1. Introduction to the *Handbook on Global Social Justice*

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### 1.1 RECLAIMING SOCIAL JUSTICE AS A PROGRESSIVE CONCEPT

During the second half of the twentieth century, broadly since the publication of John Rawls’ path-breaking volume *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, the positioning of social justice as a philosophical concept underpinning an approach to political, social and economic change, was widely understood to be ‘owned’ by political activists and philosophers on the centre-left of the political spectrum. Although this was contested, most writers who contributed to the developing corpus would have aligned themselves, to some degree of firmness, with concerns about poverty, inequality, discrimination and, more generally, fairness. Writing since Rawls, continuing his attempts to bridge political philosophy with political theory, widened our understanding of the concept to include, for example, a concern with respect and recognition, with addressing difference and identity politics, with the distribution of resources, with human capabilities, with voice and representation, but broadly continued the tradition of leftist perspectives.

This is no longer the case. In the past few years, there has been a growing number of commentators, policy-makers and politicians who would by no means place themselves on the left of the traditional left-right political divide but who have argued that their approaches to policy and politics are informed by the concept of social justice. The most prominent, I would say hugely contentious, of these in a UK context is the former Conservative government minister (and one-time leader of his party) Iain Duncan-Smith who has argued that his fundamental restructuring of the UK welfare system, and particularly of cash benefits, which has led some people with disabilities to suffer such financial losses from what was already a barely adequate income that they have committed suicide, and driven others into homelessness, has been done in the name of social justice. This for me is an aberration and a dangerous one at that, for if social justice can be understood as punishing the poorest in the interests of protecting the most wealthy (which is what almost ten years of recent UK government policy has done, with significant increases in both poverty and inequality), then it seems to me it can mean anything you like. Lewis Carroll, speaking through the mouth of Humpty Dumpty in *Alice’s Adventures through the Looking Glass*, put it elegantly many years ago:

‘When I use a word’, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make a word mean so many different things’.

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master – that’s all.’
Quite.
Or, as Marjorie Mayo notes in Chapter 23, this volume:

Justice is simply an expression of what is best for those in power. (A view attributed to
Thrasymachus – and contested by Socrates)

My first aim then, a political one, in compiling this collection of essays (as in an earlier
and shorter collection1) was to restore the concept of social justice to where I felt it
belonged, firmly in the progressive tradition of politics, policy-making and practice, and
to reject attempts by those on the political right to capture it for their own purposes,
thus muddying the water and sowing confusion amongst less-engaged readers. This aim
is achieved, I believe, through the chapters in Parts II and III, with their explorations of
theories of social justice and their application to key issues within ‘Western’ public and
social policy: inequality, income and wealth, democracy and poverty.

The second aim, a more theoretical and philosophical one, was to explore how social
justice might be understood in other national contexts than the UK. Because of my own
position, situated for some years within UK politics, policy and practice, I felt that I
might be in danger of viewing the concept through Anglo lenses. There are therefore six
chapters (grouped in Part II) which set out the respective authors’ views from differing
national contexts on social justice, although it must be said that of these only two might
be regarded as being from ‘non-Anglo’ political traditions. I did not know most of the
authors before I commissioned the chapters but they were all recommended by colleagues
I trusted and they have done me proud; they all clearly also subscribe to my general
perspective on the political positioning of the concept of social justice.

1.2 THE LIMITS OF THIS BOOK

Despite its claim to be a global handbook, a major limitation of this book is that it does not
include chapters viewing social justice from other cultural, political and philosophical or
religious backgrounds. The book as a whole is set squarely within what might be character-
ised as the Western social democratic political tradition.2 Because I have not had the time or
knowledge to interrogate fully these other contexts in my own work, and because I wanted at
least to acknowledge this lacuna in the book as a whole, I have made a fairly major digression
in this editorial introduction to set out a few ideas – positioned very much within one of my
own central concerns about the development of ‘racial’ justice in multicultural societies –
which might prove a useful starting point for a companion volume that takes non-Western
social democratic contexts as its focus (but which I could not write). It might also help
mediate discussion and promote understanding in multicultural contexts, where the notion
of the ‘other’ in many people’s eyes is equated with terrorism at worst and ‘stealing our jobs’
at best, and to know that many of the values we in the ‘West’ claim as our own are not in

Press. Some of the ideas here draw on and adapt arguments made by me or with colleagues in this earlier book.
2 But not necessarily what is usually referred to as the Judaeo-Christian religious one, since most of the
writers have not drawn on statements of faith in their discussions, although some of the chapters do attempt to
connect with these other backgrounds.
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fact solely our own. Many other cultures and religions are struggling with the same kinds of questions that are raised in this book. To take some obvious examples debated in the UK: Is the wearing of the hijab about modesty, freedom or oppression? And why the dominant outcry about honour killings when more white women than Muslim women are killed each day in the UK as a result of domestic violence for example? Knowledge and understanding of others, about difference, is the beginning towards tolerance and co-existence.

The notion of ‘East’ meets ‘West’ could, of course, just as easily be discussed within the context of the UK or similar multicultural societies without the need to travel metaphorically, to other countries: the UK now has an ethnic minority population of about 13 per cent, including people from more than 100 countries and of many religious backgrounds, including Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews and Buddhists; as of 2017, half of all minorities were, incidentally, born in the UK. In what follows below, I make some general remarks about the issue of ‘racial’ justice and social justice in the UK multicultural context, and then widen the discussion to briefly outline some thoughts about the value base of other national and religious contexts.

First, culture – a collection of shared values, attitudes and customs amongst a particular group or people – changes over time; so do notions of justice, as political conditions change. This is true whether we talk of essentially monocultural countries or of increasingly multicultural countries, where the arrival of migrants bringing different cultures sometimes generates violent political and social contestation. Huntington claims we are witnessing a clash of civilisations where the binary division between capitalism and communism is replaced by that between Islam and the West. War seems to be the logical end of this line of reasoning. We might equally argue, however, that globalisation brings with it a need for those who have embraced Western values and drive economic globalisation, to develop a much more nuanced understanding of other cultures and religions, freed from imperial and colonial perspectives, if they are to engage effectively (as Edward Said argued in respect of orientalism) and, of course, benefit from new economic markets. As Modood posits, debates about cultural clashes are currently polarised between those believing that religion has a place in secular society, and those who do not. As we shall see, these tensions are stronger in some ‘non-Western’ societies.

Secondly, linked to this, nationalist sentiments are growing in Western countries as a defence against the impacts of immigration, often expressed in terms of protecting indigenous values, such as the so-called values of ‘Britishness’: this was apparent in the 2016 UK vote to leave the European Union, accompanied by a spike in ‘race’ hate crimes. Most evidence, however, including a recent study of UK-based Muslim clerics, suggests that there is little to differentiate the fundamental values of most cultures and religions. All major religions practised within the UK appear to claim the same values: (qualified) freedom of speech, fairness, justice, equality, respect and tolerance, stressing the values of family life. Another recent study showed that the vast majority of migrants, including Muslims, placed the highest value on democracy, fairness, justice and security in Britain.

Thirdly, however, whatever political theory or religious doctrine may say, there is usually a significant gap between theory and practice: many of these values are observed in reality more in their breach than application. Thus, an observer of British life arriving from Mars might argue that Britishness actually prioritises alcoholism, sexism, obesity, greed, drunkenness and promiscuity, a view also supported by recent comparative surveys. Sadly, the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its emphases on
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non-discrimination, dignity and respect, and equality, has been signed up to by most
countries of the world clearly has not yet translated into a framework of social justice in
very many of them. Moreover, even where individuals have publically defended the values
of human rights and social justice, too often political calculations take over, as we have
seen tragically in the case of Aung San Suu Kyi, who appeared to be complicit in the ethnic
cleansing of Myanmar’s Muslim population.

My fourth general point is that the place of religion clearly varies within and between
societies: in some cases, religion has a marginal impact on present-day culture although
it may, as with Christianity, have had a significant historical influence. Over time in most
societies – some Islamic states being the obvious exception – religious leaders have ceded
temporal power to the bureaucrat. Thus, in many countries, dominant moral values are
driven less by religion and more by increasingly secular political theories (even those
claiming to have religious origins), although there are countries such as Turkey where
these strands are generally more in balance or confused.

Fifthly, the implications of culture, religion and the practice of social justice may have
very gendered dimensions (as Kirstein Rummery and Miriam David, for example, argue
in Chapter 14 and Chapter 25 respectively); many women struggle with conflicts between
their basic human rights and religious orthodoxy, with governments in multicultural
states at best ambivalent and often inconsistent in their stance. Where religious impera-
tives trump basic human rights, we usually end up with fundamentalist religious states,
characterised by sexism, patriarchy, hierarchy and a lack of democratic practice. In so-
called democratic countries such as the UK, professionals are often fearful of challenging
cultural rights in case they are labelled as racist even where these ‘cultural rights’ – such as
female genital mutilation – are clearly oppressive in a wider human rights context.

Finally, most religions are also a site of internal contestation, usually expressed in
the form of sects. Thus Christians argue amongst themselves as to the proper place for
women, with Catholics denying women the right of priesthood whilst some Catholic
liberation theologians actively promote human rights, including for women. Similarly,
some Islamic sects are intensely patriarchal (a stance with which the UK government
partially colludes), and some support oppressive practices such as honour killings, forced
marriages and female genital mutilation or even wholesale terrorist murders. Women,
incidentally, had a much more powerful place in Islamic society a thousand years ago than
they have now, the result of particular readings of the Koran: there is clearly no such thing
as a universal interpretation of Sharia law just as in other sacred texts.

1.3 SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE UK

Turning again briefly to the concept of social justice as it is understood in the West; this
is discussed cogently in Chapter 2 by Phil Parvin and I have no intention to replicate his
elegant analysis here. However I want to challenge again the notion that social justice can
mean anything to anyone. Everybody (well, nearly everybody3) in the UK claims to be in
favour of social justice; but what they mean by it, the priority they accord to it relative to

3 Clearly the neo-fascist UK Independence Party and some of the more outright fascist tendencies in UK
political life do not.
other objectives and the public policies they believe follow from it, vary widely. In the UK, the Conservative party focuses on reinforcing the ‘welfare society’ rather than the welfare state, apparently breaking with the Hayekian neoliberalism exemplified by Thatcherism. Tackling the conditions of those whose life is characterised by dependency, addiction, debt and family breakdown is to be achieved by means of charitable and family help, built on a regime of harsh benefit cuts and ‘tough love’, with support specifically for the institution of marriage, all within a context of market economics and a much reduced role for the state. The Labour party’s 1995 commission on social justice (CSJ), came to apparently rather different although still in my view modest conclusions. For them, social justice then meant the:

- equal worth of all citizens;
- equal right to be able to meet their basic needs;
- need to spread opportunities and life chances as widely as possible; and
- requirement to reduce, and where possible, eliminate unjustified inequalities.

The CSJ approach was based on rights, rather than charity, on society as whole, rather than on an underclass, and its recommendations identify government action as central to tackling structural inequalities. In office, however, and now in opposition, Labour’s approach has been somewhat different. Many policy initiatives were based on different conceptions of social justice and focused on the poor – such as the street homeless, students excluded from school and teenage pregnancy – rather than on tackling inequality: neither the stretching of the upper half of the income distribution, nor the runaway and obscene accumulation of wealth at the very top have been addressed. ‘Opportunities and life chances’ became and remain simply the chance to engage in paid employment, despite the fact that wages were dropping and working conditions worsening. This perspective ignored those who could not be part of the productive process, such as mothers, carers and those with disabilities. Yet, despite these obvious differences, currently, all four main UK political parties advocate policies in the name of social justice.

Internationally, the rhetoric of social justice, tempering the pursuit of economic growth with concern for the less fortunate, gained ground for a while. The Millennium Declaration of the United Nations affirmed in 2000: ‘we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. [. . .] We are determined to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world’.4 Even the World Trade Organization, not generally associated with a social justice agenda, explained that it promoted free trade, ‘because this is important for economic development and well-being’, claiming that one of its principles was to make the trading system ‘more beneficial for less developed countries’.5 When governments and organisations implementing such a diverse range of actual policies, all nevertheless claiming to promote ‘social justice’ (or at least the benefit of the least well-off), there is an urgent need to be more explicit in political debate, nationally and internationally, and clear about how we understand the concept of social justice.

Rawls’ 1971 book provided a benchmark against which most modern ideas have been assessed. I am not going to examine his arguments in detail here: Parvin in Chapter 2 most of all does that (and several others but in less detail) by reviewing many key aspects of Rawls’ arguments and of those who have followed him, challenged him and elaborated on his theory. Of particular interest to me, and in relation to multicultural societies, of which Rawls had relatively little experience, Will Kymlicka challenges the view that increasing ethnic diversity within societies – a key phenomenon in many states – erodes the sense of national solidarity claimed to underpin welfare states. This view rests on two assumptions: a ‘heterogeneity/redistribution trade-off hypothesis’, which claims it is difficult to sustain national solidarity in the form of welfare spending across increasingly diverse ethnic or ‘racial’ groups, and a ‘recognition/redistribution trade-off hypothesis’, which argues that the more a country adopts multicultural policies, recognising its ethnic minorities, the harder it is to maintain (national) economic redistribution. Kymlicka found no correlation between the size of the minority and change in welfare spending over the past 30 years (although the rate of change in the size of immigrant minorities may have some impact), nor was there any correlation between the strength of multicultural policies and changes in welfare spending. This argument is critical in opposing those who argue that multicultural societies almost by definition cannot pursue a programme of social justice for all their residents (whether formal citizens or not).

Social justice is of course multifaceted. In thinking about it, we need to examine different aspects of a person’s life: the extent to which basic needs are met, resources are available to them relative to others, their negative and positive freedoms, their status and the degree of recognition they receive. Different aspects of justice are not just inter-related at an individual level, they may be inseparable. A refugee does not separately experience the injustice of a global system that fails to redistribute between nations and which defines her individual entitlements according to her nationality, the lack of respect she receives as an ethnic minority in a rapidly diversifying community, her poverty as someone outside the labour force, and the constraints imposed on her freedom of movement and right to a family life. Different dimensions of justice are interconnected: distribution and recognition, recognition and voice, and justice in public and private spheres should be mutually reinforcing. Thus, no single metric of equality, of resources or subjective well-being, is sufficient to evaluate the aspects of life that are important and relevant. At an international level, meeting global responsibilities need not exclude the possibility of continuing to support effective and just national institutions. And, of increasingly urgent importance, as Miriam Kennet argues in Chapter 19, environmental concerns can ultimately only be addressed, in the long run, by examining them together with social justice and human rights issues.

My own definition of social justice is a wide-ranging one: a framework of political objectives, pursued through social, economic, environmental and political policies, based on acceptance of difference and diversity, informed by values concerned with:

- achieving fairness, equality of outcomes and treatment;
- recognising the dignity and equal worth of, and encouraging the self-esteem of, all;
- the meeting of basic needs, defined through cross-cultural consensus;
- reducing substantial inequalities in wealth, income and life chances; and
- the participation of all, including the most disadvantaged.
This goes beyond many definitions because it incorporates both a recognition of the need to have consensus across cultures (and thus religious backgrounds) and that this consensus has to be achieved through widespread and inclusive participation. How, then, does this take concrete form in relation to marginalised groups in developed societies, such as ethnic minorities and recent migrants. Most UK minorities (and those in most other ‘developed’ countries), have arrived since the late 1940s. Whatever forms of ‘race’ relations policy – assimilationist, integrationalist, multicultural or hostile – were pursued by the British state, the position of minorities remained – and still remains, according to a huge corpus of solid research – one of poverty and exclusion. Social justice for minorities is thus not yet achieved – in terms of equality of outcome, equality of status or even of meeting basic needs. Partly this is because of the dominance of market economics: the inequities of the market bear down most heavily on most minority groups. A concerted effort to root out racism – the most obvious form of disrespect – is also required, not only in terms of interactions between individuals but in the design and operation of public and private institutions and in the implementation of legislation. Many – including the present and previous Conservative British prime ministers – argue that multiculturalism has failed. The concept is now under attack in many countries, including those which have had a more open stance to minorities, such as Canada and New Zealand. In reality, multiculturalism has never properly been implemented but is now being used as a convenient political scapegoat for many problems facing multicultural states, reflecting the worst form of institutional racism. The process of negotiating multiculturalism is in reality work in progress. Pertinently, as Anne Phillips argues, culture is being used within debates about multiculturalism in a way which denies people agency: it is said that ‘individuals from minority groups are driven by their culture and compelled by cultural dictates to behave in particular ways; culture is used to explain everything they do’. This denies that there are disputes within cultures and religions as much as between them and usually points again to ignorance by one culture of another both within particular societies or between different societies. It also ignores wider political debates and possibilities for change.

The failure of the market to deliver social justice foregrounds the question of the individual versus the collective, the question of individual freedom. Where countries – drawing on the writings of Kant and Mill – emphasise the importance of individual freedom, the concomitant is that economic growth will solve problems of poverty and inequality through ‘trickle-down’. The value of this approach to those few having this so-called freedom is that their ability to live well is not compromised. They do not sacrifice any of their freedom to the needs of others who are less well-off. Henry Rosemont puts the counter view: ‘the more that procedural justice is defended and championed morally, the less will distributive justice be achieved politically’. That is, current dominant Western political thought claims that fair procedures outweigh outcomes. Individual freedom or autonomy (a chimera in my view anyway) is thus ‘increasingly being purchased at the expense of social justice for an increasing number of the world’s peoples’ both in

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‘ostensible democracies’ and in other nation states. This is apparent both in the increasing levels of inequality within states of all ideological persuasions as well as between states.

1.4 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalist policy in the UK and elsewhere has not yet been set within a framework of social justice as I have defined it. A socially just multiculturalism is undermined most of all by the continuing racism within countries which, whilst content to accept minorities to fill low-paid, dirty, difficult and dangerous gaps in the labour market that the majority of residents are unwilling to take on, are unwilling to offer the full rights and benefits of citizenship to them. This is justified within the framework of ‘othering’ described earlier: individuals and groups are classified as ‘not one of us’ – so it is alright if they are exploited, paid low wages, given poor housing and so on. This is affecting the basic rights of minorities living in many countries.

In the UK, citizenship is increasingly becoming conditional for migrants as immigration and asylum rules are tightening to a point where the notion of asylum – security from persecution – has almost become unrecognisable. Indeed, many of those seeking asylum find themselves persecuted by those from whom they are seeking asylum: in the UK this is characterised by Theresa May’s desire to make Britain a ‘hostile environment’ for outsiders. In France, in the terms of the 1789 Republican constitution, minorities are effectively ‘written out’ of the French policy process and from research that might describe the scope of disadvantage they face. The 2005 riots in the Paris banlieues, as with parallel ones in the UK, were protests by some minorities at their continuing ‘hidden’ impoverishment, a result of structural racism. In Germany, jus sanguinis, basing citizenship on the rights of blood ties rather than on jus solis, of residence, has meant that the aussiedler returning from Poland and Russia still have greater rights to citizenship than long-standing migrants of Turkish origin who might even have German-born children. This harsh position had begun loosening somewhat, but in the face of the backlash (reflected in the 2017 German electoral result) to Merkel’s act of generosity to about a million refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East, it is probably going to harden again.

Other examples of discrimination against minorities can be found worldwide and these are discussed by John Solomos in Chapter 13. The Canadian federal government has at least publicly apologised to the Inuit for its oppressive treatment of them within education policy over the past hundred years, although poverty, ill-health, disproportionate incarceration, and poor social and economic conditions remain strongly ‘racialised’ to the disadvantage of even long-established minorities. The same is true of minorities in the USA, although the American constitution regards them not as minorities in a multicultural society but as American citizens created through the assimilative ‘melting pot’. Here, the disabling legacy of Black slavery remains a potent force in social and economic life, and Trump’s neo-fascist regime is turning the exclusionary spotlight onto other minorities. Interestingly, First Nations Canadian women argue that having greater access to individual human rights of, for example, freedom from violence and for education does

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8 Ibid.: 3.
not undermine traditional collective cultural practices since, for them ‘every individual comprises the collective’.

Rather than accepting that multiculturalism as a political project is dead, there remains – because multicultural societies exist and will not go away – a critically important theoretical, political and practical agenda, of exploring and promoting social justice within such societies. The attacks on the World Trade Center, the so-called ‘war on terror’, the growth of Islamophobia – leading to a significant distancing between Islamic minorities and majority populations – have merely heightened this agenda’s relevance. To scapegoat multiculturalism for increased national or global political tensions is fundamentally to miss the point. Where tensions have arisen in recent years within multicultural societies, it has typically been where the value system of a ‘foreign’ culture is said to clash with majority values (which are rarely defined), over relatively minor issues of dress or food preparation, or, more critically, with values embedded in international human rights conventions (such as the protection of women from oppressive male behaviour). But these tensions often reflect wider conflicts, notably in the growing imperialist policy of dominant economic interests searching for greater control over the world’s resources. Bear in mind that more than half the world’s migrants are women. And it is only through understanding other cultures and religions, and building on our commonalities, that we can build socially just forms of multiculturalism in each country.

The question of achieving social justice, as noted, is also not simply about redistribution. Societies where there are diverse cultural and religious perspectives have to face the difficulties of incorporating respect and recognition for that diversity and difference within a framework of universal rights. Respect and recognition for minorities can be understood as ways in which equality of status, of common citizenship, are operationalised. In many countries, however, modest recent gains are unravelling in the context of ‘the war on terror’, which has made many people fearful rather than accepting of ‘the other’. For minorities of whatever kind, the exercise of cultural rights should imply the ability to be culturally different within internationally accepted human rights parameters, in a society providing the same social, civil and political rights to all. We should ask what the parameters of this ‘difference’ are and, in particular, whether they reflect different value systems – that is, different conceptions of the fundamental meanings of social justice – or are limited to relatively superficial indicators, such as forms of dress, religious observation or dietary habits. Although it is perhaps risky to suggest that dress is an insignificant indicator when the wearing of the hijab – a focus of lively political debate within Western Europe – is seen by many Muslim women as a mark of emancipation from the culturally dominant sexualisation of women’s bodies. It may be caricatured by some non-Muslims as inappropriate modesty, yet is badged by some white feminists as a mark of male oppression and is often (wrongly) regarded by government as an unwillingness to engage with secular interests.

The key questions at the time of writing then are: What room is there for compromise when apparently different value systems compete within a national polity? And are these value systems so different? This is why we need to explore the meaning of social justice in other cultural contexts, a task which I hesitantly begin below.9

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9 Judaism, which, despite its relatively few followers, is still regarded as one of the world’s great religions, is perhaps unique in explicitly acknowledging as a core tenet that one does not have to be a Jew to be good. This
There is in fact, I believe, little empirical evidence supporting the view that cultural differences translate into differing conceptions of social justice despite the multicultural ‘settlement’ being specific to historical and political conditions in each nation state. There remains considerable disagreement, however, about to what extent cultural diversity should be recognised formally in policy frameworks. Racism in the UK is most clearly embedded in immigration policy but shapes most welfare policy. Western governments often argue that the major issue facing minority communities is their failure to ‘integrate’, their desire to lead increasingly separate lives, both geographically and culturally, at odds with ‘traditional’ national values. Recognition of difference is now challenged as a basis for policy-making. This understanding of difference is in any case a flawed one: it is possible to insist on a universal discourse of rights and equality whilst acknowledging many forms of difference which do not compromise those rights. Those who insist on removing those forms of difference are indeed cultural imperialists. More, as Kymlicka also argues, minorities need the security of their own culture in order to be able to enjoy their individual rights.10

Applying the principles of social justice firstly to the UK’s minorities – and we can test this in any multicultural country – can governments’ policy frameworks and outcomes for minorities be said to be fair? Extensive research shows clearly that, in the areas of equality of status, and the particular dimensions of respect and recognition, the problem of individual and structural racism is growing in many countries. Similarly, reviews of the entire welfare provision and of specific aspects of it suggest that access to welfare provision is highly unequal, on a basis which is highly ‘racialised’, and that outcomes for minorities (whether indigenous or immigrant) are in general disproportionately poor.

Social justice, then, is not a reality for minorities in the UK or, I suggest, in other multicultural countries. The achievement of equally socially just outcomes, in terms of meeting need, or ensuring equality as citizens, in terms of status, opportunity and access, may vary somewhat from one so-called multicultural country to another but each has, however, a substantial way to go. Even where polities espouse the political rhetoric of social justice, this is rarely matched by political policy or practice. A classic example of this is the question of family life, mentioned earlier. Those who argue for the values of family life, as in many cultures and religions, including in China in the past and within the UK at present, practise it in ways antithetical to social justice: rather than reciprocity, mutual affection, care and respect for elders, they demonstrate the values of hierarchy, patriarchy, elder neglect, individualism and homophobia.

A socially just society should be one in which human rights are enjoyed by all: conversely, social justice is achieved through human rights and human obligations. What part, finally, then does religion play in achieving a socially just society? If a right is a moral claim on society, to what extent does religion shape these rights? As racism and fear of the ‘other’ lies at the root of unequal treatment, we need to explore the commonalities between different religious and cultural traditions, to build bridges between majority and minority populations. I can, as I said earlier, only make a brief, modestly informed start on this agenda here and hope that these introductory comments and the book as a whole may help to generate further understanding through ongoing debate.

1.5 SOCIAL JUSTICE, RELIGION AND NON-‘WESTERN’ CONTEXTS

Most ‘Eastern’ countries are of course multicultural countries – whether they espouse multiculturalist policies or not – and, prima facie, are likely to be exposed to the same kinds of tension discussed here. But there is this other dimension to national contexts which I have only briefly touched on, and which is addressed only slightly in this volume, which is to understand the centrality or not of religion in determining the cultural, political and moral/philosophical traditions of a particular country. In most Western countries, moral philosophy was shaped originally by the Judaeo-Christian heritage but as these countries have become more secular, it is arguable that notions of social justice – whilst echoed in some Christian doctrine – have increasingly reflected secular perspectives, with religion now playing catch-up: for example, much of the Christian church lags far behind secular attitudes to gender equality. By contrast, a Buddhist order ordains women on exactly the same basis as they ordain men.

In many countries, however, religion remains influential. I start with the experience of Islam as it is the religion – albeit a highly distorted version of it – attracting the greatest level of hostility across the world, following the recent terrorist attacks. For Muslims in developed multicultural societies, two responses are apparent: one is a defensive one, where Muslims retreat into a kind of religious ghetto, with minimal engagement, as Scott-Baumann argues, ‘a flight from western modernisation’ and its values. This is dangerously accentuated amongst young Muslims, a disproportionate part of migrant populations. It is also reflected in Islamist states where Muslims become increasingly isolated from contact with other cultural traditions. The other stance is one where Muslims, encouraged by modernising clerics, attempt to engage more fully with other societies: this can be seen as a positive approach, facilitating an understanding by majorities that Muslim values can be seen as not markedly differing from Western ideas of social justice. It also provides the political space for compromises to develop, which reject the paths of incorporation, conservative patriarchy or fundamentalism; for example, Muslim women can enact their own religious practices whilst engaging with wider issues of gender inequality. One anxiety expressed by Muslim women in the wake of the Arab spring, in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, is that Islamically dominated governments may row back from some of the gains made by women over the past 50 years in terms of legally embedded rights.

The mantra of individual freedom and the ideology of individualism that underpin Western corporate capitalism, and which underline attempts to develop a framework of social justice, is also challenged in Confucianist thought, which argues that individuals only exist ‘in relation to other human beings’. This view of our interconnectedness is strikingly echoed not only in First Nations peoples’ collective approaches to rights (as noted in the Canadian First Nations stance reported above), perhaps in the Buddhist notion of compassion, that is, kindness in response to suffering, in Iris Young’s idea of relational social justice but also in Desmond Tutu’s espousing of the philosophy of Ubuntu – that

11 I simply use this term as the logical opposite to ‘Western’ with all its limitations.
we are only human through others; through relationships with others we accord both ourselves and others the socially just values of dignity and respect for difference, as well as meaning. If I racially abuse others, I am effectively abusing myself too.

This widely supported approach suggests that the core of social justice includes recognition of and respect for the dignity of other human beings, whether Eastern or Western, man or woman, and to develop policies that underpin that recognition. Historically, religion may have taken a lead in promoting moral doctrine, but now, when religion is a minority interest, as is the case in most countries, whatever official censuses may say about the importance of religion, the state has to take a central role in confronting the immorality of unfettered freedoms, promoting social justice – where it believes in it – through redistribution, positive action and the many other avenues open to it. We achieve social justice through an understanding of human rights – moral claims on society – and human obligations – moral responsibilities to society: if religions and cultures happen to accept that position, then that is straightforward. But where universal human rights and obligations are undermined by religious doctrine and cultural practice, then the state has, in my view, a responsibility to overrule that practice. It is not open to states to adopt a disinterested stance towards cultural difference: as Phillips argues, this can effectively be a capitulation to unjust social power whether gendered or otherwise. If social justice is to mean anything in a multicultural society, it must mean that all citizens – whether indigenous, majority, minority or migrant – are extended the same rights unless, echoing Rawls, there are reasons that they should not be extended for the more general welfare of the population.

The Hindu notion of dharma is quite clear on the basic moral obligation to treat all others with dignity and respect. Yet again, however, doctrine is denied in practice: the caste system promotes disrespect and undignified treatment for some – continuing to consign many millions to poverty – even though Indian law claims to have overridden religious practices. Despite claims made by Hinduism and Sikhism to generosity, caste remains stubbornly and often horrifyingly central to Indian culture, which is also predominantly patriarchal. The claims by governments worldwide to pursue socially just policies are undermined by their policies and practices. To take an example from the area of respect for religious difference, French Christian girls are allowed to wear crucifixes to school, yet French Muslim girls are not allowed to wear the foulard or headscarf, this from a state which claims to be fixedly secular. In many countries – the UK is one Western exception – there is a complete separation of church and state and this clarifies the moral basis of a state’s politics. States pursuing the values of social justice can underwrite those aspects of religion and culture which accord with the secular values of social justice, whilst challenging those which do not. Thus, multicultural and socially just societies might applaud the pillar of Islam known as Zakat, the giving of alms to charity for the poor and needy, but attempt to confront the intensely patriarchal and oppressive nature of some Islamic sects or traditions, by supporting women’s rights.

Difficulties arise for states and religions, however, where this separation has been blurred and religion is exploited for political purposes as has often been the case, not least in wars where religion has been co-opted to provide moral legitimacy or where states use religious authority to underpin their own position. North Africa and the Gulf States at present offer many examples of the difficulties of generating democratic socially just societies in situations where politics has been mixed with religion. The Catholic church
provides a different example of this blurring, since, although it argued it was the one true religion in some contexts, it was not above forming alliances with other religions when it suited its purposes. For example, at the United Nations’ world conference on women in Beijing in 1995, the Catholic church linked with Islamic countries to block some of the demands of the women’s movement, illustrating how, as Ursula King argues, women’s position in religion is often a reflection of their status in society more generally.

Liberation theologians of course also provide an example of how each religion incorporates many competing perspectives. Where religion has intervened in the political process, as in Poland and China at different times, the upshot is often either a conservative form of Christianity (where religion has had the upper hand) or a limited adherence to religion (where political ideology is stronger). Buddhism provides another example of this blurring. U Nu, an earlier Burmese President, co-opted the Burmese form of Buddhism with the view of restoring a sense of moral foundation in the country, although others argue that he intended merely to quell social unrest. Making Buddhism effectively the state religion, however, had the effect of making other religions such as Islam feel marginalised; indeed it went further with Buddhists destroying mosques, killing Muslims and undermining the human rights of others (a process continuing at an extreme level today), a strange form of morality and one that was contrary to the Buddhist notions of kindness towards and, awareness of, and well-being for all. Another example of this blurring is that of Shinto, an animistic religion strongly sponsored by nineteenth-century Japanese governments to promote nationalism in the face of what was seen as a Western Christian threat to Japanese culture and identity. This resulted in an extreme form of nationalism, supported also by Zen Buddhism, leading eventually to wars of imperial conquest and to Japanese involvement in the Second World War.

It is perhaps no surprise that, despite a residual but strong form of nationalism embedded in Shinto (with the Yasakuni war memorial commemorating not only the millions of ordinary people who died but a number of Japanese class A war criminals), it is largely discredited and Japanese foreign policy since has been grounded in humanitarian – we might say socially just – concerns rather than those of religion. Some argue anyway that Shinto is not a religion but an approach to life, as has been argued both for Confucianism and for Islam. Ambedkar, the Indian political theorist, rather confusingly argued that Buddhism was a secular religion; by this he may have meant that it had no sovereign deities or that, unlike Hinduism, it was aligned with the principles of plurality, diversity and a just society. To expect religions to act justly, however, the state has also to be seen acting justly in return towards adherents of differing religions. Buddhist monks in Myanmar number approximately the same size as the army, but, on the other hand, are denied many of the rights of citizens, and, on the other hand, are protected by that same army when they persecute members of the Islamic religious tendency.

Sadly, of course, virtually no major world religion or culture is free from the criticism that it preaches peace but practises war. To put it another way, espousing the values of social justice does not necessarily bring harmony: the fact that Muslim and Hindu value systems both claim generosity towards others has not prevented outbreaks of vicious intercommunal violence. Similarly, achieving the values of the enlightenment in Europe

13 Interestingly the site of the current Myanmar capital, Naypyidaw, appears to have been chosen on the basis of astrology, rather than religion.
did not prevent a slide into world wars, as those values were overwhelmed by economic dislocation, imperialist greed and the resultant nationalism and racism. Nor did espousing the values of social justice prevent most major world religions from supporting slavery and imperial expansion. I do not have space here to reflect on one of the most pressing issues for analysis, the environmental aspects of social justice, save to say that most so-called development is highly anthropocentric, leaving little space for considering the impacts on other species than human beings. Kennet addresses this issue in considerably more depth later in this volume (see Chapter 19). However, it is important to note that some religions – as in India and China – include animal worship. Confucianism, amongst others, stresses that the human should be in balance with the natural, an insight only now beginning to be understood within industrialised nations as the implications emerge of the rush to exploit natural resources, a rush usually also sweeping away the just imperative for indigenous populations to be treated with dignity and respect (see Chapter 8 on Australia).

So, in an era of globalisation, can we identify specific Eastern values which might correspond to our ‘Western’ notions of social justice as elaborated below? I would argue that the basic values of most cultures and religions are, in theory at least, very similar; we can pick and choose values in most cultures and religions which correspond to my notion of social justice. We can also identify practices that do not. The difficulty, particularly at a time when migration is becoming a key phenomenon worldwide, is that many host countries are taught to be fearful of the stranger, the ‘other’, leaving little room for the knowledge and understanding of what, in the last resort, are largely superficial differences. Most of our fears of the other are rooted in ignorance: Lord Krishna, according to the Mahabharata, was killed simply because he looked like a deer. I repeat, knowledge and understanding about difference is key to tolerance and co-existence. It is fair to say that key aspects of many religions – well-being, acceptance of difference, interconnectedness, understanding and equality – have shaped our understandings, if not our practice, of social justice. And these of course are not specifically ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ values.

In the end, however, echoing a Judaist tenet, I believe what we think and say is far less important than what we do. As Confucius said, to see what is to be done and not to do it, is cowardice. This is reflected in the words of Edmund Burke: all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for the good man to do nothing; or, as the famous epigram begins, ‘they came for the Jews, and I said nothing’. What we can do, both individually and politically, is to interrogate the claims made on behalf of cultures and religions and ask, who benefits in practice? For example, as Susan Okin points out, ‘most cultures are suffused with gendered practices and ideologies that disadvantage women relative to men. Most cultures are patriarchal, but some are more so than others; cultural minorities claiming multicultural accommodation are often more patriarchal in their practices than the surrounding culture’.

My argument here then is essentially against those who argue that imposing Western values of social justice on other cultures – for example through international human rights conventions – represents a form of moral imperialism. This misses the point. Of course these values and cultures should not be imposed but essentially many of these values (as opposed of course to actions) may be discerned in some form or other in most cultures

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and religions worldwide, notwithstanding the fact that they have to be interpreted in differing cultural contexts. The task for us all, east and west, is to understand and respect the other, to accord that dignity to all in our differing societies and build on our common value systems, as well as to identify those values and practices which offend against our notion of social justice and act against them in word and deed.

1.6 INFORMING EVERYDAY PRACTICE

Having made this lengthy aside, which I hope will excuse to some degree the lack of detailed discussion within the body of the book about other cultural contexts, I go on to state my third and final aim for this book. This is a much more practical one, to understand and set out how the theory of social justice informs practice within a range of occupations or welfare divisions: health, housing, education and so on, or for people with particular characteristics such as gender, sexuality, age, disability, what in the UK’s human rights legislation are called the ‘protected characteristics’. Too often, highly theoretical books about social justice, whilst illuminating for those deeply embedded in academic discourse, have not helped practitioners to understand what to do or how to solve the kinds of dilemma they face on a day-to-day basis. The collection of distinguished authors in Part III achieve this, all of them with great accomplishment; my hope is that these individual chapters will be of enormous political and practical use to a wide range of people whether in policy, politics or practice.

Even then, and despite the size of the book, there are gaps: sport, for example, might be a candidate for treatment for, in the current context with issues being raised about extravagant transfer fees for football stars at a time when most fans cannot afford tickets, corrupt practice at the highest levels in international and national sporting organisations, performance-enhancing drug-taking, abuse and racism, there is a huge agenda of questions regarding fairness in sporting activity. I can only acknowledge these gaps, and suggest that the book might never have seen the light of day if I had not adhered to the publisher’s requirements and decided on and kept it within those limits.

To attempt to summarise the contents of the book I think would be both arrogant, given the expertise assembled here, and superfluous. Each chapter stands on its own and does not need cross-examination from me. Of course no reader will agree with every argument put forward here, even in their own particular discipline or practice; nor do I. What I wanted, and I gave the authors a very light steer to ensure this happened, was to set out arguments relating to the focus of their chapter – with counter-arguments where appropriate – which would bring readers up to date with thinking across the world (with the major caveat acknowledged earlier), provide a set of additional reading, and provide a touchstone for further debate. Some chapters are more theoretical, some more policy-oriented and some are fervently polemical. All are valuable contributions. Further debate there will certainly be and hopefully will incorporate an even wider range of basic cultural and national contexts. Clearly for many authors, defining social justice remains work-in-progress and we would anticipate that thinking may advance in the next 50 years just as much as it has in the past half century. That would be my hope, and also, to return to my first aim, that our actions are increasingly shaped by an even clearer notion of what social justice is – and is not.
In a nutshell, what I have tried to convey in this chapter is:

- notwithstanding continuing debate and refinement, there is broad agreement on the political left within the liberal democratic ‘West’, about the concept of social justice, one which eschews any significant engagement with the politics and economics of the so-called ‘free market’;
- social justice as a concept and theory is still rarely translated effectively into policy and practice: this is most harshly felt by minorities, whether indigenous, settled or recent immigrant; and
- there remains a major task which is to begin to develop a theory of social justice that is truly global, incorporating the values and traditions of the major cultures and traditions of the ‘East’/‘South’.

I now leave it to my colleagues in what follows to develop the ideas of social justice in their own elegant and wise discourses. I end by again thanking all the contributors to this book. They have stimulated me immensely and I hope they do that for the readers of this volume. They have also persevered with patience my prompts to faster action. I hope they enjoy the book at least as much as I have enjoyed editing it. And I thank those at Edward Elgar Publishing, and particularly Emily Mew, Commissioning Editor, for her unfailing support in this lengthy endeavour. My partner, Gill, deserves the last and greatest thanks for her tolerance towards my frequent disappearances into my study.