

Book Review

Bozalek, V. & Hölscher, D. & Zembylas, M. (eds.) 2020. *Nancy Fraser and Participatory Parity: Reframing Social Justice in South African Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

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In her Preface to this edited volume, Nancy Fraser acknowledges that although she has spent her 'whole adult life theorising social justice, on the one hand, and working in higher education, on the other ... [she has] never systematically explored the connections between these two occupations' (2020: p.xiii). This timeous edited volume contributes to this lacuna by exploring the junction of what counts as parity of participation in the higher education sector, the ways in which it is being thwarted, and the degrees to which national, institutional, and pedagogical responses are making ameliorative or even transformative changes. Although this volume examines the South African context in the autoclave of the chiefly cultural #RhodesMustFall student protests in 2015 and the subsequent economically-directed #FeesMust Fall protests in 2016, the insights garnered resonate more broadly as countries, institutions, academics, and students themselves around the world endeavour to respond to the mounting economic, cultural, political, and ecological injustices exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employing Nancy Fraser's expansive multidimensional social justice conceptual framework, the editors and contributors invite the reader to enter into a conversation about the lack of participatory parity in the gravely unjust South African higher education context and to consider the specific ways in which stakeholders in higher education, and students in particular, experience maldistribution, misrecognition, misframing, and exploitation, and in turn, how these experiences can be countered in ameliorative or even transformative ways.

As one of the outputs of a larger research project, which sought to better understand how to reconfigure higher education and simultaneously build the research capacity of PhD students, this collection provides a captivating view of how members of this local and international team insightfully appropriated Fraser's incisive conceptual tools to investigate, analyse and reflect upon social justice in South African higher education as both an outcome where 'all the relevant social actors ... participate as peers in social life' and a process in which procedural standards are followed 'in fair and open processes of deliberation' (Fraser, 2005: 87).

The opening chapter sets up the broad conceptual framing that underpins most of the chapters and helpfully traces Fraser's canon of work to explicate key ideas included on her conceptual canvas. The subsequent three chapters provide penetrating analyses of the value of Nancy Fraser's work either on its own or diffracted by the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Gray, 2020, Chapter 2) to better understand the influence of the neoliberalist capitalist economy on social reproduction and political power (Gray, 2020, Chapter 2), the



ecological crisis (Carstens, 2020, Chapter 3), and the entrenched unjust South African higher education system (Bozalek & Boughey, 2020, Chapter 4).

I was particularly taken with Gray's spotlight on Fraser's engagement with Foucault's notion of power that 'touches people's lives more fundamentally through their social practices than through their beliefs' and that this 'enables us to understand power very broadly, and yet very finely, as anchored in the multiplicity of what he calls "micropractices", the social practices that constitute everyday life in modern societies' (Fraser, cited in Gray, 2020: 22). Gray goes on to identify the replacement of many scholarly readings usually required in higher education with a 'close reading' of more specifically selected texts as an example of a pedagogically more socially just micropractice. Drawing upon Deleuze, Gray (2020: 22) further expands upon the notion of time, its relation to social reproduction and how it relates to the 'ethics of care' that is required for these micropractices to be conceived and implemented.

The next five chapters provide deeply perceptive and insightful analyses of students' personal experiences of a university over the progress of their qualifications (Shefer, et al., 2020, Chapter 5), their responses to economic injustice (Gredley, 2020, Chapter 7), and in particular their experiences of an extended curriculum programme (Garraway & Lange, 2020, Chapter 9) and the student residence system (Khan, 2020, Chapter 8). Chapter 6 provides a perspicacious critique of the hegemonic discourse evident in a professional discipline (Carolissen, 2020, Chapter 6).

I was particularly struck by Gredley's observant analysis of students' financial precarity and how they often needed to secure funding from multiple sources in order to continue their studies as well as to contribute to their families' needs. She accentuates the 'burden of expectation' this places on first generation students as they are expected to 'lift families out of poverty' (Gredley, 2020: 105); a burden they should not be carrying, but one that has wittingly been encouraged by the financialised form of capitalism currently in sway. She highlights how, despite ameliorative economic responses, the deeply political and cultural root causes of poverty and inequality in South Africa 'remain unaddressed' (Gredley, 2020: 105).

These empirical studies showcase vignettes of the myriad ways in which social injustices manifest themselves in higher education and expose just how difficult it is to analytically parse apart the experiences of students and their lecturers where maldistribution, misrecognition and misframing permeate each other and intermingle. Yet, it is precisely this analytical framing offered by Fraser that assists the researchers and authors to analyse the efficacy of various economic, cultural, and political responses more sharply.

The penultimate chapter by the editors of the volume explores the decolonial debates most particularly in South Africa, and acknowledges that this is a 'multifaceted and contested terrain, and that the use of decolonial language and concepts need not necessarily imply a commitment towards a participatory, inclusionary and emancipatory approach to higher education' (Hölscher, et al., 2020: 146). The editors judiciously conclude that Fraser's conceptual tools and theorising, her Western socio-geographic positioning notwithstanding, are well placed to contribute to the analysis of 'some' (2020: 156) of the intricate dynamics that explain

the economic, cultural, political and ecological injustices entrenched in the South African higher education system, the achievements and deficits of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMust Fall protests and the indisputable inequalities between higher education the Global North and Global South.

The final chapter (Chapter 11) takes a bird's eye view of the studies highlighting how they illustrate the imbricated role of colonialism, apartheid, neoliberalism, and edu-capitalism in maintaining or exacerbating economic, social and political inequities, and environmental degradation.

Overall this volume and the research project that informed it has created an example of a 'counter-public sphere' that Hölscher, et al. (2020: 146) contend is necessary for 'radical reform to be possible and transformative approaches to justice to be effective'. This collection displays how public discourse and (micro)practices can provide spaces to critique and confront hegemonic positions and help others, in turn, to conceptualise, observe, describe, and explain the presence, or lack of, participatory parity in higher education in South Africa and in other social unjust societies.

Reviewed by

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