

# ONTOLOGISING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN DECOLONISED AND POST-APARTHEID SETTINGS

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## ABSTRACT

One topical issue in South Africa since the 1994 democratic elections is how a socially just higher education may be advanced in the context of the decolonial demand for the recognition of diverse epistemologies in the curriculum. The challenge since 1994 however has been what social justice means in the decolonial and post-apartheid settings where injustices continue to be perpetrated on the basis of race, albeit covertly. This article examines African and South African epistemologies and ontologies of social justice, in the context of decoloniality and curricula transformation in higher education, that became more pronounced through the #Feesmustfall protests in 2015. I argue that while social justice occurs within particular historical and political contexts, it is necessary to discern some ontologies of social justice that are not necessarily reducible to contexts. Use is made of Realist (R), Critical Realist (CR) and Race Realist Theory (RRT) perspective to unpack paradoxical constructions of social justice in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa.

**Keywords:** African epistemologies, postcoloniality, racial realist, ontologies, relativist epistemologies, social justice

## INTRODUCTION

The call for higher education to advance social justice in Africa generally, and in South Africa as the country enters its third decade of democracy, intersects with the of discourse decolonial and the transformation of curricula and knowledge to address deep-seated past political, social and economic injustices (Fataar 2018).

Despite divergent perspectives, there is agreement that social justice is a multidimensional concept that includes material redistribution, and a participative citizenship that recognises and encompasses civil, political and social rights (Frelin 2014). What warrants further analysis however are underlying ontologies and epistemologies of social justice in the discussions of curriculum transformation and knowledge in higher education in the decolonial and post-apartheid epochs.

Blaikie describes ontology as “conjectures on social reality, something that exists and

units making up reality and their interactions” (paraphrased by Grix 2004, 59). Ontology therefore refers to the study of something existing as a reality, or beliefs about the nature of reality and being (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Mack 2010; Merricks 2007). Conversely, epistemological beliefs are about the character and attainment of knowledge (Merricks 2007). For Crotty, “epistemology is the conjecture of knowledge entrenched in the speculative outlook and methodology” (1998, 3).

Accordingly, epistemology is shaped by peoples’ ontological frames that enables persons to ascertain what constitutes knowledge and how this knowledge is produced to explain existence (Mack 2010). Ryan (1970) argues that our worldview and how we interpret the world and how we locate ourselves in it depends on our ontological being. Thus, “ontology and epistemology form a paradigm” (Mack 2010, 5).

My article explores advancement of a shared ontology to frame discussions of advancing social justice and transformation of higher education curriculum in the decolonial and post-apartheid periods in South Africa, and African settings in general. I argue that social justice inevitably operates within particular contexts and therefore intersects with the decoloniality agenda and post-apartheid discourses to transform curricula and knowledge by reimagining alternative epistemologies and ontologies to which students should be exposed. I further argue that although social justice policies and practices are conceptualised and implemented in different contexts, it is possible and necessary to develop a shared ontology of social justice regardless of contexts.

I rely on Realist (R), Critical Realist Theory (CRT) and Race Realist Theory (RRT) to counter seeming relativist, empirical and idealist epistemologies in developing a shared ontology of social justice in the post-colonial and post-apartheid settings.

## **CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

A balancing of differences and similarities in discussions of social justice in different contexts is required to address inequities and gaps around social justice in societies (Adams, Bell and Griffin 2007). This calls for appreciating the individuality of people and of the multiplicities of realities people experience in daily life (Bauman 1997; Bauman and Donskis 2013; Frelin 2014; Ross 2007).

Nancy Fraser (2008; 2009) much of whose works on social justice have been appropriated by other authors (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2015a; De Sousa Santos 2001) identified economic, cultural and political structures that can either militate against or contribute to development of a socially just pedagogy. Fraser’s theory of social justice focuses on the construction of redistribution and recognition of ethnic and “racial”, sexual and gender differences which puts

recognition at the centre (Fraser 2008; 2009). Justice from this relational perspective highlights the dynamics and complexities of realities, where people express their values and cultures contribute to shared social forms (Fraser 1989; Young 1990). Drawing on Fraser's work, De Sousa Santos argues that meaningful social justice without acknowledging recognition of differences and redistribution of resources is impossible (De Sousa Santos 2001).

Furthermore, a distinction is sometimes made between the broad and holistic approach, and the narrow, atomistic approach to social justice (Englund 1986). The narrow approach has been criticised (Edling 2015; De los Reyes and Martinsson 2005; Edling and Frelin 2013; Kumashiro 2002; Lloyd 1983) for:

- Celebrating polarity which places people in into categories;
- Accommodating stereotypes that deny differences;
- Emphasising neutrality while neglecting power-relations (Edling 2015);
- Asserting that absolute truth may be reached while neglecting difference, inconsistency, and insecurity; and,
- Celebrating empirically observed phenomena whilst ignoring covert forms of violence.

Similarly, positivism has also been criticised for neglecting the multiplicity of social justice in normal actions (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005; Edling 2015; Frelin 2014).

Drawing on Fraser's work (1996), Leibowitz and Bozalek (2015a) propose a transformative social justice pedagogy to capacitate students to disrupt existing institutionalised cultural patterns that devalue indigenous knowledges in South Africa (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2015b).

## **RELATIVIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND REALIST AND CRITICAL REALIST ONTOLOGIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **Relativist epistemology**

Grounded on Ludwig Wittgenstein's anti-realist tradition, relativist epistemology is one of a range of intellectual movements including radical feminism, cultural studies, deconstructionism, and post-modernism.

Although Thomas Kuhn (1970) never considered himself a relativist, he has nonetheless been associated with epistemological relativism because of his notion of communities of paradigm through which he argues that different scientists or groups may interpret and apply paradigms in different ways. In denying this association, Kuhn argues that his view that new

scientific theories which emerged as a result of revolution replace earlier ones and are better as problem-solving frameworks, matrices and instruments does not amount to relativism (paraphrased by Chalmers 1978, 107). Conversely, Kuhn claims that the term “paradigm” does not denote relativity in problem-solving but rather denotes frameworks that should guide research in future (Kuhn 1970, 157–8).

Kuhn’s epistemological relativism questions the classic scientific realist’s idea that science progresses by approaching the truth, and argues instead that scientific progress rather has to be understood in terms of revolutionary changes of scientific paradigm (Schantz and Seide 2011, 18). Thus, scientific communities often “delineate theories they accept and propose canons governing what constitutes reality and acceptable research” (Ryan 1970, 142). Scientists are normally guided by paradigms in which they work, and as a result, proponents of rival paradigms live in different worlds (Chalmers 1978, 96). A paradigm is a worldview and experiences shared by a particular group; further, one needs to know the individualities of the group that created and use it (Kuhn 1970, 94, quoted by Chalmers 1978, 107). Paradigms are judged as “relative standards ‘appropriate to community’, and these standards will vary with the cultural and historical setting of the community” (Chalmers 1978, 107). Scientific communities supporting particular paradigms will adopt different strategies and therefore arrive at different conclusions to identical problems (Chalmers 1978).

### **Relativist epistemology of social justice**

In terms of the relativist position, what counts as a socially just higher education curriculum will vary from one context to the other, depending on existing power relations, cultural and ideological beliefs, social and historical background, and values espoused by individuals and communities in particular contexts.

Scientific communities of paradigm and individuals decide which theories and epistemologies are suitable for understanding justice in higher education curricula. These communities are likely to disagree on solving problems of inequity, denial of access to education, or strategies to advance social justice in different contexts, and are therefore likely to develop multiple strategies. A scientific view of social justice involves subjective elements influenced by the awareness that a socially just higher education can only be attained by positive discrimination in favour of marginalised groups. A scientific paradigm of social justice requires knowledge of the characteristics of a particular group. Priority must therefore be placed on recognition of ethnic, racial, and sexual minority needs and gender differences.

More importantly, transformative social justice in higher education can only be realised by acknowledging the uniqueness of people and their experiences. In South Africa, race and

gender as social constructions are critical to explain social inequities in higher education curricula and in societies, and therefore non-racial and non-sexist strategies need to be developed to address inequities in contexts. Recently, there has been a clarion call to infuse indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies in higher education curricula and to recognise what students and communities experience. In particular, critical pedagogy has been proposed to drive transformative social justice in order to allow students to challenge prevailing cultural patterns that currently value race and related categories, and devalue indigenous knowledge (Leibowitz 2017, 105).

### **Realist (R) and Critical Realist (CR) ontologies**

Ontology according to realist philosophy exists as independent reality and therefore differs from epistemology in this respect (Wikgren 2004, 13). Thus, ontological realism recognises that knowledge is about something other than itself and that there exists a reality beyond our symbolic realm (Maton and Moore 2010). In contrast to positivism and constructivism, CR, which moves from the same premise as R, asserts that only part of reality can be explained in terms of human knowledge (Fletcher 2017, 182). Knowledge creation in CR ontology is a production of new meanings constructed from prevailing meanings that have irreducible qualities (Moore 2013, 344). Thus, social reality consists of social structures that exist “independently of the various ways in which they can be discursively constructed and interpreted by social scientists and other social actors located in a wide range of sociohistorical situations” (Reed 2001, quoted by Wikgren 2004, 14).

CR realist ontology developed to challenge philosophical slants comprising positivism, post-modernism, and neo-Kantianism and pragmatism (Wikgren 2004, 13). CR challenges the absolutism of positivism, questioning the assertion that observed regularities are facts in themselves but rather products of scientific experiments (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Fletcher 2017; Moore 2013; Wikgren 2004).

Similarly, the relativism of constructivism and post-modernism are equally questioned by the CR ontology, which argues that reality has objective and independent existence of our thoughts rather than the way people in particular understand it (Wheelahan 2010). Conversely, CR assumes the world is designed in a particular way that is distinct from the way we think about it (Wheelahan 2010, 53).

Following CR ontology, understanding and changing the social world can only be explained provided that the structures that produce actions and conversations are recognised (Wikgren 2004). The real comprises structures and their associated reproductive methods and not “theoretical entities” or “logical constructs” (Collier 1994, 45). Structures generate the

events that happen, and the things we experience (Wheelahan, 2010). The realm of empirical consists of that which people experience directly or indirectly (Collier 1994, 45) (paraphrased by Bergin, Wells and Owen 2008). The incidents generating our practice must be produced in the real, and occur in the actual domain. In describing the features of CR ontology, Bhaskar (1998b, 170) distinguishes constructs and reproductive procedures, with the former consisting of internally related objects or practices, and generative mechanisms comprising causal powers governing ways of acting of structured things. Bhaskar (1998a) warns that empirical realism, which confines the real to what is experienced, collapses the three domains (the real, actual and empirical) into one domain (Wheelahan 2010, 60). Moore (2013, 343) extends this feature of CR by distinguishing between the intransitive realm that is transcendental, and the transitive that is a time-specific dimension.

### **R, CR and Race Realist Theory (RRT) ontologies of social justice**

In contrast to relativist epistemology, the ontological realist approach in this article views social justice as existing as real, actual and empirical, and not as social constructions developed within fields of practice with socially developed and applied procedures (see Maton and Moore 2010). Social justice comprises social structures that exist independently of different ways in which scientific communities construct and interpret them in different contexts. Social justice reality is structured in a particular way; it is the structures of social justice and not the structures of people's minds that make their knowledge of social justice possible. Knowledge creation of social justice reality in R and CR ontology is a form of production, and new meanings construct and transform existing meanings of social justice, which has its own irreducible qualities (see Maton and Moore 2010).

The domain of the actual in social justice, on the other hand, relates to the fact that social justice is concrete and not an abstraction of our social constructions. The empirical domain of social justice, namely ontology, means that even though social justice is real and actual, social justice also comprises our experiences. However, this contrasts with positivist epistemology that asserts that social justice can be empirically determined. Conversely, social justice ontology implies that experience of social justice is created in of the sphere the real but occurs in the realm of the actual. Accordingly, the real, actual and empirical within social justice are merely kept apart but not collapsed into one domain of the empirical, whereby the real of social justice is restricted to that which we can experience (Wheelahan 2010, 60). In this sense, CR ontology safeguards the three spheres and ascribes the real to people's experiences of social justice in the social world.

Complementing R and CR, and expanding them somewhat in my article, is what Derrick

Bell (1992) calls Race Realist Theory (RRT), an account of race as reality. RRT is briefly outlined below to explain its bearing on discussions of race as reality in the debate about social justice in South Africa. First, Bell reviewed the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which set the groundwork for the infamous principle that separate facilities for Blacks and Whites were constitutional as long as they were equal (Bell 2004). This Supreme Court decision therefore endorsed the legality of racial segregation which became to be known as the “separate but equal” principle for public facilities as long as such segregated facilities were equal. Contrary to the general endorsement of the court’s decision to negate the “separate but equal” principle in the well-known *Brown vs Board of Education* 1954 case, however, Bell (2004) differed with the general view that the abolition of “separate but equal policy” in this latter case was progressive in accelerating desegregation. Rather than embracing this decision, Bell argues that the Native Americans would have been in a better position regarding the implementation of “separate but equal” status if the court in *Brown* had rejected arguments to overturn the decision that enforced a “separate but equal” for races other than the Caucasian race in the US (Adams et al. 2007; Allen 2006; Allen et al. 2006; Mack 2006). Bell’s argument was that *Brown v. Board of Education* was considered more “symbolic than real” (Allen et al. 2006, 19) because it focussed exclusively on the inequality of the schools, and therefore did not provide any significant changes (Allen et al. 2006, 158).

In his criticism of this celebrated decision declaring the “separate but equal” principle unconstitutional, Bell, used the RRT approach to argue that justice would have been better served had the courts argued for the retention of the “equal” part of the doctrine.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICAN AND OTHER CONTEXTS OF DECOLONISATION AND DECOLONIALITY**

The discourses around creating a socially just society in the post-colonial context, including South Africa, are shaped by narratives of decolonization and decoloniality, both of which claims for the recognition of the African episteme and epistemology are articulated in works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) and Achille Mbembe (2015; 2016), among others.

A distinction between decolonization and decoloniality is in order. Decolonisation refers to the “withdrawal of direct colonialism from the colonies as well as the struggles ranged against those empires that were reluctant to do so” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 13). Decoloniality on the other could be described as a period that post-colonial countries find themselves in long after having gained independence from previous colonizers. The term therefore refers to the period following decolonization (Maldonado-Torres 2007). It is therefore different to decolonialism in that it describes political and economic relations between former colonising

and colonized countries several years after decolonization debates (Mignolo 2005). This period should therefore entail understanding the socio-economic dynamics in Africa as a product of years of fighting against oppression then and currently (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 13; Motta 2013; Ramoupi 2011; 2014).

Thus, decoloniality is necessary to understand how for example people in post-colonial countries such as South Africa continue to feel the effects of colonisation and apartheid in economics and higher education curricula.

Since my discussions of social justice are located within the decolonial and post-apartheid eras, it is necessary to highlight the distinction of these two from the decolonisation movement. The proponents of the decolonial movement argue that the difference between this movement and the decolonisation movement lies in that the latter was and still is considered a critique of European epistemologies; decoloniality is a critique of both the European epistemologies and of Third World epistemologies that tend to generate into essentialism (See, Grosfoguel 2001; 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Post-apartheid on the other hand describes the period following the inception of democratic elections of 1994 but also located within the current decolonial setting.

Significantly, debates about creating a socially just higher education inevitably involve intersecting terms including cognitive justice, “decolonisation of knowledge and infusion of indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum depending on how one interprets each term” (Leibowitz 2017, 110).

The term “African” “refers to people and their philosophies, cultures, and practices originally identified with the geographical region, the continent of Africa, irrespective of whether such peoples live currently on the continent or abroad” (Quampah et al. 2016, 855). The proponents of African epistemology argue that the location of the African continent, its human history, and the experience of African peoples result in distinctive ways of understanding and the world and human condition (Jimoh 1999; Nkulu-N’Sengha 2005). There are suggestions that African communities have their African epistemologies that are distinct from those of Western societies used to frame descriptions of external objects or reality (Airoboman and Asekhauno 2012). This account suggests that distinctive cultures of the African peoples mean that realities will not be understood and interpreted the same way as in other cultures outside the continent (Nkulu-N’Sengha 2005).

Social justice in South Africa is enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of South Africa, which prescribes non-racialism as the cornerstone of policy and practice for post-apartheid society (Republic of South Africa 1996). The Constitution highlights equity, fairness, respect for human rights, dignity, cultural diversity, and equality of treatment irrespective of

race, gender, religion or ideology. Non-racialism is emphasised because both colonialism and apartheid were founded on a system that promoted discrimination against the black majority, including denying them equal educational opportunities (Badat and Sayed 2014). The focus of equity was to increase the participation and success rates of black students, including women students, in programmes and levels in which they are underrepresented (ibid.). Thus, non-racial treatment as a standard of equity is a necessary factor in building a socially just society and higher education (Dunne and Sayed 2002; Badat 2008; Fiske and Ladd 2004).

Accordingly, the meaning of social justice has become more urgent as South Africa enters its third decade of democracy, especially with increasing demands to decolonise the higher education curriculum. Although the decolonisation movement dates back to the 1960s when African countries gained independence, it was given impetus by the recent #Feesmustfall student movement (Fataar 2018; Heleta 2016). These demands have rekindled the decolonial narratives concerning social justice epistemologies and what forms they should take, in order to realise a socially just higher education in the post-colonial context (see Mbembe 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). These narratives maintain that curricula introduced by colonial countries and subsequently by the apartheid regime in South Africa promoted values of white community while reinforcing African stereotypes and thereby aggravated injustice (see Badat and Sayed 2014).

Given this context, the principle of equality of opportunity must be realised in relation to provision, access, and outcomes that could be achieved through equal recognition regarding race, gender, or ethnicity (Badat 2008, 12). Although important, equality of treatment and opportunity could not in itself eliminate historical and structural educational inequalities resulting from apartheid institutions (Badat and Sayed 2014). Consequently, formal equality that underplays inherited and structurally produced inequalities cannot redress the inequities in South Africa, making it necessary to distinguish formal equality from equity (Badat and Sayed 2014, 128). The former refers to the “principle of sameness” and to uniformity and standardisation; the latter is concerned with proactively fair and just treatment, and is therefore key to achieving substantive equality by inter alia enforcing positive discrimination in favour of groups that were and are still disadvantaged, and ensuring social progression of disadvantaged and marginalised groups (Badat and Sayed 2014, 128).

Leibowitz introduced the notion of “cognitive justice” that would ensure that the equality of knowers forms the foundation for “dialogue among knowers and their knowledges to advance democracy” (2017). It is argued that the proposed social justice pedagogy is necessary to conscientise people to existing structural inequalities and more importantly, to conscientise students to challenge existing institutionalised cultural patterns and frameworks in order to

achieve participatory parity (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2015b).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **Relativist epistemologies of social justice**

African epistemologies and the decolonization movement in South Africa locate social justice within the power relations of post-colonial and apartheid contexts, arguing that oppressed groups need to reclaim their epistemologies by reconstructing the world according to their own interests rather than according to the interests of former colonial powers.

Given the geopolitical location of Africa and South Africa, architects of the decolonisation movement and subsequent decolonial movement argue that a socially just higher education could be advanced by recognizing a variety of archives in the curricula, including archives of African and Western epistemologies. Although not explicitly stated, claims for the recognition of multiplicities of knowledge, epistemological archives, and diverse understandings of social justice within the decoloniality narrative resonate with relativist epistemologies.

Relativist epistemology makes the implicit claim that because African people have their ways of understanding the world and reality, and their own cultural beliefs and values, social justice need to be understood within the particular geopolitical setting of post-colonialism and post-apartheid ideology in South Africa. Thus, the concept of social justice embracing equality, equity and justness, and the recognition of differences in race and ethnicity, makes sense within a particular historical and political context that mirrors unequal power relations. Social justice in these terms must be realised through decoloniality and deracialization projects that aim to address inequity. The multiplicity of epistemologies of different groups implies that not only do Africans have their distinct epistemologies from those outside the African contexts, but also have distinct epistemologies within the African contexts.

In response to pedagogical practices informed by liberal theories, both critical pedagogy and socially just pedagogy have been advanced to empower students to challenge current epistemologies that are not only foreign, but also alienate students from their environment through curricula that exclude indigenous knowledge and epistemologies (see Leibowitz and Bozalek 2015b; De Sousa Santos 2001). The recognition of differences explains why equity is considered most the appropriate to achieve substantive equality (see Badat and Sayed 2014).

The discussions suggest that social justice in the relativist position is predicated on a context-dependent theory of knowledge that recognises social construction and experiences in establishing knowledge claims about a theory of knowledge of social justice that in turn recognises indigenous. This version implies that there can be no shared ontology of social

justice and socially just higher education as these terms are open to varying interpretations, depending on contexts.

Similarly, although proponents of decoloniality are critical of the decolonisation movement for basing their critique on a Marxist ideology, the narrative of decoloniality equally draws on the neo-Marxist paradigm of unequal power relations where epistemologies and pedagogies of the former colonial power are used to “negate” epistemologies and pedagogies of the African people long after the decolonisation process has been completed (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 10).

### **Ontological properties and attributes of social justice**

I argue that while the existence of multiplicities of epistemologies are an integral part of post-colonial and post-apartheid societies, it is possible and desirable to identify some ontological properties and attributes of social justice that transcend contexts and therefore exist independently of our thoughts even in countries as diverse in terms of race, cultures and epistemologies such as South Africa. These overlapping properties and attributes are democracy, citizenship, recognition of differences, race, and ethnicities. In terms of the R and CR perspectives, concepts of democracy, citizenship, race, equality, differences and recognition embrace the real, actual and empirical domains. These structures, I argue, surpass accounts of causation of social justice that confine the real to events of social justice and negates existence of underlying structures and objects (see Collier 1994). Significantly, it is argued that while this is clearly debatable, these properties and attributes are not necessarily reducible to ideologies, beliefs or power relations that are clearly understood within particular contexts of particular scientific communities in South Africa. These attributes are discussed below in the current post-colonial and post-apartheid settings.

First, the concept of democracy which implies promotion of equality, fairness and consensus has the real, actual and empirical aspects of social justice that cut across South African society, and therefore exists independent of different groups in the country. In particular, democracy entails protection of the human rights of all citizens, and respect for rule of law that applies to all is equally enshrined in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996). I therefore argue that respect and protection of human rights of all and the rule of law are foundations of democracy. This description suggests that democracy is something to which all in society should aspire in order to create a socially just society. Conversely, policies and practices that do not advocate these values cannot be considered to advance social justice. In this context, the role of educational institutions in democratic states is key in instilling the spirit of citizenry, advancements of civil rights and dignity, and tolerance for differences, regardless

of contexts. Higher education institutions cannot be expected to mirror the South African society in which they are located, but rather challenge explicit though sometimes hidden injustices propagated by colonialism and apartheid.

Second, the concept of citizenship encompassing social responsibility and social consciousness as a component of social justice similarly exist as independent reality transcending particular contexts of different groups in South Africa (see Pierre, Jochem and Jahn 2016). Social responsibility and social consciousness mean that citizens and students have a duty to promote justice in societies in different contexts. These values existing as real, actual and empirical counters contextual explanations of social justice that may be shaped by people's thoughts, cultures, ideological beliefs and experiences. Thus, citizenship as an ontology implies that people should exhibit social awareness, self-responsibility and self-worth regardless of their particular ideologies and epistemologies (cf. Hall, Williamson and Coffey 2000).

Regardless of diverse epistemologies and ideologies in South Africa therefore, it is inconceivable to make any claim of advancing social justice unless a sense of social responsibility and social consciousness is instilled in students through the curriculum.

Third, the recognition of differences in social justice conversations especially in countries such as South Africa with its dark historical past involves respect for diversities; acknowledgement of past wrongs and of those who suffered from them (see Govier 1999); and respect for indigenous knowledge systems. These elements are an integral part of the process of building a just society, with higher education playing a critical role. Recognition refers to granting of equal rights to all members of society which promotes their self-respect as fully included citizens, and acceptance of different groups. Notably, recognition of cultural practices, minority groups, physical disabilities, linguistic groups, and values of various groups as part of social justice reality transcends contexts. I argue that regardless of contexts, these values form part of the process of building a just South Africa as the country enters its third decade of democratic freedom.

Fourth, the features of social justice that have generated much discussion and disagreement relate to whether race and ethnicity can ever exist as independent realities (ontologies) elsewhere and in South Africa (Bell 1992). I have specifically appropriated R, CR and RRT to explore the extent to which race could be considered an independent reality, given that social injustices during colonial and apartheid were perpetuated on the basis of race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity in the discussions of social justice encompass nation or nationhood, cultural and racial groups, tribes and indigenous groups. RRT is especially canvassed to provide an account of race, given that the notion of non-racialism and associated policy may unintentionally undermine attainment of social justice and human rights of groups

of Africans in the post-apartheid setting (Ntshoe 2017, 72)

In particular, race, ethnicity and tribalism are emotional terms inextricably linked to colonialism and apartheid. Race, ethnicity and tribalism were two powerful instruments to perpetuate and institutionalise injustices and discrimination against certain population groups during the colonial period. This explains why people who have been affected by discriminatory practices find it difficult to delink race and ethnicity as social justice concepts, as distinct from colonialism and apartheid ideology and beliefs.

I argue that despite these misgivings, racial realist and ethnicity ontologies are two properties of social justice that exist outside our thoughts and are therefore not necessarily tied to social constructs of people with diverse races, ethnicity and multiple realities in South Africa. Race as an ontology of social justice in my article is distinct from racism which describes a prejudiced belief that one race is superior to others, and similarly that certain ethnic and tribal groups are superior to others. This means that race as an independent reality of social justice can exist independently of racism in different contexts. However, even though the two concepts are often erroneously used interchangeably, race exists as an independent reality of social justice.

This ontologised view of race or racial realist attributes of social justice challenges the epistemology of positivism regarding social justice, which asserts that firstly, the term race can be subjected to scientific verification and therefore be explained in terms of logical or mathematical proof as was the case during apartheid (see Bell 1992). Secondly, that the element of race in the framework of social justice can be understood through experience and observable events, and thirdly, that everything about race in the analysis of social justice can be intelligibly and rationally explained (c.f. Bell 1992; 2004; see Ntshoe 2017).

In contrast, the ontologised race element of social justice in my article recognises nationhood, people of different races, tribes and ethnic groups to advance social justice regardless of racial differences. Significantly, it is inconceivable to understand how fairness, justness, gender parity and recognition of racial, ethnic and other minorities could be achieved if these concepts are not recognised as realities existing independently of our minds. I argue therefore that denial of race as a reality existing independently of our thoughts by implication denies existence of differences as one of the key concepts in advancing social justice. In South Africa such a seeming denunciation of race expressed in the vocabulary of non-racialism and non-sexism as policies is aimed at addressing discriminatory practices against people of difference races and femininity.

Three features of Bell's theory germane to discussions on advancing social justice in South Africa are, first, the rejection of erroneous misuse of terminology in asserting that there is only

one human race (see Bell 1992). Second, is Bell's critique of the supreme court decision that rejected the "separate but equal" doctrine in its entirety. Accordingly, Bell's RRT provides a useful framework to question the humanist account built on rationality of race in the context of racial equality and conventional structures of law in South Africa which assume that a just society can be created if the laws are properly applied (Bell 1995; see Ntshoe 2017). Drawing on Bell, therefore, I argue that South African society contains many races instead of just one human race to which all human beings belong in contrast with diverse animal groups. In the light of the arguments above, it is asserted that the racial status of different racial groups should be embraced. Drawing from Bell's formulation, Blacks specifically should retain their racial identity rather than denying its existence as this would place them in a better position to challenge both explicit and sometimes hidden racism (Bell 1992). Third is the argument that the decision in *Brown vs Board of Education* should have compelled the retention of the "equal" part of the "separate but equal" principle. The implication of this claim for my article is that social justice could be better served if the "equal" part was upheld as this would force governments to develop under-privileged communities and minority groups in South Africa.

This argument raises an interesting issue in addressing the effects of "separate but equal" doctrine during the apartheid era. Contrary to the general belief that both "separate" and "equal" policies are obsolete to address social justice in the post-apartheid society, I argue that social justice context be better served if the "equal" part of the defunct "separate and but equal" doctrine is resuscitated in the South Africa despite multiple diversities and epistemologies. This proposition would force the government in the democratic context in South Africa to focus specifically on the development of under-privileged communities and minority groups in order to advance social justice. In particular, this proposal implies that well-managed resources from national government, provinces and municipalities should be made available to provide decent housing, clean water and proper sanitary facilities that ensure observation of human rights, dignity and respect for townships and informal settlements to advance social justice.

In education the proposition suggests that instead of encouraging parents from townships to send their children to former model C schools (schools located in urban areas and originally built for privileged "white" communities by the previous government) through bussing system of the type that has not succeeded in accelerating desegregation in the US, and other legal means, the government could invest in developing townships and schools attended exclusively by "Black" children to the same status as former model C schools (See Ntshoe 2017). Furthermore, the "equal" part of social justice can be advanced by not only renewing and rehabilitating schools that were built for, and exclusively attended by Blacks. Most of these schools lack basic equipment, are not provided with security to protect buildings, teachers and

learners as in all former Model C schools and have either inadequate, or no spaces for sports facilities.

Similarly, genuine social justice could be enhanced if the state spends more resources to improve historically disadvantaged higher learning institutions and making them attractive to students. This involves provision of proper and safe accommodation with proper security for students. However, much has been done to build capacity of historically disadvantaged institutions through earmarked funding for infrastructure development in these institutions, including recently, the skewed allocation of the National Students Funding Scheme (NSFAS) in favour of students most of them Black in the disadvantaged higher education institutions most of which are located either urban townships or in rural areas.

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