal axiom. This is observed at various points in the extract where he attempts to discursively reconstitute the pejorative connotations of the so-called culture of non-payment (e.g. lines 2–4: 'Majority of the people they are not working. And prepaid is too expensive. And what about the pensioners? I'm one of the pensioners'), rather than reframe 'non-payment' with respect to its historical, liberatory and systems-focused orientation. Indeed, the caller's discursive position remains ever vulnerable to the apparent 'rationality' of neoliberal rebuttal, noted here in the host's repeated interruptions (e.g. lines 6–7: 'But Daniel, prepaid is not expen- it's- it's it's- you pay for what you use, do you not?') which, through an (empirically incorrect) value judgement of service payment being inexpensive, constructs the materiality of income inequality in South Africa as inconsequential (Duncan, 2016; Mutua, 2008). It is these obscuring capacities of neoliberal ideology that allow it function as neutral and self-evident within the discursive landscapes which it structures (see O'Rourke & Hogan, 2014).

In sum, the *naturalisation of the commodification of everyday life* discourse serves to make commonsensical neoliberal ideology's economising rationale. By constructing South Africa's supposed culture of non-payment as a kind of moralistic failing, the discourse works to sustain, adapt and interpolate a neoliberal ideological strand which dictates that a free market economy of a society will drive, manage and organise the lives of its population in a fair and just manner – despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (see Piketty, 2014). As neoliberal ideology is so dominant in South African society,

it works to structure broader discursive landscapes in a way that holds anti-neoliberal discourse to standards of legitimacy that are set by neoliberalism.

Market over welfare

Throughout the data corpus, a recurring interactional structure is noted in how protest is interpreted primarily with reference to its socially disruptive consequences, with protesters' grievances almost always made secondary to a listenership's presumed middle class interests.

Extract 3:

```
1      H      Alright, somebody else is stuck on the N14. I've got a lot
2             of people who are obviously stuck in that service delivery
3             protest around Diepsloot.
```

Extract 4:

```
1      H      One of running stories through Eyewitness News this morning
2             was some disruption to traffic as a result of a protest by
3             a township by Pelican Park.
```

Exemplifying a larger trend observed across the data corpus, the two excerpts above construct protest primarily with respect to how it disrupts traffic (these segments are featured within traffic reports), with protesters' specific grievances made a secondary concern. Indeed, in extract 4 the township from which the protest emanates is not even named. Protest is, once again, discursively decontextualised and made to appear functionless, without reason or history. When radio reports do not report the causes and drivers underpinning specific protests in this way, it has been shown that listeners tend to attribute negative affective responses to protest more generally (see Leopold & Bell, 2017).

In both of the above extracts, listeners are presumed to adopt a particular subject position that is inconvenienced by and perhaps indifferent to – rather than sympathetic with – grassroots protest. This is not to say that this necessarily reflects the desires of the listenership, however, such instrumental, neoliberal discursive framing acts to construct the available channels through which listeners are able to engage protest. These channels are typically geared towards manufacturing consent for neoliberal ideology and policy (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2014) which posits protest as a kind of nuisance to be avoided, or that which intrudes on an otherwise functioning society.

Extract 5:

```
1      H      Well, tonight we're getting reports of sporadic incidents
2             of violence, of a shopping centre that was coming under
3             a form of assault where a pharmacy was being raided and
4             we also hear that shopping centres around Pretoria have
5             been closed early tonight.
```

In extract 5 (which is transcribed from a radio programme that focuses on economics), which refers to a protest that took place in Tshwane and a number of other neighbouring communities, the radio host conflates property damage with violence (lines 2–3: 'a shopping centre is coming under a form of assault'). Here protesters, described in the passive

voice, are made invisible and denied the kind of humanity that is afforded to the inanimate shopping centre. Concerns around economic activity (the destruction of a shopping centre and various stores closing early) and the resultant financial 'cost' of the protest are posited as more valuable than the structural injustice towards which protest action is directed. Furthermore, the protest is established in the extract as a 'sporadic incident of violence', which entrenches the notion that protest is irrational and spontaneous (a popular construction within South African media, see Duncan, 2016), as opposed to a constitutional, organised and bureaucratically constituted form of resistance. Constructing protest as social deviance, coupled with the dehumanising methods by which neoliberalism is disrupted, restricts listeners' ability to contextualise or even appreciate protest as a legitimate means by which to resist neoliberal violence (Leopold & Bell, 2017). Yet, although considering protest and protesters in this manner is historically false, it is not in every case a wholly misguided bourgeois grievance. Oftentimes, it arises from genuine concerns about salaries and survival within a system that prioritises marketised competition.

Extract 6:

```
1    H:    Suppose the question is if all those businesses will
2          open today, Spar was vandalised, was robbed. I know that
3          Checkers was also robbed, BP garage also robbed. I wonder
4          if those businesses will be opening.
5    J:    I highly doubt. They were looted thoroughly. I doubt. The
6          windows were smashed. At one of the- at the BP Garage I was
7          with the- some of the police there who were on duty at
8          night and you know, they knew that they were going to
9          have to wait out the whole evening because some of the-
10         some of the goods were stolen in the store, and people
11         would come and go and come and go. And you know, some
12         of the residents saying, you know, we're taking stu□
13         that we need. I did speak to some of them. They're saying,
14         you know, some mothers took milk for their babies. Some
15         mothers took food in the stores. Other people took alcohol
16         from the store. So, so, so, it's not clear what people
17         want. So, there's people who are taking what they need
18         and then there are just people who are looting for the sake
19         of looting.
```

In the above extract, the radio host talks to a journalist who is covering a protest in Johannesburg which, at the time, had been ongoing for a number of days. Through various discursive rhetorical techniques (such as eliciting listener sympathies through allusions to 'mothers', see Krebs, 2011), the journalist's response to the host's inquiry as to whether business activity will continue attempts to give nuance to monolithic constructions of protester criminality by establishing looting as a legitimate means of survival (lines 11–15, ' … some of the residents are saying, you know, we're taking stuff that we need … They're saying, you know, some mothers took milk for their babies. Some mothers took food in the stores'; line 17, 'So there are people taking what they need'). However, although the discourse drawn upon by the journalist seeks to resist constructions of protesters as criminals, it does not wholly disturb neoliberal hermeneutics. References to 'alcohol' and those who 'looted for the sake of looting' act to disrupt the kinds of sympathies elicited through the supposedly utilitarian looting enacted by 'mothers'. A discourse of this sort acts to displace listeners' attention, whereby the neoliberal economic system in which the looting takes place is substituted for a focus on 'good' or 'bad' motivations for looting.

The *market over welfare* discourse allows us insight into how neoliberal ideology becomes discursively embedded (see Graham & O'Rourke, 2019), and consequently influences how we understand and interpret protest. Indeed, protest comes into discursive formation through the hermeneutics of capital generation, obscuring the reasons for and functions of protest. Yet, it must be noted that these discourses often address legitimate, materialist concerns around income security and personal livelihood.

Concluding thoughts

Neoliberal ideology advances a particular individualising, markertising and financialising logic in order to justify and maintain oppressive economic policy (see Harvey, 2005). In this article, we draw on the archives of three South African talk radio stations in order to examine how neoliberal ideology informs and brings into effect discourses on public protest. Although not every protest is necessarily a response to neoliberal policy, we argue that neoliberal ideology informs how protests – and protesters – are discursively rendered in the public imagination.

Our analysis focused on two discourses: *naturalisation of the commodification of everyday life*, and *market over welfare*. The first discourse was constructed with reference to South Africa's supposed culture of non-payment, State-led cost-recovery programmes and the criminalisation of protesters. Here, non-payment is established as unjust when pitted against an apparently benevolent programme of cost-recovery, with the individual non-paying protester or community member cast as criminal and/or driven by immorality. With the broader programme of cost-recovery discursively constituted as beneficial to all, protesters' grievances as well as tremendous economic inequality, are rendered illegitimate reactions to, rather than direct consequences of, neoliberalism.

In the second discourse, *market over welfare*, neoliberalism's 'growth-first' model takes precedence over concerns of welfare, humanity and citizenship, thus obscuring structural violence which, in the context of South Africa's racial capitalism, is especially salient among the country's black population. By relying on meritocratic rhetoric, the discourse constructs paying for fundamental services as a natural and necessary facet of a just society. The discourse also works to dehumanise protesters, with cost to the economy always prioritised over the livelihood of the poor.

We thus concur with researchers, such as Bosch (2011), who note that although talk show radio holds the potential for democratic public engagement, it is also constrained by a commercialised format. In this study, we observed these constraints in how listeners engaged with protest coverage, as well as the limiting discursive parameters with which they were able to enter this discussion. Indeed, listeners who resisted neoliberal ideology appeared irrational against the apparent rationality of neoliberalism's dominant discursive logic. Others whose discourse sought to contest neoliberal reasoning seemed to struggle to break entirely from the discursive limits of neoliberalism, and repeatedly fell back on capitalist tropes and framing devices.

Countering the ways by which hegemonic neoliberal rhetoric structures discussions on protest will require bringing into talk radio a sense of history and contextual specificity that highlights structural violence. We may then begin to exacerbate the contradictions of neoliberal ideology, while problematising the contradictory meanings of 'violence' and property damage, as well as what particular notions of violence signify within different settings

(see Duncan, 2016; Paret, 2015; Springer, 2011 for further discussion here). As Paret (2015, p. 120) contends, for protesters, 'direct violence – destroying property, burning tyres, barricading roads – represents an alternative form of democratic participation that is significantly more effective than following the formal channels created by the democratic state'. We are not suggesting a move towards operating outside of ideology. Indeed, ideology of some kind cuts through every discursive position (see Eagleton, 1991). Rather, in order to dismantle neoliberal reasoning; allow for a fuller, contextual and ultimately more accurate reading of protest; and – ultimately – grant greater legitimacy to anti-neoliberal discourse and action, we are calling for radio to advance a greater historicisation and contextual consideration of protest in South Africa. Until it does so, radio dialogue will remain insufficiently democratic. By taking seriously discourse and discursive limitations, talk radio might begin to better facilitate people's participation in, and understanding of, democratic processes, such as protest.

Although people's concerns with economic stability may relate to their own well-being more than they do to malevolent notions of others (and even the Other), discourses around protest must see a fundamental (re)humanising shift if neoliberal doctrine is to attract popular resistance. Radio shows that consult 'expert' opinions on protest cannot continue to, absurdly, exclude protesters. Further, voices which do not align with neoliberal ideology should not be confined to neoliberal discursive requirements. Resisting neoliberal rationality sufficiently necessitates that radio stations incorporate a greater array of voices, expand the kinds of discourses that they permit and enable a plethora of discursive formations.

In this article, we have attempted to demonstrate how talk radio is able to serve as a useful site for examining, understanding and interrogating discursive iterations of neoliberal ideology. Future analyses of talk radio would benefit from undertaking such examination through specific anti-capitalist lenses (e.g. Marxism; decoloniality), which may yield especially deep insights in this area. We have argued that talk radio allows researchers to examine the discursive organisation of neoliberal ideologies as well as the kinds of practical considerations that are necessary to subvert the hegemonic properties of neoliberalism. Such subversion is perhaps best suited to radio formats that are less aligned with the neoliberal agenda than commercial talk radio is, such as community radio. It is in this subversive spirit that we may begin to debase neoliberalism's attempted naturalisation of economic exploitation and oppression by advancing an anti-neoliberal discourse that is readily interpreted as not only legitimate, but also just, overdue, urgent and necessary.

Notes

1. The use of socially constructed racial categories in this article does not signify our uncritical acceptance of racial groupings. Rather, they are used to indicate that as a result of the oppressive deployment of racial categories by the racist apartheid State, the material, discursive and symbolic inequalities that exist in South Africa are, today, largely structured along 'racialised' coordinates.
2. Structural violence refers to the constraining, diminishing and/or erasure of human potential and subjectivities due to oppressive social systems (see Galtung, 1969).
3. Short Messaging System, or text messages.
4. Eskom is South Africa's electricity service provider.

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