

# EMPATHETIC COSMOPOLITANISM: SOUTH AFRICA AND THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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## Abstract

One feature of Nelson Mandela's legacy in South Africa is his concept of post-*apartheid* society as a cosmopolitan space. Sadly, recent developments in the country suggest a return to nativist and bigoted world views and cast a dark shadow over his legacy. There is an urgent necessity to review this aspect of Mandela's vision. In so doing, this paper highlights the ethical advantages of cosmopolitanism, and argues that what sets Mandela's cosmopolitanism apart from others is his emphasis on empathy. I therefore suggest that empathetic cosmopolitanism is a particularly South African worldview. In support of this idea of empathetic cosmopolitanism, I discuss such recent theories as 'incompleteness', 'multiple identity', and 'entanglement', suggested by South African thinkers, as registers of Mandela's global citizenship.

## 1. Introduction

The world greeted the transition from *apartheid* to democracy in South Africa as a unique phenomenon and viewed Mandela as a global icon of morality. Indeed, given its colonial history, the country surprised the world with the peaceful nature of that transition. As Njabulo Ndebele (1999: 153) notes, the anticipated disintegration of the country in a "conflagration of violence did not take place". South Africa provides a valuable case study for the condition of our world as a globalised space, a space in which migration and mixing of people have become normalised. Against a background of centuries of intermixing and entangle-

ment among different ethnicities and races, the country is a microcosm of the global socio-cultural condition. This is so because nearly every society is heterogeneous, that is, each society comprises peoples from diverse races, ethnicities, religions and other markers of identity. This experience could have far-reaching implications not only for Africa, but also for the rest of the world. Indeed, South Africa's political and moral accomplishments have led Phillip-Joseph Salazar (2002: xvii) to the belief that the country could be "a blueprint for the construction of a European nation". Paul Gilroy (2006: 289) hopes that South Africa would provide "a new cosmopolitanism" for the world.

It may be too early to confirm Salazar's bold claim. Indeed, recent socio-political developments in South Africa provide sufficient reason to question the country's development. Among these are the recent cases of corruption and nativist political gestures in Jacob Zuma's government and life, on the one hand, and on the other demonstrations such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, and Arts Must Burn. Some have even suggested #MandelaMustFall (Munusamy 2015). The popular painter Ayanda Mabulu calls Mandela "a dignified bastard, a political slut", arguing that he "was just an image, an idolised black man, a colourful image in so called 'rainbow colours' who gave away property rights to the oppressor. He was a huge sell-out who readily acquired stardom but he forgot about the freedom of his people" (Mabulu 2015). Zama Mthunzi, a third-year mathematical sciences student at the University of Witwatersrand, made a t-shirt with an inscription: "Fuck White People". In explaining that hate slogan he states that he felt excluded when he saw white students paying school fees whereas he did not have money to pay his. He states:

I was feeling hatred, because it was times of financial exclusion ... and ... white people are paying [school fees], they're relaxed, there are no financial problems so it arose that Black exclusion is so [rampant] in this institution (Panyna 2016).

Chumani Maxwele began the Rhodes-must-fall movement with his poo-protest. He poured a bucket of human faeces on the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Maxwele states, "Black pain led me to throw Rhodes poo" (Maxwele 2016).

These demonstrations draw attention to the despicable conditions of the majority of the black population. What is troubling in them, however, is their nearly unanimous singling out of whites as the cause

of their existential problems. The demonstrators express an apparently dominant mood among the black population, which is the questioning of forgiveness and reconciliation. There is a growing tendency to resurrect notions of Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness as solutions to the problems of the day (Sipho Hlongwane 2011). There is, therefore, a troubling desire for purity and singular identity in a world that can no longer contain those categories. This desire is morally objectionable. Thankfully, the South African Constitution and social structures seem strong enough to prevent this desire from being realised. As Bernard Lategan (2015: 97) rightly observes:

The idea of a singular, 'pure' identity formed the bedrock of the sustained attempt over centuries to impose a divisive and unequal social structure along racial lines, leaving in its wake a deeply scarred humanity and an internally polarised society, steeped in mistrust and suspicion.

The concept of singular identity is limiting because it defines individuals as pre-existing in a condition beyond which they cannot go. It contains within itself the potential for violence because it is, by nature, exclusionary. Why then would the victims of such arbitrary constructs of identity, with their implicit violence, resort to the same ill will that was visited on them? The youths who challenge Mandela's legacy might not be to blame. His legacy seems to be missing from contemporary politics, and in the vacuum created by the absence of good leadership, what is left is a venting of anger and frustration at Mandela himself who led what they perceive as a flawed transition. South Africa is in a moral and political crisis. But given the overwhelming poverty in the black population, it is appropriate to speak of cosmopolitanism. It is precisely at such moments that we are asked to re-examine Mandela's vision of his society. At such moments, we ask whether we can still live together and how. It is not the goal of this article to explore the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the black population. Its goal is to reassert the necessity of Nelson Mandela's vision of South Africa as an open society. It is difficult to imagine economic fairness and social harmony without openness. Indeed, as Bernard Lategan (2015: 97) has suggested, the injustice of *apartheid* was possible precisely because of the narrowness of the notions of identity and solidarity that informed its thinking. A better alternative to the *apartheid* society must, therefore, reject *apartheid's* mind-set.

## 2. The need for openness in post-*apartheid* South Africa

Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu are widely recognised as leaders who understood palpable steps to correct the dangers of exclusivist conceptions of identity and solidarity. In their pursuit of social and economic justice, they adopted universal moral frameworks designed to maintain respect for the rights and dignity of individuals. For example, speaking at the United Nation's (UN) first global campaign to promote gay rights in July 2013, Archbishop Tutu declared that he would never worship a "homophobic God" and would rather go to hell than find himself in a "homophobic heaven". He accentuated his support for gay rights by making reference to his work as an anti-*apartheid* activist: "I am as passionate about this campaign as I ever was about apartheid. For me, it is at the same level" (Frymann 2013).

A dominant idea emerges from Tutu's equating of black liberation struggles with those of the queer community. Both struggles are rooted in a universal moral justification: respect for the rights and dignity of others. Tutu, a man of God, does not posit God as the guarantor of his activism as a Pope would; God is not the source of his moral conviction. Rather his references to God or heaven must be understood as metaphors of the non-negotiability of the moral conditions of the dignity and equality of all humans. The non-negotiability is ontological and teleological, that is, it is the source of being and the end to which all beings tend. In sum, this moral condition is the ultimate guarantor of meaning and belongingness in community. Openness is an essential aspect of the moral framework of post-*apartheid* South Africa if only because it is the exact opposite of *apartheid* ideology. Openness to reality and to the humanity of others, constitutes essential aspects not only of a democratic society, but of global citizenship as well. Desmond Tutu's idea of group-transcendent, or individual-centred conception of rights and dignity can also be appreciated with the help of the words of his compatriot and fellow anti-*apartheid* activist, Nelson Mandela (2010: 17):

At a time when some people are feverishly encouraging the growth of fractional forces, raising the tribe into the final and highest form of social organisation, setting one national group against the other, cosmopolitan dreams are not only desirable but a bounden duty; dreams that stress the special unity that holds the freedom forces

together — [in] a bond that has been forged by common struggles, sacrifices and traditions.

It is of far-reaching relevance that Mandela identifies cosmopolitan dreams not just as desirable, but as a bounden duty. It is a moral condition that 'should' apply to every South African. But what are those cosmopolitan dreams? How does Mandela's cosmopolitanism differ from other forms that have acquired a negative aftertaste, given their closeness to European imperialist dreams and globalisation? I argue that what sets Mandela's cosmopolitanism apart from other forms is his emphasis on empathy. Someone who is truly cosmopolitan perceives the world from other people's perspective and reorders his or her ethical relation accordingly. I, therefore, offer the term 'empathetic cosmopolitanism' as a particular model of the post-*apartheid* South African worldview. Empathetic cosmopolitanism is born of the effort to create a new society that recognises openness to others and otherness as its operative principle. In explaining South African empathetic cosmopolitanism, I shall discuss some of the recent theories of living with particular attention to 'incompleteness', 'multiple identity' and 'entanglement', suggested by South African thinkers as registers of Mandela's global citizenship.

Mandela's conceptions of cosmopolitanism and global citizenship are intimately linked to his idea that people should cultivate feelings of empathy that cut across race, religion, ethnicity and other groupings. In his speech, "South Africans, Africans, and Citizens of the World", he extols the virtues of the Afrikaner poet Ingrid Jonker who wrote a popular poem, "The Child", in which a white protagonist identifies with a black child shot in its mother's arms by the *apartheid* police. For Mandela, Jonker "transcended a particular experience" (2003: 148), and in so doing became receptive to people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. It is in her capacity to transcend a particular experience and to reach out to others that Jonker "became a South African, an African and a citizen of the world" (Mandela 2003: 148). Mandela seems to imply that being a citizen of South Africa and of the world means recognising an aspect of oneself in other people's experience. The idea of reaching out to others or recognising an aspect of oneself in other's experience is inherent in Mandela's explication of the Southern African concept of *ubuntu*. For him, "*ubuntu* does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be

able to improve?" (Kuryraym 2013). At the core of his explanation is the relation between an individual's act and society; it is about responsibility towards others, including the environment. The other is, therefore, already present in one's consciousness. Understood in this way, *ubuntu* is an essential aspect of openness; its core formulation, *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* ("A person is a person because of people") presupposes openness to the other through whom one becomes what one is.

### **3. Global citizenship from the South: Empathetic cosmopolitanism**

A global citizen is a cosmopolitan. I have discussed cosmopolitanism elsewhere. For this essay I provide a sketch of global citizenship and cosmopolitanism as a fundamental openness to reality and as an idea that runs through the most important South African theoretical interventions on what it means to be human in today's complex world.

The term cosmopolitanism derives from Greek, *kosmos* (world) *polites* (citizen); *kosmopolitês* ("citizen of the world"); it is the understanding that all human beings are citizens in a single community. Hugh Harris (1927: 7) reminds us that "Democritus complains 'I visited Athens and no one knew me'. Yet, as a result of his wanderings farther afield, he could say, 'To the wise man every country is a dwelling-place, for the whole world is the fatherland of a good soul'". Democritus's idea of the good souled person in relation to the world suggests one whose humanity knows no boundary. A person with a good soul is a citizen of the world. Martha C Nussbaum (1997: 5). She interprets Diogenes's famous declaration "I am a citizen of the world" to reflect spiritual expansiveness. For her, Diogenes "refused to be defined by his local origins and local group memberships, which were central to a Greek male's self-image. He insisted on defining himself primarily in terms of more universal aspirations and concerns". The cosmopolitan, for her, is "the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings" (Nussbaum 1996: 4). Nussbaum's emphasis on human beings, obviously of diverse ethnic extractions, beliefs and political persuasions, draws attention to what really counts about cosmopolitanism: relation rather than opposition. In being open to, and in relating with diverse people, we form a community whose justification lies in its elementary openness to reality. Such a community is "the source of our moral obli-

gations" (1996: 4). In Nussbaum's analysis, cosmopolitanism adopts a moral outlook. As Brian Barry (1999: 12-66) argues, a cosmopolitan is, by definition, a citizen of the world, and global citizenship is essentially a moral outlook. Luis Cabrera (2010: 5) advances the moral outlook of cosmopolitanism in his conception of global citizenship, which he identifies as "the fully realized form of individual cosmopolitanism. It provides a guide for individual action within a globally oriented but still individualistic moral frame". Understanding the shortcomings of individual cosmopolitanism as lacking in obligation to specific individuals, he argues that global citizenship must be "grounded in duties corresponding to widely recognized human rights" (2010: 9). Obviously, Cabrera argues from the perspective that individual cosmopolitanism excludes responsibility towards others. This is not always the case. There is, of course, no doubt that some aspects of individual cosmopolitanism carry negative baggage such as snobbism and elitism. I will address this further down.

In arguing that global citizenship requires openness to others and otherness even within a given nation-state, I provide a further definition of the global citizen as one who at the very least subscribes to the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (United Nations undated). Some international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide some of the more practical, truly realisable definitions of global citizenship. The International Development Education Association Scotland (IDEAS), a Scottish NGO, defines the global citizen as "someone who is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen [someone who] respects and values diversity" (IDEAS undated). For Oxfam, global citizenship involves: "asking questions and critical thinking; exploring local-global connections and our views, values and assumptions; exploring the complexity of global issues and engaging with multiple perspectives; exploring issues of social justice locally and globally" (Oxfam undated).

Cosmopolitanism is not without baggage. Its origin is rooted in privilege and elitism. Brett Bowden (2003: 350) argues that "the ideal of global citizenship is inextricably linked to the West's long and torturous history of engaging in overzealous civilising-cum-universalising missions in the non-Western world". John Noyes (2006: 444) shares the same

conviction with Bowden, and locates the problem in the idea of "*Bildung* — the doctrine of formation, improvement and self-expression of individuals and cultures that became a central concept in discussion on modernization as the century progresses". He cites Goethe, who captures the 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialist sense of the word. Noyes argues that for Goethe, "to be a citizen of the world is to live in a world increasingly determined by European overseas expansionism" (Noyes 2006: 448), which in itself was an extension of the ability of the European man to expand his horizon by moving freely across national boundaries. Bruce Robbins (1998: 1) states that the term had been applied spitefully to "Christians, aristocrats, merchants, Jews, homosexuals, and intellectuals". It later began to apply to "North Atlantic merchant sailors, Caribbean au pairs in the United States, Egyptian guest workers in Iraq, Japanese women who take gaijin lovers". At the same time, Robbins (1998: 12-13) explains that the "term *cosmopolitics* represents one effort to describe, from within multiculturalism, a name for the genuine striving toward common norms and mutual translatability that is also part of multiculturalism". It is perhaps the idea of "mutual translatability" of cultures or experiences that lends cosmopolitanism one of its saving virtues, especially when considered within a multi-racial, multi-ethnic society such as South Africa.

Amanda Anderson (2006: 72-73) acknowledges this negative aspect of cosmopolitanism, but points out the relevance of its universal element. She notes the difference between exclusionary and inclusionary cosmopolitanism. In exclusionary cosmopolitanism: "all value lies in abstract or 'cosmic' universalism. In inclusionary cosmopolitanism, by contrast, universalism finds expression through sympathetic imagination and intercultural exchange". Anderson seeks to reassert the primacy of universalism over essentialism. The new universalism "focuses on those ideals and practices that propel individuals and groups beyond the confines of restricted or circumscribed identities" (2006: 70). She introduces a helpful concept, "sympathetic imagination", which allows the cosmopolitan to feel with the world of the other. It is against this backdrop that she understands cosmopolitanism not just as an intellectual program, but as an ethical ideal "for cultivating character and negotiating the experience of otherness" (2006: 74). She thus argues that a robust understanding of cosmopolitanism endorses "reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity" (2006: 72).

I find Anderson's insight helpful in my articulation of the South African conception of global citizenship, which is rooted in the post-*apartheid* search for the common humanity among ethnicities, races, cultures, or if you will, nationalities. Abstract, disembodied rules by which every individual is supposed to abide are not enough; boundary-defying moral feelings and outlooks are required if these groups are to bind into a true community. This is not just desirable; it is a "bounden duty". A true global citizen from the South African perspective acknowledges the humanity and dignity of others as constitutive of hers. Negotiating the experiences of otherness demands that such a person interact with this other in a Martin Buber I-Thou paradigm. Anderson's "sympathetic imagination" plays an important role in this regard, though, in my opinion, sympathy smacks of elitism here. Sympathy issues from a position of power that refuses to acknowledge the coequality of the victim with a sympathiser. "Empathetic imagination" seems more appositional to Anderson's moral conception of cosmopolitanism and to the South African condition. Suzanne Keen (2006: 209) provides a succinct differentiation between empathy and sympathy that might aid our discussion. The empathetic person says: "I feel what you feel. *I feel your pain*", whereas in sympathy one says "I feel supportive about your feelings. *I feel pity for your pain*". Sympathy is the near equivalent of pity.

Indeed, one of the achievements of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is the opening of portals of empathy through which South Africans might hear one another's stories. In so doing, they are able to put themselves in the positions of others. (On how stories open portals of empathy, see Keen 2007; Frank 2010). Empathy is thus established as an integral element of South Africa's cosmopolitan imagination. Martha Nussbaum's definition of empathy as the "imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer" helps our understanding. Empathy "involves a participatory enactment of the situation of the sufferer, but always combined with the awareness that one is not oneself the sufferer" (Nussbaum 2001: 327). Empathy teaches us the value of considering issues from other people's perspectives, thus keeping us in constant awareness of the presence of others in our thinking and being. As Simon Baron-Cohen (2011: 10) puts it, "empathy occurs when we suspend our single-minded focus of attention, and instead adopt a double-minded focus of attention".

Understood in these ways, empathy is never passive. On the contrary, it urges us to become involved in the lives of others by con-

fronting the systems that make their lives unbearable. It opens us to others and the environment because it encourages a double focus of attention. Cosmopolitanism without empathy is empty and snobbish. Empathetic cosmopolitanism encourages us to switch perspectives with others of different ethnic, racial or cultural abstractions in order to relate with them without the intrusion of power or prejudice. In this context, therefore, it is fair to assert that cosmopolitanism does not involve universal systems or cultures. Nor is it mere globetrotting. One can be cosmopolitan without leaving one's birthplace. What is necessary is openness to otherness that is manifested in relation to that other. Empathetic imagination is implied in what Gerard Delanty (2006: 27) calls cosmopolitan imagination. For him:

the cosmopolitan imagination occurs when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness. It is an approach that shifts emphasis to internal developmental process within the social world rather than seeing globalization as the primary mechanism.

The ultimate test for the global citizen is captured in the questions: What is my attitude to others who do not look like me and my people, acceptance or rejection? Can I affirm their humanity as I affirm mine? In regard to the condition of the impoverished population in South Africa, the cosmopolitan imagination also demands seeing the world from their perspectives.

Jonathan Jansen provides a profound analysis of the requisite condition for South Africa to flourish as a cosmopolitan space. That condition is the understanding of the historical embeddedness of knowledge and the readiness to engage individuals as they come. To seek to understand where things have gone wrong is to take a hard look at history. As a foretaste of that history, one might wonder whether it is ever fair to expect forgiveness and cosmopolitan thinking from a people who have been brutalised and hounded out of normal economic and social existence by centuries of exploitation, forced displacement, and forced labour. Why would they not seek to exact some measure of vengeance? Jansen (2009) details the justified anger of black people and suggests that in order to understand them, one must switch perspectives with them. The magic of perspective-switching also works when one thinks of the descendants of white oppressors who cannot be held accountable for the crimes of their forebears. Jansen argues

that "if transformation were going to happen at all, it would have to happen at the level of knowledge" (2009: 20). In his view, whatever solution one proposes must be rooted in a race- and ethnicity-transcendent imagination that is couched in the awareness of how we are shaped by what we know. He observes that people often co-opt issues of race or ethnicity either to further their private interests or to avoid responsibility towards those who most need the attention (2009: 2). More often than not, well-intentioned scholars and activists, embarking upon the task of overthrowing oppression and its legacies, end up entrenching the oppositional mind-set that produces such oppression in the first place. Jansen gives an example that involves Critical theory — a school of thought, which is derived from Marxist anti-capitalist class struggle, and whose goal is to resist the agents of exploitation, and which perceives the world through the prism of polarities. "Critical theory receives and constructs the world as divided between black and white, working and privileged classes, citizens and illegal immigrants, men and women, straight and queer, oppressors and oppressed" (2009: 256). In adhering to these divisions, Jansen argues, Critical theory ignores the "people ... the bodies ... who carry knowledge within themselves that must be engaged, interrupted, and transformed" (2009: 258). His own personal experience of suffering and hardship had bred anger and resentment towards whites. He grew up nurtured by the philosophy of black consciousness, whose thinking was assertive and which made —

black identity and black power central to its ideological tenets much more appealing than nonracialism of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. [He] had firm views about white privilege and a very clear understanding about redistribution from white hands back to the original inhabitants of the land (Jansen 2009: 6).

Like much of Critical theory, identity politics in South Africa achieved the opposite of the redress of the past injustices that some of its proponents claim to address. Indeed, it is wrong precisely because it fails to address humans as humans; it addresses them as figurative of their groups. Warning against resorting to identity politics, Jansen reminds us that *apartheid* would not have worked for as long as it did without the collaboration of blacks. At the same time it eventually fell apart also when confronted with universal human solidarity. "Black South African elites are as much part of the capitalist system of exploitation as are their white compatriots, while prejudice and bigotry are not restricted to

white citizens" (Jansen 2009: 259-260).

Global citizenship that is informed by empathy must, therefore, take into account the knowledge of how people live. Global citizenship, understood from this perspective, takes as a starting point the idea that a person and their culture are not finished products, and they need society's affirmation to realise the full reaches of their humanity. Empathetic cosmopolitanism in South Africa traces part of its roots in the Southern African concept of *ubuntu*, the idea that an individual does not exist all by him or herself. It is the idea that my being owes its existence to that of other people. Understood as an extension of *ubuntu*, empathetic cosmopolitanism has not only ethical implications to relate to others in fulfilling ways, it also has a moral obligation to look after the other, especially the vulnerable members of society. We do that by creating an enabling environment for their flourishing as humans with dignity. Exclusionary conceptions of identity and solidarity run counter to empathetic cosmopolitanism. It would be a fatal mistake in the socio-political life of South Africa, or indeed, of any nation to believe that the search for social and economic fairness has to necessarily include a nativist, essentialist or absolutist solutions. A sympathetic reading of forgiveness, an essential part of the TRC, states precisely the opposite, that is, the fact that socio-economic fairness can now be more rigorously pursued, and without bitterness.

#### **4. Multiple identities, incompleteness and entanglement**

Jean and John Comaroff have observed that the global South is rarely seen as the genesis of theories concerning world historical events. They argue that the far-reaching historical transformations taking place there provide unique opportunities to theorise about our world: "In the face of the structural violence perpetrated in the name of neoliberalism ... the global south is producing and exporting some ingenious, highly imaginative modes of survival". By "imaginative modes of survival" the Comaroffs are referring to new constructs and paradigms for meeting the challenges of globalisation and modernity. I agree with their assertion that "in the present moment, it is the global south that affords privileged insights into the workings of the world at large" (2013). South Africa is an interesting case in point.

In recognition of South Africa's special role in the construction of imaginative modes of survival, the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS), a prestigious South African research institute, organised, in 2009 and 2010, a series of symposia dedicated to examining what it means to be human today in South Africa. The organisers published some of the papers presented in these symposia as a book aptly titled *The Humanist Imperative in South Africa Today* (Geyer 2011). In addition to these symposia, STIAS also sponsors on-going research on the theme, "Being Human Today", which examines, among other issues, "The constitution of humanity and the impact of classifications; ... critical humanism, reflexive humanism, interconnectedness and solidarity, humanity as part of the web of life" (STIAS 2016). In one of these lectures on New African Humanism (2011: 22-23), Bernard Lategan, the founding director of STIAS, argues that:

A more humane society will require not only the internalisation of our multiple identities, but also the ability to utilize the overlap with our fellow citizens to build bridges and to weave a complex net of social relations that will be strong enough to function with the opposing force of the complex world in which we find ourselves.

'Multiple identities' is not the same as 'multiple personalities'. The latter is mutually exclusive, while the former is mutually inclusive. The concept of multiple identities suggests that a person could be X and Y at the same time. In this sense, X merely relates to Y. Neither is complete without the other. The shift from singular to multiple identities is not an easy one. According to Lategan, it requires the presence of three factors: changes in attitude, expansions of framework, and the recognition of process. Attitude refers to the "way in which identity is approached", and it involves the "willingness to consider alternatives" to the previous often restrictive "experience with singularity". Framework refers to the way in which identity is conceptualised. I understand Lategan to mean that all self-perception takes place within a context, and the larger and the more complex the contexts are, the more likely people will be to perceive themselves in models of multiple identities. He argues that "multiple identities presuppose a framework of openness and limitlessness, along with the use of strategies for building relational bridges, reaching out, crossing borders" (Lategan 2015: 92). Identity is not something that is given to human beings, because humans are not automatons. They act upon, and are acted upon by, their environments; this

interaction helps to define individuals. For Lategan, the concept of multiple identities implies a process, or —

the willingness to undertake a journey. With the existing identity as the point of departure, the challenge is to follow the connecting strands as they lead to a wider network that constantly branches out yet simultaneously keeps the different parts connected. In the end, the individual is fully embedded in the interconnected web of life (2015: 93).

Lategan's journey metaphor is instructive. If singular identity is restrictive because it is static and defines individuals as pre-existing in a condition beyond which they cannot go, then a journey necessarily becomes a transgressive gesture. Mobility implies the possibility of changes in perspective and the willingness to negotiate reality. As a journey, the notion of multiple identities is the gesture undertaken by an adult to understand and be an active part of the complex world of which he/she is a member.

Given the South African past, which suffered under strictly compartmentalised identity constructs, the idea of identity as a journey is helpful indeed. In this conception, every journey is often a journey to the other, to the unknown. Every journey to the other is also a journey to the self. This journey also implies that one does not have all that one needs in order to be who one is. One always needs something more; one might need the other. That is precisely why the person reaches out. One is incomplete. Indeed, in this conception of multiple identities, Lategan pays tribute to Francis Nyamnjoh's notion of incompleteness.

In *Palm Wine Drinkard*, Amos Tutuola's magical realist narrative, the author offers us a world that defies clear dualistic demarcations between things and consciousness. Francis Nyamnjoh, in his analysis of that work, imagines human identity and solidarity in ways that defy strict Western identity constructs. One reality merges into another because nothing stands on its own; everything is connected to every other thing. Things are incomplete in themselves and therefore require other things to realise their being. Even then completeness is never attained. Incompleteness becomes a permanent condition of striving to reach out to something else; therefore, reality becomes what it is — a permanent striving. Nyamnjoh argues that:

Tutuola's is a universe where life is larger than logic, and where the

logic and reality of sensory perception are constantly challenged. [Tutuola] invites us to perceive things as interlinked and to factor interconnections into how we relate to the world and the hierarchies we would like to claim or contest therein (Nyamnjoh 2015: 4).

Nyamnjoh identifies Tutuola's world as that of frontier Africans whom he defines as those who "contest ... institutionalised and bounded ideas and practices of being, becoming, belonging, places and spaces. They are interested in conversations not conversions" (Nyamnjoh 2015: 6). In Nyamnjoh's thinking, "fundamentalist and exclusionary claims and articulation of belonging are profoundly at odds with the frontier character of Africans and their societies" (Nyamnjoh 2015: 7). Any theory that is supposed to have realistic implications for people's lives and that is derived from a work of magical realism, must appear slippery. One would be challenged to explain how the suppleness of being in the magical world can explain one person's relation to another in the real world where, in the name of human rights, individuals demand respect for their bodies. Nyamnjoh provides an answer in his notion of openness and conviviality. Tutuola's world provides a metaphor for conviviality: an essentially African mode of living. For him:

conviviality invites us to celebrate and preserve incompleteness and mitigate the delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness. Not only does conviviality encourage us to recognise our own incompleteness, it challenges us to be open-minded and open-ended in our claims and articulations of identities, being and belonging (Nyamnjoh 2015: 10).

Of far-reaching importance in regard to African self-perception is the idea of openness to reality and to others, and this is where Nyamnjoh best approximates the concept of *ubuntu* and Mandela's vision of global citizenship. Nyamnjoh seems to suggest that the notion of self-sufficiency runs contrary to the contours of being African. The idea that the other is necessary to our being implies a broad, inclusive attitude to the world. It is a rich form of empathetic cosmopolitanism.

Regarding the necessity of conviviality, Nyamnjoh's concept of incompleteness dovetails with Sarah Nuttall's notion of entanglement. After more than three centuries of living together, the different races and ethnicities that make up South Africa have become so entwined that it is impossible to speak of one group to the exclusion of others; the

fates of these groups, for better or for worse, are inextricably knotted. Carli Coetzee (1998: 113-119) argues that more and more people of Afrikaner descent are claiming Krotoä, a Khoisan woman as their ancestor. They thus support the idea that South Africans are more mutually interdependent than most seem willing to admit. Sarah Nuttall (2009: 11) argues that entanglement in South Africa is a potent means of social understanding. Entanglement is a knotting of difference and sameness, and with regard to socio-cultural relevance, it is "a rubric in terms of which we can begin to meet the challenge of the 'after apartheid'"; it is "a set of relations, some of them conscious but many of them unconscious, which occur between people who most of the time try to define themselves as different" (2009: 12). To be sure, entanglement does not imply a glossing over of the different forms of separation or difference that still exist and which have material consequences in many people's lives. Rather, Nuttall focuses on how "sites and spaces in which what was once thought of as separate — identities, spaces, histories — come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways" (2009: 20). She suggests that the ideas of established cultural differences can no longer be used as tools of oppression or of resistance. Thus the time has arrived to invest in mutuality as capital. This is a virtue in itself.

## **5. Conclusion: The search for a new humanism as a register of global citizenship**

I mentioned in the previous section that STIAS organised a series of symposia in quest for a new humanism in South Africa. I understand the STIAS projects to be an extension of Nelson Mandela's vision. A new humanism must transcend the pitfalls of identity politics; it implies engaging people not as entrenched in traditional Marxist, or other polarities, but as humans who are informed by their own specific history. Whatever questions are raised by the complex condition of South Africa must be answered by adopting a more critical attitude to identity and solidarity. Making a subtle reference to some of the ideas that undergirded liberation struggles, Njabulo Ndebele (2011: 180) dismisses the supposition that solutions to post-*apartheid* problems might still arrive as pre-packaged group answers. Instead, the answers "will emerge from the interactions of sturdy, open-minded agents". Thus emphasis

on the group should yield to an emphasis on society in all its diversity. Whereas groups as markers of identities cannot be entirely dismissed, they "should progressively give way to the needs of individuals forming lasting or temporary collectives, within or across groups, which result in shifting or ever widening personal identities" (2011: 180). Ndebele's privileging of the individual is to be understood as an emphasis on moral awareness. Open-mindedness and freedom keep the victims of history from becoming trapped in *ressentiment* and bigotry and thereby inverting the crimes of the oppressors. On the other hand, it allows former, privileged oppressors to switch perspectives with victims of history. Of importance here is the will to contribute something to society. In this way the person asserts their freedom and humanity while at the same time defending the freedom and humanity of others.

Empathetic cosmopolitanism may not solve any immediate social or economic problems. However, it is necessary for its specific emphasis on open-mindedness and for the urge to consider issues and persons from perspectives other than one's own. At this difficult stage in South African history, open-mindedness must accompany the quest for social and economic justice. As Mandela has claimed, open-mindedness is not just a virtue; it is a bounden duty. Indeed, it would be a mistake to believe that cosmopolitanism ignores issues of social justice; to the contrary, it enhances both the awareness of social justice, and conviviality, which is an essential aspect of the Southern African concept of *ubuntu*.

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