

# Towards a humane community: The search for disability justice in higher education through African moral thinking

**Author:**Erasmus Masitera<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Higher Education and Human Development Research Group, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Simon Muzenda School of Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

**Corresponding author:**

Erasmus Masitera,  
amasitera@gmail.com

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**Background:** The central claim of this article is that African disability justice is possible through analysing, re-examining and reimagining realities that distort and disempower the being of individuals with disabilities.

**Aim:** In this article, I argue for an African disability justice.

**Methods:** I do this by establishing that higher education ought to produce citizens who are responsive and are able to reinvent Africa through the idea of (community) serving. I borrow these ideas from the African ethical thinking and practice of relational attitude and communal living.

**Setting:** In traditional African thinking, as informed by *Ubuntu* [I am, because you are] social thinking, disability was recognised and respected.

**Results:** I, therefore, develop the concept of reflective-creative education (RCE) as carrying this African ethos for social justice (responsive and enabling citizens) towards members with disabilities. In that endeavour, African higher educational institutes ought to prepare and empower Africans to be responsive and to enable others to live confidently and inclusively in transformed communities that address the needs of citizens.

**Conclusion:** In this way education becomes a tool (RCE) for changing attitudes and developing citizens to be proactive in building better communities to live in.

**Keywords:** disability justice; African ethical thinking; *Ubuntu*; higher education; reflective-creative education; communal living; relational thinking.

## Background

The central claim of this article is that African disability justice is possible through analysing, re-examining and reimagining realities that distort and disempower the being of individuals with disabilities. I assert that this is possible through reflective-creative-education (RCE)<sup>1</sup>, which higher educational institutions have a duty to uphold, articulate and disseminate. As such my intention is to show the relevance of RCE, in and through African institutions of higher education in inculcating a sense of justice (for the disabled) from an African perspective that promotes or propagates relational attitudes and communal living within the context of Southern Africa.

Disability justice and disability and justice are not a new or underexplored academic areas. A lot of work has been forwarded in that regard (cf. Berghs 2017; Ngubane-Mokiwa 2018; Onazi 2016, 2020) except that none make a link on disability justice, institutions of higher learning and the African ethical notions of relational attitude, communal living as proceeding from RCE. In this regard, my work differs from other works that address disability, education through perspectives such as the human rights, legal, distributive justice and the capability perspectives on disability and education. I admit that some efforts on (higher) education, disability and (African) ethics have been forwarded (cf. McKenzie 2016; Mpofu & Molosiwa 2017), yet these works examine the issues from matters of inclusion, exclusion, equality and or at times general views on ethics and institutions of learning. In this work, I make a critical connection that exist amongst higher institutions of learning, African ethical thinking especially the relational and communal living as championed by RCE and justice for disabled individuals.

1.A proposed platform for critical and imaginative reconstruction of living in a contemporary society that endeavours to support and promote each other's well-being.

In my argument, I assert that the two notions, relational and communal living are the embodiment of the value of diversity and inclusion and advocate for shared life (living together), these are essential in advancing African disability justice. Furthermore, I argue that the African disability justice I agitate for calls for the inculcation of the common good that aims at responding to each other's needs and enable each other to live lives of choice. This is made possible through mutual interaction to understand each other. This removes heartlessness and egoism yet intensifies conversion of diversity and inclusion into a strength that empowers and enables all to exploit or harvest what society (social goods) offers in order to utilise and live a meaningful life. Yet this is propagated through an educational system that allows for critical and truthful assessment of society itself.

To successfully present my view firstly, I will make a discussion on my argument by distinguishing it from existing one. Secondly, I will present an African understanding of disability and disability justice itself, then thirdly, link that justice to the idea of RCE in higher education and discuss the role that higher education plays. Fourthly, I discuss the notions of relational attitudes and communal living as there is much reference to them in the discussions on RCE, higher education and the search for disability justice, I therefore consider it necessary to have a deliberation on them. Fifthly, I will draw a conclusion for the article.

## Aim: Mapping my argument

I acknowledge the efforts that Onazi (2016, 2020) has done on disability justice from an African point of view. Onazi (2016, 2020) argued for African disability justice from a legal perspective, through using notions of community living and relational attitude that are implicit in the philosophy of *Ubuntu* [I am, because you are]. He asserts that relationships within communities are essential in as much as they offer societies any opportunity to evaluate, influence and criticise political and social institutions and at most create, promote, nurture and strengthen the institutions so that they sustain communal relations and especially those that relate to people living with disability (Onazi 2020:124). I applaud and appreciate his thinking although I should say his limitation is that his focus is on institutional justice rather than justice for and amongst the people. In this work, I propose using higher education to facilitate, advance and address African disability (in)justice through teaching, analysing, critiquing social, economic and political systems and redressing injustice through imagination on how to live together.

In addition, in the ensuing work, I will depart from the usual disability justice arguments such as the human rights, capability approach and distributive justice arguments. Rather my emphasis is on what higher education can do or contribute to the African disability justice discourse, especially the idea of developing a common good that empowers and motivates people or communities to be responsive and in enabling everyone to realise their needs

and achieve dignity. To that end, I note that, the human rights approach is concerned with examining the question of disability justice vis-à-vis the concept of equality, individuality and its connection to individual autonomy. Yet, my contention is that certain African quarters subscribe to the idea of communitarian living (cf. Chemhuru 2018; Gyekye 1992; Mbiti 1969; Menkiti 1984)<sup>2</sup>, which in the course of this article is of importance. In that regard, I express reservations over the celebrating and promoting individual autonomy whilst neglecting the communal and collectiveness aspect that some Africans respect, which this article advances. I therefore, in this article, bring forth ideas that have relevance to disability justice from a (moderate) communitarian perspective.

Apart from the human rights discourse on disability, I note that there have also been arguments from the distributive justice approach. Distributive justice refers to different frameworks that seek to address the sharing of burdens and benefits in society (Lamont & Favor 2017). In most cases, this would include aspects of equal distribution of material goods. Reasonable as this maybe but focusing on material goods is narrow, it ignores other aspects of human life such as self-respect, individual well-being (needs especially in cases of differences or disability) and accessing other social and political goods (Kleist 2010; Nussbaum 2000:74). Furthermore, I argue that the frameworks are mostly of western origin not reflecting an African feature. I intent to bring the African feature into the discourse on higher education and disability justice.

Yet, a seemingly response to some of the distributive justice limitations comes from the capability approach. The capability approach emphasises on human development through focusing on the individual's needs. Equally to blame like distributive justice, capability approach still has an individualistic flavour (Kleist 2010) at the expense of communal living and it ignores addressing historical injustices (Masitera 2017:165–166). Historical injustices play an important role in as much as they contribute to the debate on rectifying past injustices (Masitera 2017:165). This is an area that deserves attention (although beyond the scope of this article) but important in as much as it contributes to awakening and conscience raising on exploitation, marginalisation and what needs to be done so as to better the lives of individuals living with disability.

As such in this article, I present African disability justice that draws views from varied African moral thinking especially the notions of relational and communal living as promoted or propagated through institutions of higher education. In that effort, I bring in RCE that shows the importance of recapitulation (part of historical justice) by linking this to the

<sup>2</sup>These scholars have difference with regard to the kind of communitarian living. Mbiti and Menkiti in particular ascribe to radical communitarianism that is a system in which obligations overshadow by means of radical subsuming individual rights. On the other hand, Gyekye and Chemhuru subscribe to moderate or limited communitarianism that posit that individual rights and autonomy are respected within community living and at the same time accepts the being of the community with limited control over individuals.

development of a new African community (creativity through imagination) that honours a shared life that is responsive and enables all to live better lives. This brings me to the discussion on African disability justice.

## Setting: Understanding disability in traditional African society and disability justice

### Disability in African traditional thinking

In traditional African thinking, as informed by *Ubuntu*<sup>3</sup> social thinking, disability was recognised and respected, and in some cases, disability has been viewed as possessing divine powers. In the same tradition and traditional thinking thereof, humans have always been depicted as divine and their bodies as holy and the same also applies to individuals who were and have disabilities (Musenze & Ojok 2019). However, people with disability were more revered and glorified as possessing divine spiritual attributes (Musenze & Ojok 2019). This may explain why in certain contemporary countries individuals living with various forms of disability are hunted and brutalised for their body parts to be used as 'magical potions' (Musenze & Ojok 2019). In addition, people living with disabilities have been acclaimed for possessing extra prowess in different trades. In some cases, disabled individuals are well known for their physical abilities, knowledge in the use of herbs, abilities in the arts (performing and visual). In fact, such individuals are at times well known for doing whatever they can with inexplicable perfection and power (I am not going to belabour on this as I am only interested in illustrating a point about reverence, recognition and acceptance of such people in African societies). People living with disability are limited perhaps to that which they do best beyond that they may and actually encounter difficulties or limitations (there maybe cognitive, physical and sensory limitations).

In African communities, and as noted by Broodryk (2006), the limitations and/or lack that individuals living with disabilities were always taken care of by the community through the ideas of supporting and being generous. In most cases, the lack was covered for by the generality of the community through various forms of generosity, which was and is inherent in African social thinking. The generosity manifests itself in the form of caring and sharing with members of the community. The caring and sharing is a vocation that *Ubuntu* members have and does not require remuneration. As a vocation, caring and sharing in the *Ubuntu* tradition is shown through attitudes of loving, empathising, sympathising, listening and accepting and responding to that which the less privileged require especially through sharing and giving (Broodryk 2006:43–45). Again this demonstrates the acceptance of disability and its recognition in African societies. The reciprocation, complementation and compensation of and for individuals

<sup>3</sup>*Ubuntu* is one of the several African moral theories. *Ubuntu* is a humanising philosophy that draws its inspiration from humanness (advancing human existence through human interactions based on essential human virtues) (Broodryk 2006).

living with disability present the responsiveness of the community and also the enabling nature of African societies. The idea of complimenting is part of the *Ubuntu* social support system that guarantees personal security and supports individuals' aspirations (Masitera 2018a:28). Ideally, the thinking does not discriminate, hence the thinking that difference or disability is part and parcel of society (Berghs 2017:3; Ndlovu 2016:29). This does not mean that societies are immune to exclusion or discrimination, exclusion and discriminations have become rampant in contemporary societies because of foreign influences that have changed the thinking and practices of the people.

Disability as difference implies the uniqueness in human beings. The uniqueness I refer to constitute the variances found in the functionalities of human body parts functionalities; these differ in appearance and capacity or ability to be used. In short, Berghs (2017) called these human impairments. These impairments limit particular individuals' functions be it physically, cognitive or sensory ability. Yet, this does not render individuals with such limitations any less human. Disability meant limitation in some human functionality but the same does not mean inability. Individuals with impairments may compensate for what they lack in one area with abilities in other areas. Furthermore, within the African traditional thinking, the practice of shared humanity and shared living (drawn from the concepts of common good, caring and generosity [cf. Broodryk 2006]) also cover and compensate or complement for the lack of physical, cognitive and sensory incapacities. In this article, I am concerned with this form of disability largely because it fits (and is applicable) into a framework that has to do with understanding community living and relational attitude and disability and justice for disability.

Although traditional African thinking as expressed above celebrated difference, it is important to note that there are instances where disability was derided by communities. Ndlovu (2016:29) noted that there are instances whereby stigmatisation and exclusion of individuals living with disability existed. The same sentiments are shared by Berghs (2017:3) who implied to this by noting that segregation, exclusion and marginalisation of individuals living with disability has become rampant in African societies largely because of the loss of traditional African culture and values. Yet besides all these negative perceptions, there is always the thinking that African moral values and notions can still assist in implanting positive attitudes amongst contemporary African societies and protect and empower people living with disability.

### Disability justice

In general justice is an ideal, an expected standard and a goal that societies establish and strive to achieve in an endeavour to establish and formulate acceptable and appropriate relations that enhance human living. This will be premised on interaction amongst individuals in society and on



institutional arrangements and the ability of the society or institution to execute duties bestowed upon it (Campbell 2010:6–9; Moyo 2015:71). In that regard, disability justice like any other form of justice is the search for meaning and appropriate relationships for individuals or groups that live with varying forms of disability.

The search for meaning includes by and through rights discourses, distributive discourses, contractarian discourses and identity discourses, epistemic and relational (in)justice discourses amongst others (Putman et al. 2019). In the same sense although put differently, Keifer-Boyd et al. (2018:268) said '[D]isability justice is a socio-political activist framework that recognises entangled forms of oppression ...' towards people with disability. From the two definitions, one can deduce that disability justice is both a normative and an activist framework to analyse and critique various forms of exclusion, marginalisation, stigmatisation, powerlessness and dependence of individuals living with disabilities and also a means to argue for the liberation and the seeking of inclusion for the same people. There is therefore a sense in which disability justice is a quest for recognition, respect, inclusion, a call to dismantle hierarchies, a search for collective liberation and establishment of an acceptable society where all thrive and/or realise their well-being.

In that view then, I argue that disability justice within the African context follows both the normative framework and social activist approach; it strives to empower, include, recognise and respect individuals who live with disability. The kind of justice that I argue for is one in which self-actualisation of such individuals is enhanced within a community whereby the community is responsive and enables individuals to realise their well-being within a community's shared life. In addition, the justice is premised on reconstructing and redefining one's community so that enabling avenues are created for individuals to actively participate in the life of the community and contribute meaningfully to the formulation of the society. At most this includes recognition, respect and awareness of uniqueness or differences that humans exist with, and beyond that this involves commitment to care and share with the less privileged in society.

Note that the reconstructing and redefining of society is one in which history is interrogated and a new image emerges and/or rather the true image about individuals' place and dreams is realised. Only a responsive community can thus enable individuals to rise from past distortions and recuperate to live lives worth their abilities. Importantly, I note that the African communal life provides for this especially through upholding the notions of relational thinking and communal living. In addition to this, the notions of relational attitudes and communal living are part of the values that African communities impart to its members. The imparting is both informal (different experiences) and formal (oral and class teaching). For this article, I will make a case for formal education by presenting my ideas through examining the role of higher education in the promotion of disability justice.

## Reflections on reflective-creative education and the role of higher education in disability justice

### What is reflective-creative-education?

Reflective-creative education is my own proposal and suggestion for an integration of recapitulated human realities, criticism and imagination into one reality that aims at changing and creating well-being for all. In fact RCE does two things: it has a curative and/or corrective (emanating from history) and it is imaginative (creative aspect). Reflective-creative-education is an educational curriculum that attempts to create a person who is aware of the injustices, who thinks critically and is ready to respond to and enables others to realise their well-being. This kind of education allows one to rise above being mere recipients of other people's views (cf. Freire's [1970] bucket filling concept) and is above the mere raising of objections (cf. Passmore 1972) to one who questions and seeks recourse and resolution to what is before them. In this kind of education, the learners are encouraged to become more creative through critiquing, imagining and reimagining the kind of life they would want to have especially the life that enhances everyone's well-being. The RCE that I propose, closely follows critical education, which has been used in some countries as a way to bring awareness and enhance and build positive images and recreate community lives (Pacho 2013).

Reflective-creative education is the kind of education that advances serious self-social-community assessment, opens up avenues for honest analysis of activities and seeks true corrective measures from the community itself. The redressing of community faults takes a historical approach of learning from the past (wrongs and the good) and it allows for creativity through reimagining how to live together. In that regard, this education asks questions such as: What kind of society do we want? Why is that society not realisable? How and what needs to be done in order to achieve the expected? What role does each individual have to play? What needs to be done to the less privileged and in particular those living with differences or disability? Where have we gone wrong in advancing everyone's well-being? Responding to such questions necessitates conscience formulation and awareness to differences that people live with in life and helps formulate a society that enables everyone's well-being.

Furthermore, RCE takes history serious, and it acknowledges that history (past) is important as it assists individuals to interrogate past living conditions, think about them and necessarily assist to critique those conditions and then (re) imagine a possibility. One can think of the history of disability in Africa in particular – the distorted images that have been proffered, dehumanising descriptions, marginalisation and exploitations that have occurred and continue to occur. These at most have significantly contributed to disablement of individuals living with disabilities, social contempt associated

with having disability and psychological degradation. In that view then, history helps to actualise people, defines identity, moulds expectations and effectively guides direction that people's lives will take (Ojara 2006:328).

As if that were enough, RCE considers the present and the future as essential components in addressing justice and indeed disability justice. In regard to the present and the future questions such as: How do we correct these? How do we create positive images? Which normative systems portray a positive image? These are ethical questions that seek to assess the readiness of individuals or society to respond to the needs of others. Furthermore, these are questions that demand commitment to change attitudes, a plea to move beyond indifference and a search for a better society. In connection to the commitment to a better future, the RCE that I propose draws inspiration from the African ethical thinking that speaks of ways of strengthening and complimenting each other through caring and sharing. In particular I am thinking of the notions of relational and communal living; these give a nuance of inclusivity, enabling, respect, recognition and responsiveness to the needs of each other, thereby leading to enhanced well-being for all (a sense of community shared life and serving each other).

The notions of relational thinking and communal living are reasonable in as much as they can be embraced by all because they can be learnt through formal and informal means. In this discussion they became critical because they expose the integral aspect of African living. They show the connections and the commitments of Africans to social and community formation and this becomes central in addressing and fighting against social injustices and in particular disability injustice. How is this noble African aspect and commitment to be disseminated? I argue that education is one possible way although I think institutions of higher education would do a better job. I therefore turn to discuss the role of institutions of higher education in the cause for disability justice. In that endeavour, I share Hlatshwayo and Shawa (2020) positioning of institutions of higher learning as ideal in responding to the African context (problems and successes). Although for Hlatshwayo and Shawa this is a general suggestion on what African higher education institutes ought to do, I however go on to make a discussion of positioning African morality in higher education and making it relevant to disability discourse.

### **Higher institutions and propagation of African disability justice**

What role will institutions of higher learning have in promoting African disability justice? I respond to this question in this section of the article.

The inculcation of culture has been the task of many societies across the ages. This kind of inculcation is seen in many different social institutions, ranging from the home to academic institutions (Plato 1997). Matsika (2012) proffered the view that within African communities, moral education

has always been disseminated through traditional methods of family teachings and through traditional educational systems passed down from one generation to the other. Beyond that Matsika (2012) noted that institutions of formal learning have replaced the traditional ones because of the changes brought about by globalisation; I share this view. I also add that the institutions of learning have become centres of forming new cultures and inculcating ways of living. This is also in reference to disability justice and in particular the African disability justice that I am championing.

A distinct feature of the traditional *Ubuntu* moral education is that it seeks to inculcate a culture of collectivism (working and living together) through emphasising on the aspect of community serving in which human interactions aimed at empowering each other as a community rather than individual prosperity. Matsika (2012:157–160) said the African traditional education initiated individuals into society, and I find the term initiation very useful. This initiation involved training into what behaviours are deemed socially acceptable or unacceptable. In this regard, Matsika (2012:158) emphatically said, 'The purpose of the initiation practices was to instil or reinforce critical socio-cultural values among the youth in a way which would facilitate their being remembered throughout life'. Initiation was thus aimed at informing and instilling a sense of self-respect and respect for others, and most importantly, at least in my opinion, it was aimed at instituting social reform amongst members of society. Self-respect, respect of others and social reform are important in as much as they have something to do with social justice and in this vein initiation is motivated by the idea of advocating for social justice. The understanding of social justice is bordered on 'being there for each other', which is basically the recognising and supporting of each other for the sake of progress for all.

In connection with the above, I argue that public institutions of higher learning can be ideal places or platforms for conscientising, repositioning and ultimately (re)initiating humans into a humanising tradition. My thinking here is that the ideas of RCE can be actualised, that is, through permitting students and institution staff to interrogate seriously the existential realities they face; this implies changing classroom teaching method of memorising to one that challenges students to participate and be imaginative. In this case, participants reflect on what is wrong, correct and on what ought to be done as a way of correcting relations at the same time suggest means and ways to enhance and empower each other so that all realise a good life. Through the adoption of RCE, participants (recapitulate, becoming aware) relive and revisit historical positions and activities reflect on them; identify the bad and the good that is being critical and analytical of those situations. Beyond the questioning there will also be the creative part that involves thinking of how best to avoid future reoccurrences and reconsider or reorganise themselves (where possible taking lessons from them and using that to guide their views of how to live

together). This thinking of formulating a way of living from the past for the benefit of the future has its foundations in critical thinking of Freire (1970) who argued for free interaction and free thinking in formulating a way of living.

Further to the above, I argue that curriculum ought to respond to contemporary African situations, that is, the needs, interests, joys and solving African problems. In this case, my interest is on social dislocation and social injustices, which conceptualisation of disability might have caused. According to Ndlovu (2016:29) some contemporary African societies despise individuals living with disability. At the same time, such individuals face exclusion and stigmatisation and are ultimately marginalised and disempowered. The same views are shared by Berghs (2017:3) and Ngubane-Mokiwa (2018:2). In the light of these disablements (inability to live freely and autonomously), there is a challenge for the search of justice, justice for disabled members of society and especially the role of institutions of higher learning in this matter. The institutions are to be platforms for discussions for attaining disability justice. The institutions of higher learning are flexible, multipurpose and inclusive, and this will be ideal. The participants will be different people – disabled and non-disabled and their discussions aiming at achieving well-being for all. This will not be hypothesising but practically criticising social practices and thinking about disability and demythologising that from an informed position. This is possible because the participants will include all people.

As the discussions take place in the African context, which particular African practices or trends of thoughts are relevant? I suggest that relational thinking and communal living ought to take a centre stage largely because they embody the African ethos of humaneness (the aspect of humaneness will be elaborated on in the section that deals with Relational living and Community living).

I therefore consider that institutions of higher learning take a lead in research and in dissemination of the different *Ubuntu* notions discussed, both in theory and in practice. What do I mean by this? Firstly, through research these notions should be made known and elaborated, meaning that the notions are brought into line with existing trends in education and even in other global practices. Doing so will help to confront injustices that occur. Secondly, I think that higher educational institutions provide fertile ground for introducing or initiating people into *Ubuntu* theory and practice. Note that generally universities are multicultural and multiracial in their nature, thus making them suitable for initiating and re-initiating students into the humanising philosophy of *Ubuntu*. The initiation would be aimed at individuals who are generally unfamiliar with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, and the (re)initiation would be aimed at individuals who may have been aware of the existence of such a philosophy but need intensive re-education on the theory and practice of *Ubuntu*. Such a practice will also deepen the understanding of the notions and their application to different life situations including how to live with disabled individuals.

How will this be made possible? I think such initiation and re-initiation efforts can be done in class and through voluntary clubs that allow free interaction amongst students. In the case of classes, there may be a deliberate inclusion of *Ubuntu* education throughout disciplines. This is not new; there are universities that have included certain philosophical components in different disciplines for appreciation and for assisting students to argue logically. With this in mind, it might also be possible to include *Ubuntu* components either as stand-alone modules or as a component of already existing modules. Apart from classroom acquisition and appreciation of *Ubuntu* values and associated notions, it may be ideal for institutions of higher education to establish *Ubuntu* clubs that also work towards conscientising people and disseminating *Ubuntu* practices and theories. These will be voluntary organisations to which all will be welcome. In this way there will be broad association of different people and greater learning about *Ubuntu* theory and practice. I think these activities will go some distance in demythologising the thinking that *Ubuntu* applies to certain groups or races at the expense of others and in introducing the richness of the tradition into contemporary educational systems and social systems. In the end there are chances of initiating individuals into the attitudes that *Ubuntu* thinking inculcates and ultimately the application of those attitudes to different aspects of human life.

## The *Ubuntu* notions of relational and communal living in disability justice discourse

*Ubuntu* ethics is an African moral philosophy that seeks to promote, protect and secure human life. *Ubuntu* moral thinking advances the idea of humanness. This idea is well portrayed by different South African philosophers who aver this perspective in the sayings: 'A person is a person through others' (cf. Shutte 1993); 'I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am' (Mbiti 1969).<sup>4</sup> Ramose (1999) also propounded that a person is understood in relation to other persons in the community. Furthermore, connecting implies a movement towards integrating, interacting and working with and for others' good. This idea has been expressed by different philosophers as humaneness (Murungi 2013), a humanist ethical world view (Berghs 2017:2; Kaunda 1966:136) or a communal way of living (Ngubane-Mokiwa 2018:1; Nyerere 1965:170). This idea of connectedness and related terms mentioned here captures the essence of what a person is and ought to be in the African moral sense. Nyerere (1965:170) said connecting is embracing the entire human society by valuing responsibility, respect, and recognising is the basis for shared life and interdependence. To that end, Onazi (2016) aptly articulated this by saying that human interdependence reveals the complex ethical ways of sharing lives:

[I]t encompasses the ethical and moral literacy that is acquired through learning from and sharing, exchanging, experiencing

<sup>4</sup>This is dictum used by Mbiti to refer to communitarian life in East Africa, but is also applicable in discussing *Ubuntu* way of life.



and interacting with each person. Human interdependence is predisposed to and provides the grounding for other values, particularly compassionate dispositions of love, care and affection for the most vulnerable people, not only as the ultimate measure of a community, but also of society as a whole. (p. 35)

Onazi's views reveal that African ethics (*Ubuntu* included) constitutes an ethics that is defined and dependent on human interaction, which is best described as a shared humanity. Shared humanity means supporting and enabling each other to become who they want to be (Berghs 2017:2). The supporting and enabling involves a complete support for all – young, old, able-bodied, disabled – through sharing, caring and affection. In short, *Ubuntu* is a social support system for everyone that guarantees that everyone's wellbeing is realised, yet this support system is based on mutuality. These views are well articulated in the notions of relational thinking and communal living; these two I discuss here.

### Relational living

One of the expectations of the *Ubuntu* ethics is the notion of relating well with others. In some instances, relating well with others has been referred to as other regarding (Metz 2011a:532, 2011b:16), interconnectedness (Oelofsen 2015:368) and interdependence (Masitera 2018a). Hoffmann and Metz (2017) actually propounded that relational attitudes (as pronounced in *Ubuntu* thinking) constitute the basis of all social relations. I share this view largely because I note that a relational attitude is premised upon the idea of being there for others, to such an extent that individuals in society act consciously towards bettering the lives of others, the basis of mutuality. In fact, there is a personal conviction that whatever members of society do for each other, is always done for the good of the other and community at large. This means that the well-being of each person in society counts and is catered for by every other member of the community.

Relational attitudes involve the way in which people interact with each other, especially with the intention to humanise human interactions (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2018:30). Humanised human interactions are interactions that are rational and that seek crafting a shared end and maximising good outcomes for all (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2018:30). In this regard, there is the question of avoiding divisions by encouraging unity, solidarity, harmony and well-being for all. The relationship is about mutually, '... act(ing<sup>s</sup>) for the sake of one another (ideally, repeatedly over time)' (Metz 2009:183). Ideally, relational living aims at formulating the 'we' in community, that is, living together in unity, improved understanding of each other, formulating common goals, consensus, living harmoniously and in solidarity by understanding and responding to differences that exist in society.

In relation to this discussion, the well-being of individuals living with disability is a concern of the entire community and is embedded in communal relations. Reflecting on

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5.Own addition.

Murungi's (2013:24) postulations that no one human in African communities lives at the expense of others, and the same applies to communities, it is plausible to make the claim that despite human impairments such individuals will still live their lives to the full. My thinking is that by having a mentality founded upon improved understanding, friendliness and the sharing of common goals, individuals easily connect. There is a sense in which members of society deliberate, negotiate and seek consensus and ways of collaborating for mutual goodness. More importantly, through relating with each other certain obligations are set, to such an extent that an attitude of sharing, reciprocating kindness and caring and being helpful towards others is also established (Ngubane-Mokiwa 2018:1; Onazi 2016:35). In the words of Broodryk (2006) this is the African way of goodwill, which is an inherited and experienced way of life. In short, the notion of relationality obligates people to adopt a spirit of mutual respect, inclusivity, caring, sharing and generally being helpful to each other. The stated ideas can be disseminated through educational systems, especially the teaching of ethics.

### Communal living

The other notion that I discuss in relation to disability justice and education is communal living. By bringing in the idea of communal living, I intend to encourage and bring in a dimension that may be useful in reimagining or creating a new common good, which is an aspect that can be used in grounding new ideas of a new society. This will then be developed within the extents and limits of higher education curriculum. Importantly, communal living is the climax and real practical expression of relational living in a community. This is where the actual implementation of expectations referred to in relational thinking take place. In this regard, communal living concerns how people actually live with each other (the practical part of *Ubuntu* ethical thinking), that is, the various mechanisms that they use to live harmoniously, successfully, maintaining stability and promoting each other's well-being as well as the well-being of the community itself. That is exploiting human and social good to realise the good for all.

To this end, Kasomo (2012:187) asserted that communal living is by and large a result of public conscience of which every member of the community is part. There is a sense in which members of the community contribute to how they are to live together, and as such a deep sense of corporate life and solidarity is formed. Feinberg (1970) postulated that collective living is based on reinforcing solidarity and on having large community of interests, which is supported by reciprocity and the well-being of all. Hence, communal living is a movement towards collective good and realising a collective destiny. The same ideas are shared by Elechi, Morris and Schauer (2010:73–74) who added that good relations are the foundations of the collective good and destiny. So, communal living can be summed up as an attempt to live together peacefully through having sound social relations that reinforce solidarity and that promote the well-being of each other.

This in itself invites questions about how this mode of life is to be achieved. This is where the issue of the mechanism of promoting, maintaining and protecting social well-being comes in. The mechanism of promoting, maintaining and protecting constitutes consensus or agreement. Consensus is a settlement or a form of social contract through which members formulate an agreement (cf. Wiredu 1995, 1997). Importantly, the social contract in *Ubuntu* social thinking always aims at preventing people from falling into social evils or traps. As already stated, *Ubuntu* is a social security and support system that promotes the well-being of people and, as such, consensus within *Ubuntu* ethical practices has the same aims. Note that the well-being of the people is inclusive of protection from social traps such as exclusion, poverty and various forms of discrimination. To achieve or establish a social security and support system, there is need for the involvement of members of the community in coming up with views on how they are to live together (which I consider as consensus).

To reach this mentioned consensus, certain deliberations, negotiations and commitments are needed in striving to respect outcomes. The outcomes become the duties and obligations of the community members. By and large consensus is a way of reformulating social arrangements, policy reformulation, agreeing on issues of redress and ensuring reconciliation. Furthermore, consensus or formulating a common goal comes from deliberations (that occur whenever there is a need for such) aimed at addressing certain societal dislocations and disharmonies (Gwaravanda 2011:148, 151; Idowu 2006:44; Murungi 2004:525; Tshuma 2015:317). Deliberations have always been rational (Tavernaro-Haidarian 2018:30) as opposed to rhetoric, which invites confrontation and conflict and as such deliberations are therapeutic (restorative of broken relations) in their nature (Masitera 2018b) as they address deep divisions that society has already encountered. As such, these deliberations map the future by suggesting better ways for coexistence and in this sense formulate laws that govern the solving of vexing and complex issues related to individuals living with disability and how to continue living together justly.

Essentially, the deliberations set in motion the process of cooperating and working together from divergent positions (i.e. the inclusive nature of reaching consensus). Tellingly, therefore, deliberations lead to the formulation of people-centred solutions from social ills. I furthermore argue that there is a serious search for justice that promotes human relationships and well-being during these social meetings. In regard to members of society living with various forms of disability, such interactions or meetings offer platforms where their needs, aspirations and interests are expressed and considered by the community. According to Tavernaro-Haidarian (2018:73), deliberations inform and help others to visualise divergence and differences and make an effort to sympathise and assist others from a different stand point. This is the case with disabled individuals – it is only when they are heard and when they express their frustrations, joys

and needs that those who are not disabled get to be sensitised as to the disabled members' positions, understand them and then act accordingly.

At the end of the deliberations, a common goal is reached that devises a better way of living together; a community in which no one lives at the expense of the other. Note that the obligations and duties of how to behave towards the disabled members are crafted through the discussions, and simultaneously the disabled members also receive their obligations and duties towards the others. For me this is a place where the values of caring, sharing and empathy are extrapolated and emphasised for the community and especially towards the unfortunate. On the other hand, the disabled will be expected to show gratitude and contribute to the community in different ways, especially where they can. In this way, I argue that consensus from deliberation eliminates society's social ills through obligating and assigning duties to members of the community. The same ideas of avoiding social traps or evils have been proffered by philosophers such as Dyzenhaus (2003), Weale (2013), Tshuma (2015) and Castiglione (2015), although their focus was on other social evils unrelated to disability.

Having made a case for relational and communal living as integral aspects of *Ubuntu* society, it is now necessary to argue for their relevance in contemporary societies by repositioning higher education institutions as the ideal disseminators of *Ubuntu* ethos through various platforms for discussing issues that affect society in general.

## Conclusion

In this article I have established that in *Ubuntu* guided societies people living with disability have always been respected, recognised and appreciated. The respect and recognition has been based on certain *Ubuntu* notions that are essential in establishing a humanised society, that is, relational and communal living. From these notions I argued that attitudes of social security, protection and promotion of everyone's well-being are developed and that these attitudes contribute to the formulation of communal living and relational attitudes. Communal living is an agreed way of living together, that is, living together through agreement and consensus. I also observed that the notion of relational attitude is an idea of relating well with other and is referred to as 'other regarding'. In that sense 'other regarding' and agreeing is essential in promoting the well-being of members who are living with disability as their needs are taken care of by the community (others). In promoting well-being, the *Ubuntu* social system disregards all forms of discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation by covering and compensating for members who have incapacities through the practice of sharing and being generous. Lastly, I have made a case for RCE as a curriculum that integrates recapitulated human realities, criticise and reimagines the form of life that is good for all. It is also inclusive of African ethical thinking in advocating for social change. In connection to this, I argued that institutions of higher learning will be



ideal to initiate, (re)initiate and disseminate the RCE as the basis for disability justice.

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The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

## Authors' contributions

The author has declared that he is the sole author of this article.

## Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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