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I am Because You Are: Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Xenophobia¹

Michael Onyebuchi Eze

Abstract: This paper argues that the dominant discourse on cosmopolitanism has largely focused on its constitutive character (what the law tells us) while ignoring its substantive essence (human fellowship, subjective good). While recognizing the contribution made by other intellectual traditions, the paper argues that none of the approaches have yet answered basic questions of how to live with the stranger beyond the requirement(s) of the law. The paper is also critical of those versions of cosmopolitanism that privileges subjective preference to members of our community over the stranger, or that advocates eradication of boundaries as key condition for cosmopolitanism. The paper champions subjective equality through dialogue as a key condition for cosmopolitanism. Subjective equality on the other hand defines our terms of global justice.

Introduction

Cosmopolitanism is not a new phenomenon. It is an organic character of world societies whether in terms of cultural interactions, forced migrations, necessity, wars, conquest, plunder, slavery, terrorism or deportations.² Realities such as these induce people to live and interact together through mutual desires, force of history or other sociopolitical or economic necessities. The reality of globalization has brought crises in far off land closer to our 'moral life-worlds', ultimately constituting our subjective reality of experience.³ The need for a new cosmopolitan outlook is, accordingly, based on this modern reality of human encounters.

Critical questions I seek to address include: what could cosmopolitanism mean in an age of xenophobia? If cosmopolitanism is

1 I dedicate this essay to Nazar Awan, a great cosmopolitan, from whom I learned that every human encounter is a gift.

2 Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider. 'Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: a research agenda.' *The British journal of sociology* 57, no. 1 (2006): 1-23:10.

3 *Ibid.*, 11.

not a new phenomenon, in what ways could we present a new understanding that is sympathetic to our quest for global justice, indigeneity and even crises of citizenship? Do differences in culture and history mean that we cannot have a shared community of value? In what ways does our quest for inclusive human community move from abstract to practical ethics? I argue that while the dominant discourses on cosmopolitan ethics have robustly addressed such needs as necessity for inclusive human community or even eradication of geopolitical boundaries, they have at best remained elitist by focusing primarily on policies that (i) favor only sectional groups of our world communities, (ii) ignore the role of inter-personal relationship in the cosmopolitan world, (iii) fail to reconcile the relationship between the individual as an embedded member of a cultural community who is also a potential global citizen, (iv) are ultimately an exclusive project for those who have access to global capital and (v) are reductive for its overemphasis on moving beyond the boundaries as an epistemic point of departure. I shall argue, using the African ethics of Ubuntu, for a new understanding of a cosmopolitan ethics, one which while recognizing the abstract rationalism of Western cosmopolitanism yet admits the non-rational, the non-historical and even non-humans. It is a view that taps into difference as a source of our shared humanity while at the same time placing the individual as a mobile subject embedded between his sociocultural world and the global community. One does not need to have access to global capital or travel to New York or Mumbai to develop a cosmopolitan outlook. Most significantly, cosmopolitanism as an ethical outlook would have failed if it does not evolve into a practical ethics. *After we have all realized the necessity to live together (i.e., become cosmopolitan), how do we actually live together (practicing cosmopolitans)?*

Imagining Cosmopolitanism

The term cosmopolitanism very often evokes the idea of global denizen with a sophisticated outlook about the world. He is a world traveler, a

citizen of the world,⁴ benevolent,⁵ unbound by local affinities, concerned with universal good and aspirations, one whose humanity is defined by 'worth of reason and moral purpose.'⁶ Herein, cosmopolitanism is measured in terms of a normative ethical quality to be aspired to, evoking a sense of translocation to an ideal world of the good. This cosmopolitan agent, a stock of 'rational humanity'⁷ becomes the heterodoxy of the provincialized, irrational and even timid primitive man that lacks the sunny outlook of the global world. The non-cosmopolitan subject is primitive, un-traveled, parochial in outlook, suspicious of difference, ethnocentric, prejudiced, biased, uninformed, and typically uncouth. Such schematic understanding occupies special place in cosmopolitan literature. My claim is that such ideological distortions mask social reality.⁸ Thus, we have cosmopolitanism as a constitutive ethos without a substantive essence.

Cosmopolitanism as an idea of global citizenship traces its origin to the Stoic ideal of the world community of equal citizens. Reason the Stoics argue, constitute the foundation of our subjective equality and shared humanity! We are humans because we are rational and since reason is a virtue we all share; we all belong to human community. Reason is the law of nature and the basis of our shared humanity, notes Marcus Aurelius: 'And he bears in mind that all that is rational is akin, and that it is in man's nature to care for all men, and that we should not embrace the opinion of all, but of those alone who live in conscious

4 In a response to the question of his origin, the cynic Diogenes had responded, 'I am a citizen of the world', see Martha Nussbaum *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, (Boston, Mass., 1996), also, Ibidem 'Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism.' *Journal of political philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1997): 1-25: 5.

5 Nussbaum, 'Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism.' 5.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 Abstract cosmopolitanism is often beckoned upon an impartial ethic that is anachronistic to the internal goods of a community. Such cosmopolitan ideal obfuscates social reality by imposing a misrecognition of social constructs at the root of our deepest human desires. Consider the case of the so-called 'closet' racist who abides by the law but once able to truncate the law shows his/her truest emotions.

agreement with nature.’⁹ A thought shared by Seneca that through reason we learn of our shared origins and equality:

We all spring from the same source, have the same origin ... We have all had the same number of forefathers; there is no man whose first beginning does not transcend memory ... The flight of time, with its vicissitudes, has jumbled all such things together and fortune has turned them upside down.¹⁰

Unlike Plato and Aristotle the Stoics condemned slavery which they saw as inhumane and unnatural institution: ‘*Servitus est constitutio iuris gentium qua quis domino alieno contra natura subicitur.*’¹¹ Liberty is a natural state of man while slavery is antithetical to that condition. The Western Enlightenment humanists saw in stoicism an intellectual repertoire for an optimistic view of man¹² and his relation to nature and social world. Prior to the Enlightenment, the status of man was that of a powerless being remotely controlled by a greater being who dominates his will. The Enlightenment rehabilitated the image of man as a being infused with a warrior spirit, a Lord of the universe in unity with God.¹³ Nature is neither evil nor dangerous to man but a good to be desired and celebrated for the benefit of man. The Enlightenment humanists opposed monasticism and medieval asceticism as stifling human life through a binary universalism: (i) advocating the metaphysics of divine revelation against natural reason and, (ii) championing religious mediocrity as a guide to reality.¹⁴ From Dante, the humanists got the idea that human beings are capable—through intellect and reason—to achieve greater good for humanity,

9 Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditations*, in *Marcus Aurelius*, Loeb Classical Library 58, transl. C. R. Haines (Harvard University Press, 1916), Bk. II, iv, 4, p. 53; see also, Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 593.

10 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Seneca Six Pack* (Los Angeles: Enhanced Media, 2016), 98f; *On Benefits*, Bk. III, xxvii, i; *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library, vol. III, p. 177; Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales, trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library, epistle XLIV, 3, vol. I, p. 288, XCV, 33, 52; CII, 21-22, vol. II p. 91, 181.

11 Cited in Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 67.

12 Purposely using a sexist language insofar as the project was exclusive to rich-white-male landowners, excluding women and nonwhites.

13 See also, Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*.

14 See for example, Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Renaissance Thoughts and its Sources*. Edited by Michael Mooney, Columbia University Press, 1979, 176f.

control and be masters of their fate.¹⁵ Reason is the foundation for shared humanity and equality observes Friedrich Schiller:

All thinking minds are now united by a cosmopolitan bond of friendship, and all the light of the age may now illuminate the mind of a modern Galileo or Erasmus ... we wish to be and remain in body citizens of our time ... it is the privilege and the duty of the philosopher and of the poet to belong to no people ... but to be truly the contemporary of all times.¹⁶

Not only does the philosopher and the poet belong to no one, they must also resent patriotism. National patriotism for Schiller as Hans Kohn observed, is only ‘important for immature nations, for the youth of the world. It is a poor and trifling ideal to write for one nation ... totally unbearable for philosophical mind.’¹⁷ Montesquieu concurs:

If I knew something useful to my nation but ruinous to another, I would not propose it to my prince, because I am a human being before I am a Frenchman, because I am by necessity a human being, whereas I am Frenchman only by chance ... If I knew something useful to my fatherland which were prejudicial to Europe, or something which were useful to Europe and prejudicial to mankind, I would consider it a crime.¹⁸

Writing in *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* (1772), Goethe was critical of German nationalists and their obsession with fatherlands: ‘If we find a place in the world where we can rest with our property, a field to feed us, a house to shelter us: have we not there the fatherland?.’¹⁹ This trajectory of ideas map for us, in historical terms, the boundaries of contemporary scholarship on cosmopolitanism. On this view, Roger Scruton has offered a definition that best captures this ethical imagination:

[Cosmopolitanism is] the belief in, and pursuit of, a style of life which ... [shows] acquaintance with, and an ability to incorporate, the manners, habits, languages, and social customs of cities throughout the world ... In this sense, the cosmopolitan is often seen as a kind of parasite, who depends upon the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 407f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 376f.

quotidian lives of others to create the various local flavors and identities in which he dabbles.²⁰

A primary concern in this definition is its essentialist pandering of what may be termed *naïve optimism*. Notice its epistemic indifference as to what constitutes the subjective good we desire for our cosmopolitan world. It does not discriminate on what kind of good or lifestyle we chose to adopt or incorporate as a ‘flavor’ of our identity. If Scruton is right, the cosmopolitan citizen is a dislocated individual, a transitional being, a hybrid subject. Should we however endure a lifetime of subjective prostitution just so we can remain a hybrid subject of the cosmopolitan world? This view of cosmopolitanism equally fails to interrogate what kind of values we actively desire to be universal ethics or why they are even desirable. If our common goods are internal to practices of our community, how do I reconcile the values of other communities with my own even if they are at loggerheads? Mother Theresa, the philanthropist nun of Calcutta, and Osama bin Laden, a notorious terrorist, have equally influenced culture, but what inspires my choice—in this case—Mother Theresa over and above that of Osama bin Laden? Does not the rejection of the latter constitute a short change of an ethical good in our cosmopolitan world? After all, in certain quarters, Osama bin Laden is equally considered a hero.

Martha Nussbaum, in an attempt to respond to such dilemma, speaks of cosmopolitanism in terms of embeddedness of community; an ethic that gives priority of allegiance to immediate members of my community: ‘none of the major thinkers in the cosmopolitan tradition denied that we can and should give special attention to our own families and to our own ties of religious and national belonging ... we must do so ... since we are all born into a family of some sort.’²¹ This is desirable, Nussbaum argues, yet the ‘primary reason a cosmopolitan should [prefer

20 Cited in Jeremy Waldron, ‘What is Cosmopolitan?.’ *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 227-243:227.

21 Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 135, see also Samuel Scheffler. ‘Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism.’ *Utilitas* 11, no. 03 (1999): 255-276: 259.

her community] is not that the local is better per se, but rather that this is the only sensible way to do good.’²² For Nussbaum, focusing on our local political communities, we maximize the chance of greater good. But doing such good is not without caveat for caught between two loyalties to members of our immediate community and to other world citizens one must then admit, as Scheffler puts it, that ‘devoting special attention to the people we are attached to is an effective way of doing good for humanity at large, or else we must suppose that the people we are attached to are simply worth more than others.’²³

Kwame Appiah shares similar position in his use of T. S. Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* to advocate for a closer communion for self-knowledge, for it is ‘closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical.’²⁴ Drawing insight from antiquity, he would endorse Cicero in his assertion that ‘society and human fellowship will be best served if we confer the most kindness on those with whom we are most closely associated.’²⁵ Appiah nevertheless, is keen to advocate for impartial cosmopolitanism which neither supports ‘the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitans who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality.’²⁶ Appiah identifies two strands of cosmopolitanism. The first is ‘the recognition that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other’s differences’ and the second is ‘the recognition of our responsibility for every human being.’²⁷ Of such recognition of our universal responsibility, Appiah appeals to culture.

Culture is a universal inheritance Appiah argues. Cultural artefact for example, is an entrustment for humanity. The Nigerians cannot claim sole ownership to the Nok sculpture as much as the Greeks possesses no

22 *Ibid.*, 135f.

23 Samuel Scheffler. ‘Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism.’ *Utilitas* 11, no. 03 (1999): 255-276:259.

24 Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, (London: W.W. Norton, 2006), xvii.

25 *Ibid.*, xviii.

26 *Ibid.*, xvii.

27 *Ibid.*, 4, 7f.

claim of inheritance to the Elgin Marbles nor the Danish or Swedes make any claim to Olaf's gold cup as authentically national treasure. The reason Appiah argues, is that none of these modern nation states can make a direct claim of relationship to the ancient societies from which these artefacts emerged. If these modern states do lay any claim of inheritance, they must 'think of themselves as trustees of humanity.'²⁸ These cultural artefacts (the Nok Sculptures or Elgin Marbles) 'belong in the deepest sense to all of us. "Belong" here is a metaphor, of course: I just mean that the Nok sculptures are of potential value to all human beings.'²⁹ By *deepest sense of all*, Appiah refers to cultural artefact as one example of cumulative knowledge to which the artist is an unconscious beneficiary: 'neither Munch nor Twin Seven Seven would have been the creator that he was if he'd been unaware of and unaffected by the work of artists in other places.'³⁰

The first problem with Appiah's claim is the assumption that what is considered a work of 'art' is at the same time universal. In many indigenous societies, sculptures generally possess religious essence. What we perceive as art from a Western conscious imaginary are sometimes primarily religious or they signify other anthropological necessities in non-Western societies. In the early days of my graduate school in Germany, my colleagues knowing I was from 'Africa' entertained me with planned visits to many art shows. I remember tagging along to visit art shows of German painters like those of Caspar Friedrich, Joseph Beuys, Lucian Freud, among others. I was often bemused as my friends chatted excitedly about the paintings. As these were tortuously long visits, I longed for any opportunity to escape the tours. I finally expressed my frustration that I neither understood the paintings nor have any appreciation of them. The paintings have neither relevance nor aesthetic value to me, born in Nigeria, matured in Zimbabwe and South Africa (and now an American citizen). My classmates were genuinely surprised

28 *Ibid.*, 120.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*, 125f.

but understanding. I was pleased to end the visits. This is not to say that one cannot appreciate a cultural artefact of another culture but it is equally problematic to impose our artistic appreciation on other cultures and generalize it. When the Europeans vandalized Africa, they saw in their gods and goddesses a version of European art forms. They would dispossess the people of their religious and cultural heritage which are then displayed in European museums as art from primitive societies.

Secondly, Appiah ignores the role of history in the making of modern identity. The Nok sculpture or Elgin Marbles may not have a material relationship to the current 'occupiers' where these artefacts were found. They do however speak to them in terms of subjective recognition of who they are or what to be in ways that are organically peculiar to them alone. Cultural artefacts are not just trustee commodities, they tell a story which defines the people, they represent a history of the people in terms of origins, transitions and subjective location. To view culture as mere commodity for trusteeship is a denial of history. Besides, culture is always a product of history, yet every historical transition is mobilized, sustained and nourished by its cultural outlook. The Nigerians are not just custodians or trustees of their cultural artefacts, these are their culture. The artefacts define them insofar as they draw a sense of meaning and identity from it. It is real and authentic. Just as humans make culture, we also give value to things. In the Kantian tradition, a work of art is recognized and celebrated because we endowed it with value. When a people recognize a certain style of painting or sculpture as art, it becomes meaningful to them. They give meaning to it. But meaning creations are context based. For Appiah however, the value of an artefact is not context based but valued on degree of human interest: 'the many legitimate human interests at stake.'³¹ The more an object gains wider recognition and significance, 'then other people will have a more substantial interest in being able to experience it and to the knowledge derived from its study. The object's aesthetic value is not fully

31 *Ibid.*, 127.

captured by its value as private property.’³² For Appiah, these cultural artefacts are universal good because they are merely residues of cultures that have died. Cultures die, Appiah claims, but without ‘physical extinction.’³³ Since cultural artefacts were made for ‘societies that no longer exist,’ modern states cannot lay any claim of ownership.³⁴ I disagree. Cultures do not die, they evolve *overtime*, sometimes crystallizing as tradition, but most often transformed to accommodate new historical epochs and transitions. It is precisely this nature of culture as unsettled, that is, non-static that we can have space to accommodate other people who are different from us.

Moving beyond the dilemma of *subjective preference* for recognition worthiness (between the stranger and a member of our *kind*) and the universalization of our cultural good, is another version of cosmopolitanism, an ethical vision in which the *truly* cosmopolitan citizen is free floating individual without attachment to any ‘special’ community. As Jeremy Waldron puts it, this cosmopolitan citizen is an unrooted individual whose cultural ethos is not ‘bounded’ by ‘any subject of the cultural resources available in the world. He did not take his identity as anything definitive, as anything homogenous.’³⁵ But subjective dislocation demands a community without borders. Thus cosmopolitanism here also reads as eradication of boundaries in favor of a normative universal constituency that bestows subjective rights of citizenship to every individual. Boundaries constitute a source of inequality. Boundaries, especially imposed artificial (imperial) borders perpetuate discrimination in terms of subjective and social mobility. Boundaries undermine human equality and social wellbeing.

This idea of the free-floating subject or the un-hinged citizen, as an ethical normative, however, conceals more than it reveals. First, it imposes a misrecognition of other sociocultural and historical contingencies of our

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 119f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Waldron, ‘What is Cosmopolitanism?’ 228.

political world. Second, it takes for granted the impact of sociocultural construction of our human experience. Third, it is infinitely presumptuous as to what constitutes this normative boundary of inclusion or exclusion, in other words, whose borders and boundaries are being eradicated or do we just eradicate old ones to create new borders? Geographical fatality and paperized *identity* (passports or IDs) constitute determinant conditions for social mobility and subjective legitimacy in this cosmopolitan world. I am an American citizen and with my traveling documents I could travel to over 80% of the world without bureaucratic restrictions insofar as I am financially capable. Now consider that I am traveling with a Nigerian passport. I must book for visa interview at least 3 months in advance, to be accompanied by restrictive measures such as proof for my humanity (landed property, evidence of fund, reason for travel, et cetera). Then comes the anxiety of the visa interview (the long wait, the arrogance of the visa officers, the canopy of suspicion et cetera). Even as I arrive at the final port of entry, the angst continues: the formatting of my person in those special rooms of interrogation, the special checks, and sometimes the final humiliation of deportation. Herein, only persons from certain geographic locations are deemed mobile worthy, or what Jürgen Habermas has termed *Anerkennungswürdigkeit* (worthiness to be recognized).³⁶

The quest to eradicate boundaries presupposes social mobility. But if social mobility is a privilege for people from certain regions of the world or economic caliber, does not cosmopolitanism become on the one hand intuitively exclusive and on the other hand tendentially imperialist? First, it takes for granted that these are values shared or normatively inspired by all humanity. Second, the context of what constitutes our political space is not interrogated but assumed as given. Third, since boundaries constitute a natural form of sociopolitical and cultural identity, claimants for abolition of borders neither define the degree for such erosion of boundaries nor address the ambivalent and complex

36 Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 5.

relation between identity, culture and politics. Eradication of boundaries is a persuasive regulative ideal, yet, a claim that falsely assumes equality of opportunity for everyone and ignores practical politics of history and economy of privileges.

Beyond the Boundaries: The Third-world Migrant as a Cosmopolitan Citizen

The elitism of the cosmopolitan ideal thus enunciated replicates the Western citizen of the ordinary traveler or non-Western citizen with advanced social capital. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the immigrants—the unseen cosmopolitans. Often misrecognized as uncouth, uncultured, uncivilized, different, the barbarian, the locus of absurdity, in reality nevertheless, the immigrants are ones that have broken borders and barriers; crisscrossing countries, boundaries, and exclusion zones—very often through treacherous routes—to arrive at the promised land of Western cities. In this uncertain journey, the migrants learn survival strategies and adapts through different cultures, languages and peoples. They know too that they are in a duel of life and death. They are gambling. To succeed, they have to become one with their travel routes. They will have to become conscious of every step they take for that determines their survivability. Avoidance maneuvers from border security agents; exposure to the elements, the treacherous walks in the deserts, the flight, the anxiety, et cetera are all subjective variables to which the immigrants have become acquainted with during their journey. Survival means becoming one with their journey—there must be no error or mistake. S/he assimilates the variances of their traveling condition in order to survive, to live. These are not experiences available to the normal Western traveler shepherded by bourgeoisie travel agents or cruise managers. The migrant is not traveling for leisure; he is on a survival frequency. He is one with the world around him. His journey is personalized and not indifferent. Even as she arrives at the Western cities, s/he learns how to skirt the laws of exclusion and even help others like him achieve similar goals.

Accordingly, where exposure to cultural pluralism and/or traveling becomes a criterion for cosmopolitanism citizenship, it is the migrant that possesses that credential. But if cosmopolitanism is tied only to the traveled denizen then only those who have traveled or have capacity to travel (irrespective of means or ways) are legitimate cosmopolitans. Where subjective mobility defines what is or is not cosmopolitanism, immobile subjects are perpetually entrapped; consciously de-legitimated as equal citizens of a global world. But if habitation of location defines my access not only to the world around me but my mobile ability in the social world, does not the claim that the cosmopolitan be a mobile subject institute a less recognizable but uncritical version of cosmopolitanism that is partly elitist, exclusive and mostly parochial?

Most critically, what then constitutes the end of cosmopolitanism? A constitutive disposition to allow the stranger in my backyard is not synonymous to a substantive outlook that I see the stranger who is in my backyard as a fellow human worthy of recognition beyond legal positivism. The stranger lives in my backyard not merely because the law tells me so, but because I desire human fellowship. Cosmopolitanism as a normative constitutive virtue (because the law tells me so) is suggestive of protective rights of individuals, embodiment of an ethical lifestyle which we consider a universal value. (The law defines our point of negotiation and encounters; the terms of our human relations, and even the content of our ethical and common good)³⁷ Beyond the requirements of law, what can cosmopolitanism offer? Does eradication of boundaries or even promulgation of laws for universal protection of rights undercut our innate disposition toward prejudice, stereotype, racism and suspicion of difference? Would absence of boundaries and borders automatically initiate a world of equality, mutual respect and dignity? Do we need to

37 The challenge is not only about yielding to abstract rules which are then extrapolated outside the practices of a community. The focus is on what universal rules are noble as opposed to how we can be noble ourselves irrespective of rules. My claim is that our reason *to be* is not merely because the law tells us to be humans (or nice to each other) but because of the primitive, instinctive fact that no matter the degree of our differences in terms of race, education, wealth, sex, language or geography, we are all humans despite the law.

eradicate boundaries to be cosmopolitan? Surely, such living arrangement is no more different than abstract communitarianism—a community of strangers held together by law and disparate values. Cosmopolitanism thus understood has neither stopped migration from the secular nation to the proto-nation nor undermined religious radicalization as a symbol of ethno-centric bias. Reacting against the burgeoning nationalism in Europe with its associative wars, Goethe had offered a cosmopolitan view of fatherland that recognizes the necessity of subjective embeddedness but equally transcends primordial affiliation:

At a time when everyone is occupied in creating new fatherlands, the fatherland of the man who thinks without prejudice, who can rise above his time, is nowhere and everywhere ... where we educate ourselves, there is our fatherland ... where I am happy, there is my fatherland. Yet, this consoling and satisfactory sentence could be still better expressed by saying: where I am of use, there is my fatherland.³⁸

Goethe anticipates an idealistic cosmopolitan order devoid of xenophobia or prejudice. His views are instructive for my present commitment. In the section that follows, I will draw resource from African philosophy for an understanding of cosmopolitanism that moves beyond abstract communitarianism, without alienating members of the community and yet admitting the stranger not just as an abstract number, but an engaged and *desired* member of our social communion.

I am Because You Are: a New Cosmopolitan Ethics

In this section, I use ubuntu ethics to argue for a new paradigm of human citizenship that is both universal and provincial. It offers an intellectual wavelength through which we speak of global citizenship without being alienated from our cultural communities. It is an understanding that reconciles our attachment to the global community in a way that is mobile, discursive and free from subjective entrapment, i.e., we do not have the dilemma of choosing *our own kind over the stranger for even the stranger is a potential relative*.

³⁸ Cited in Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 414.

According to *ubuntu*, subjective acquisition is only possible through positive human relationship.³⁹ What this means is that I am a person by virtue of other different individuals on whose unique existence my humanity flourishes. The essence of being a person in these communities shares correspondence of meaning with John Mbiti's famous saying, 'I am because you are; and since you are therefore I am.'⁴⁰ A view shared by Komla Dzobo, 'we are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are,'⁴¹ and reaching it most dynamic expression in the Xhosa/Zulu adage *motho ke motho ka batho babang; umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other people). The basic terms of such relationship are expressed in form of toleration, sharing, charity, respect, acceptance, hospitality, compassion, reconciliation, empathy, and reciprocity. On this view, to be human is to 'affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish relations with them.'⁴²

Within this Africanist ethical vision, the search for commonality is not dependent on eradication of boundaries. Boundaries are presupposed insofar as the traveler (stranger or kinsman) is privileged over the old as we learn in the Igbo saying, *onye njem ka onye isi awo mma*. Depending on context, the saying could mean that *the traveler is more learned than the old or the traveled (including the travelled stranger) is more cherished than the old*. The traveler or stranger is cherished insofar as s/he brings new knowledge to the community, new ways of life, a new cultural outlook. This is very instructive in a culture where respect for old people is a sacred virtue. Old people are serially respected because aside from being living ancestors, they also embody sacred wisdom of the community as we learn from another saying: *ihe okenye huru ma ya nodu ala, Okorobia*

39 T. Metz and J. Gaie, 'The African Ethics of Ubuntu/Botho: Implications for Research on Morality', *Journal of Moral Education* 39:3 (2010), p 275.

40 John.S. Mbiti 1969. *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann), 108f.

41 Komla N. Dzobo 1992. 'The Image of Man in Africa', in *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, eds. Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 132-145: 132.

42 Mogobe B. Ramose 1999. *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books), 52, 194.

aghaghi ihu ya ma origoru elu nkwu, (what old sees while sitting down, the young does not see even atop of a palm tree). Yet, when confronted with the stranger or traveler, there is an epistemic preference for the outsider. Notice that the dichotomy between the local and foreign is not shaped by difference but by desire for harmonization of ethical virtues and common good. The stranger or traveler is appreciated not necessarily because they possess subjective superiority, but in-as-much as they bestow on the community epistemic access to fresh ideas. The stranger is a potential relative, a *desired* member of my commonwealth.

My claim is neither to suggest that in these indigenous communities is a tendency for sociopolitical and cultural homogeneity nor even that within these societies are structured ethical way of life where everyone agreed with a harmonious goodwill. The history of inter-tribal civil wars in most parts of Africa is certainly nourished by most primitive instincts of Social Darwinism. My point is to find resource in African philosophy, (as there are in other cultural traditions) a plausible normative outlook for an ethical life where it concerns global justice, or as Ellie Kedourie puts it, an outlook that could ignite ‘a spark of human sympathy or fellow-feeling.’⁴³

Ubuntu as a theory of political humanism possesses the following credentials: (i) a duty to recognize others in their unique differences, histories and subjective equations; (ii) unlike the cosmopolitan ethics evolving out of the age of reason, the sense of humanism embodied in ubuntu is not only a *recognition of our kind*. As seen from the Stoics, the source of human equality is based on reason, an assessment equally shared by the Enlightenment tradition. The limitation of reason is its provinciality. Reason is very rarely autonomous since it is dominated by culture, religion or other forms of human exigencies. The indictment on reason is already over flogged in the many literatures of postcolonial discourses. The logic of colonization for example, presupposes the imposition of European kind of reason on non-Europeans. To give them humanity through reason—to think, reason, evolve and be a *reasonable*

43 Ellie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), xiv.

individual acceptable within the European culture and context. In other words, it was not so much about elimination of difference but an invention of a homogenous other, one like me—he or she looks like me and must therefore be human. But in eliminating difference, the other is suppressed and annihilated. The subjective gift he/she bears to humanity evaporates and gives space for sameness, imitation and subjective Xeroxes.

The failure of the Enlightenment scholars and Stoics was this universalization of European reason as an epistemic yardstick for what constitutes a *man*. What they fail to recognize however is that reason is neither isolated from history nor separated from culture. Reason is neither autonomous nor solely contingent on individuals. Reason can be invented and has been invented. Within ubuntu ethics, the embedded demand to know and understand the other is not as a Xerox of my being, but because the other constitute an inexhaustible source of our *reason* to be. It is in the fountain of our differences, values, belief systems, traditions, that we receive the potency or authoritative power of meaning in life and human flourishing. Through the human interactive procedures, we become divine beings, that is, self-creating agents of one another. Thus understood, the dilemma that privileges the recognition of our own *known* kind over and above the stranger is eradicated since: (i) Reason is no longer the bulwark for humanity. (ii) Our new understanding of a human person is subject to continuous dialogue with the other.

A person is a person through another person means that our humanity flourishes through a dialogic process of relation and distance, of difference and uniqueness. Our capacities and human skills are distributed equally across different cultures. The idea of uniqueness and difference embody the subjective gifts (of humanity) which we bring to one another; an idealism in which we begin to see a different ‘other’ not as a threat but a complement to our humanity. There is deep appreciation of the ‘other’ as an embedded gift that enriches my humanity. The evolving relationship opens door for subjective equality characterized by mutual recognition and unconditional tolerance. *I am because you are, since you are therefore I am* indicates an epistemic holism

that reconciles the relationship between the individual and the community in a manner of ontological equality.

The normative appeal of our new cosmopolitanism is that despite our differences, we find emotive legitimacy in the idea of our shared humanity as unconditionally given: *I am because you are human (not because you are rational)*.⁴⁴ Our contexts may be dissimilar; our history different and our culture antagonistic, yet it is this distinctive, unique and peculiar historicity that constitute our creative cultural energy. Culture for its part becomes a location of self-transcendence and inclusive admission of the foreigner, including the barbarian. Everyone is equal by nature and not *only* by law, reason, custom, tradition or convention. The human person and his dignity thereof is what defines the character of our social and political lives.

But how do we reconcile the ethical good of our community with the embedded practices of other communities whose culture and traditions contradict our internal good? How do we advance ubuntu without violating or colonizing what these other societies consider as supreme good? Admittedly, culture is a product of human community and it is through socialization that one acquires what is considered virtue or vice of a society. Notice too that culture is non-static, it is always evolving through the interaction of human actions, experiences and history. The constant engagement with others reproduces what we call our immediate cultural experiences. It is through this interaction that our subjective good is negotiated. In negotiation and dialogue with others, we achieve subjective conversion! This is what ubuntu offers us. In direct encounter with other people, in this recognition of others in their differences, uniqueness, strangeness, oddities, failures and achievements, we also become *familiar* to them and recognize our subjective equality. Dialogue desensitizes us from rigid enclaves of our mindsets. In dialogue, we are open to learning new things, a process of education that informs a hermeneutic review of our past lives and future orientation. We learn the fact of our shared

44 Rationality is an insufficient condition of what constitutes our overall humanness.

humanity. We begin to understand and appreciate the other for who they are, neither as products of my enclosed cultural outlook nor as copies (Xeroxes) of my subjective desires, that is, what I want them to be, i.e., a recognition of my own kind. I see this 'other' as independent fully realized beings—in spite of me—that is, of any differences I share with them.

I am because you are is an intersubjective dialogue to see others for who they truly are; it is a process of self-understanding, an act of education as self-knowledge, a journey of self-discovery of our ignorance. The demand to know the other is a process of liberation from dead dogmas akin to platonic cave of ignorance. It is a motivation to transition from the context of ignorance to context of knowledge of the other. One who is born and socialized in Plato's cave only knows about that context. He sees only the world of shadows. Herein, dialogue with the other is a duty of moral responsibility that I owe to myself. It is subjective conversion since evidence shows that neither traveling nor exposure to other cultures is sufficient condition to curb us of our prejudices and biases of others different from us. Appiah offers the instructive example of Sir. Richard Francis Burton, who, even by today's standard is extremely travelled and educated man. Burton was a notorious Victorian racist, whose outlook was neither for lack of education (he was educated at Oxford) nor for lack of exposure (traveled across over five continents). In fact, at the time of his death in 1890, Burton was a master of at least thirty-nine languages.⁴⁵ Appiah describes him as 'freak of nature in his ability to penetrate different cultures—to "go native,"' but despite all, a very prejudiced man.⁴⁶ For Appiah therefore, 'Burton is a standing refutation, then, to those who imagine that prejudice derives only from ignorance, that intimacy must breed amity. You can be genuinely engaged with the ways of other societies without approving let alone adopting, them.'⁴⁷

45 Frank McLynn, *Of No Country: An Anthology of the Works of Sr. Richard Burton*, (London: Scribner, 1990), 5f.

46 Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 11.

47 *Ibid.*, 8.

We are creatures of cultures. The human person make culture and define what is the content of that cultural experience. The individual is subjectively located as a bearer and embodiment of culture. Despite his education and travels, Burton was an unrepentant prejudiced mind not so much because he is a *bad person*, but precisely because of the racist mindset of his socialization to which even global exposure could not cure. What this example teaches us is that cosmopolitanism merely understood as an act of subjective mobility through erasing of borders or boundaries does not offer sufficient justification for a cosmopolitan character. This is not to say that traveling or exposure to other cultures does not eliminate prejudice or ignite within us a spark of humanity. One who has lived in major cities like Paris, London or Mumbai is socialized into living experiences and interactions of different cultures and people typical of every major city. S/he is not closed off to new ideas. These cosmopolitan citizens are also those who initiate new cultural ways of life or in other cases, legitimate or delegitimize what is in invoke as a cultural ethos. This kind of cosmopolitanism is material. What this means is that it is reproduced as a pedagogy of a system through an involuntary set of action. The actors unconsciously produce a way of life which is in turn assimilated by other spectators or residual fans. This kind of cosmopolitanism does not demand ethical guideline or moral imperative for it evolves as part of social life. If I live in New York, I do not consciously determine the degree of the impact of the *Big Apple* on my life. If I choose to be a monk in New York, then I have only preferred a lifestyle not typical of a New Yorker. However, if and when I do claim to be a *typical* New Yorker, it also means living and encountering other people, languages, religions, cuisines, et cetera. This kind of life is cosmopolitan but one with a lower case 'c'.

Cosmopolitanism understood from within ubuntu ethical frame work does not mean the obliteration of differences. It is not a new creation, a rediscovery of new humanities in which every human being becomes the same. It is not eradication of primordial essence of group boundaries thus substituted with universal memory. It does not seek to evacuate

peculiarities very often characterized as patriotic virtue. Ubuntu as a cosmopolitan ethics demand fidelity to all humanity; a universal duty to recognize the humanity of others irrespective of culture, tradition or religion. *I am because you are*, is not an advocacy for a homogenous humanity. What ubuntu does offer us is a context of intersubjective discovery. It is only when we get to know the other that empathy becomes a possibility; that humanism can be legitimately evoked. What this means is that humanity is not solely dependent on religion, rationality or culture. Ubuntu offers an understanding of cosmopolitanism with upper case 'C'. It is an outlook, a way of life that is civic and non-rigid. One does not need to travel to New York or Beijing to appreciate or recognize the way of life of those New Yorkers. And if I get a visa and become unchained from the boundaries of those imposed borders, I carry with me the burdens of my history and cultural experience as a communal gift for human fellowship.

When we examine the lives of such historical figures like Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., they symbolize illuminating ideals in times of cultural transitions. Although they rarely traveled outside their local communes, they still evolved as subjective address of an ethical outlook with global impact and repercussions. Such symbolism as agents of change with universal ramifications is echoed in this prophetic utterance of Mahatma Gandhi: 'I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.'⁴⁸ The need for harmonious coexistence or discovery of our humanity is not a demand for world trotting. The point of our human discovery is in dialogue, in immediate point of conversation as 'self-creating agents of change.'⁴⁹ In dialogue we symbiotically expose each other to our differences and uniqueness. In this engagement, the stranger ceases to be an abstract entity to be feared, ostracized or disqualified as part of my humanity.

48 Cited in R. Bharucha, 'Somebody's Other Disorientation in the Cultural Politics of our Times', *Monoculture in Education*, Third Text, Vol.23, 1994, p9.

49 Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 275.

Our new cosmopolitanism is not impartial;⁵⁰ it is concerned with a special kind of equality—subjective equality. I use the term subjective equality as key precondition of global justice. Subjective equality⁵¹ is a recognition that humanity is not a project to be acquired or ‘rediscovered’, it is intrinsic and not what we can lose by an act of jurisprudence. Our proposition recognizes our human fragility and appeals for a way of life ‘in-spite-of’ our human condition.

Conclusion

Human beings are makers of culture but are also influenced by it. The evolution of culture is a process of intimate dialogue of relation and distance; negotiating between the temporal and the spatial, of stability and progress. Cultural evolution is organic in this process of metaphysical dialogue between the internal and external goods of a community; a reflective practice of learning from the outside but also self-reflective criticism of our rigid held beliefs. Cosmopolitanism as a product of culture emerges at the intersection of cultural experiences, a confluence of narratives (note: not hybridity). The cosmopolitan identity is not a hybrid identity; it is rather a confluent identity. The idea of cosmopolitanism as a hybrid evokes subjective possession, what may be termed *colonization of subjectivity*. The other is grafted only as an offshoot of another culture. This other is dominated and although expressing sprouts of individuality still depend on dominant culture for lifeline. Our new cosmopolitanism is an advocacy for cultural difference in a dialectic relation; a meadow of creative interactionism; of human communities in confluence relation with one another.

What ubuntu teaches is a transition from *what we can do* to *who we can become as ethical beings*. Notice that the former is concerned with particular

50 We look beyond humans as abstract numbers safeguarded by rules. Our subjective address is the fact of our (primitive) shared humanity.

51 The idea that no matter their status or location in life all humans are *naturally* equal. Although dialogue may enable us to recognize the virtue of our shared humanity, subjective equality is a natural good that is prior and independent of dialogue.

instances and dilemma; it focuses on rules that can be generalized and made right for all times and circumstances. The later, on the other hand teaches us how to become a good human being who is right at all times, irrespective of circumstances, context, temporality and spatiality. It answers the question, what happens, after we have allowed the stranger into our backyard?⁵² Here cosmopolitanism ceases to be a prescriptive ethics to become a way of life, a countless disposition for interpersonal engagement and subjective inclusion of beings (people, environment, animals, strangers) in our ethical world. *We do not recognize only our kind.* Herein lies a possible point of convergence between the Stoics and our new cosmopolitanism. As Nussbaum explains, the Stoics being cognizant of divisiveness of politics and the alienation that comes with it emphasized a ‘process of empathetic understanding whereby we come to respect the humanity even of our political enemies, thinking of ourselves as born to work together and inspired by a common purpose.’⁵³ A view equally shared Marcus Aurelius who advises us to “‘enter into the mind” of the other, as far as is possible, and interpret the other’s action with understanding.’⁵⁴ Unlike the Stoics however, within the context of ubuntu, the cosmopolitan citizen is not living in an ‘exile’, where s/he is deprived of ‘the comfort of local truths, from the warm nestling feeling of local loyalties ... boundless loneliness ... bereft of a certain sort of warmth and security.’⁵⁵ *We are because you are, since you are, definitely I am.*⁵⁶

That is all!

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52 Similar debate is at the core of Kantian and virtue ethics. See for example, Nasfika, A. 2004. ‘Virtue Ethics’ in *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*. [SL]: IEP.

53 Nussbaum, ‘Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism.’, 9f.

54 *Ibid.*, 10.

55 *Ibid.*, 11.

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