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Identity and agency in South Africa: Rainbowism reimagined

ABSTRACT

It is often assumed that a sense of interconnectedness with others and a common identity, such as that associated with the idea of "rainbowism", can only be achieved after a host of social injustices, inequities and other material problems have somehow been addressed. Related to this, Western social theory proposes that addressing these problems requires mobilising op/positional identities that can free individuals from their constraints. Yet if we are to suppose that identity shapes our very interests, then the converse might be true. Social injustices, inequities and other material problems may only be resolved once a sense of relatedness and interconnectivity with the community at large is established. In this article I show how the African moral theory of ubuntu can help us achieve this by contributing to understandings of identity and agency that work in concert with systems and structures and towards shared ends. Hence, while theorists largely focus on the potential of identity to confront wanting social realities and to create freedom from constraint, I suggest that through ubuntu, identity can be reimagined as mutualistic and symbiotic with social organisation – enabling, as a result, more equity and justice. Critical of false and misappropriated manifestations of unity, my article contributes to a novel understanding of the relationship between identity and agency towards reimagined notions of rainbowism.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the "rainbow nation" and its ensuing sense of identity have been an integral part of the public rhetoric in South Africa since the end of apartheid, and speaks to a notion of unity in multiplicity in relation to the many cultures, tribes and backgrounds that make up the country. "In this regard, the African moral philosophy of Ubuntu has been evoked as an underlying and perhaps often romanticized ethos for this 'identity and statehood'" (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2017:728). Against the historic backdrop of institutionalised racism in South Africa, this rainbow citizenship is not so much a legal term as it is a discursive construct that expresses an emotional relationship to the constitution of South Africa, which aims to safeguard the rights and privileges of each of its people. Yet, in view of the fact that even today, the vast majority of legal citizens struggles to practically and effectively achieve equal rights and privileges, the image of the rainbow nation

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fades into little more than an illusion (see Gachago & Ngoasheng, 2016; George, 2018; Hain, 2016; Mafoko, 2017; Msimang, 2015). Attempts at significant socio-economic reconstruction are undermined by continued monopolies and the detachment of many in the new South African elite from issues of poverty and access (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018: 45). Hence many have become disillusioned with the idea of rainbow statehood and the associated value of ubuntu. In the context of journalism, for example, Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2017:729) argue that:

> Ubuntu journalism is magical in the broad sense that it proposes using supposedly traditional words and signs to summon forth a modern, national ideal … that may act as a motor-generator of simulacra, held up as a panacea for resolving deep-rooted problems with regard to the news media's role in nation building.

Similarly, in the space of tertiary education, Gachago and Ngoasheng (2016) bemoan the rejection of attempts to deal with the many structural inequalities and propose that our idea of the rainbow nation has so far focused only on those parts of multi-culturalism that sit comfortably for a white minority, which still holds cultural hegemony in many contexts. As a result, many believe that a rainbow nation and its associated sense of (ubuntu-) identity can only surface once the equality of rights and privileges for all its citizens is effectively achieved:

> We want a real change – a closing of the gap between the rich and the poor, … quality education and a bridging of class and racial divisions …. If we can't be afforded all of this, then what Nelson Mandela and all of the heroes of our past stood for is redundant. Because while the dream might mean a lot to us born frees, it is the action to materialize the dream which means more (Mafoko, 2017:n.p.)

In other words there is a (very legitimate) sense of urgency for tangible results, without which any conceptual closing of gaps between people is rendered meaningless. Related to this, Western liberal social theory favours the view that a sense of shared identity does not precede but follows from a shared lived experience (see Karlberg, 2008). In this context identity and agency are seen as related concepts that help individuals free themselves from the constraints of problematic social structures (see Lample, 2015). From this vantage point, rainbowism is an (almost utopian) ideal towards which we may strive and which we can achieve only to the extent that all South Africans free themselves from oppressive social conditions.

In this article I challenge this perspective and support the claim that realising the concept of the rainbow nation in its full legal and intended sense requires cultivating a related common identity from which, then, the necessary coordination of political will can take shape. Stated otherwise, it is a sense of shared identity that can reframe our sectarian interests into common ones and may thus help us address "our common" challenges (see Hitt, 1998; Karlberg, 2008). Hence, while acknowledging that ubuntu and its notion of rainbowism have been and continue to be misappropriated, my aim here is to reclaim some of its significance by discussing how ubuntu recasts pertinent social theories around identity and agency. To this end, I begin my article by discussing discourse theory and how changing our discourses around identity and citizenship

can change our related motivations and actions. In the second and third sections I explore social identity theory and offer the specific idea of a shared yet distinctly textured (ubuntu) identity through which we can reframe social interests and align various goals. I also look at the related concept of (critical) agency and propose that ubuntu reorients agency towards mutualistic rather than necessarily agonistic ends, thereby enabling collective social progress. I thus claim that an overarching sense of identity and kinship (as provided by normative understandings of ubuntu) enables the interests of various groups and individuals to be better aligned so that social organisation can be re/directed towards building prosperity and wellbeing for the nation as a whole. In my last section I reflect on these theoretical propositions by sharing some insights from a series of conversational interviews I conducted in a Johannesburg school community. As such, my article expands the scholarship on ubuntu, communication and public discourse and makes a unique contribution to prevalent theories on identity and critical agency that currently overlook explicitly communal and mutualistic orientations.

1. DISCOURSE

Discourses, such as those on identity, statehood and citizenship, are constantly unfolding around us, just as we are constantly (consciously and unconsciously) contributing towards them. These discourses manifest not only in written or spoken form but also in visual ways, as the values we express in how we dress, in the media and in advertisements or in the way in which we design our cities, spaces, activities and communities. Discourses then, are a "form of 'social practice'" implying a "dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:258). They are the way we think about the world around us and how we express this thinking in various ways. They influence and are influenced by the cultural values and the greater social context around us (Foucault, 1972; 1980; Phillips & Hardy, 2002) and do not only describe but also determine what we see and how we see it. In filtering the world according to our internalised values, we effectively project those inner values (see Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:258). Importantly, the ways in which we think and speak about the world around us are not fixed but evolve and change. Hence, a discourse is "constitutive both in the sense that it helps us to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it" (ibid.).

One way to probe, transform and evolve discourses is to question the unconscious assumptions underlying them and to reimagine the power relationships implicit in them (see Derrida, 1967). Depending, for example, on what conceptions of power one internalises culturally and societally, political aims can be rethought and re/aligned. In this context Moriarty (2003:3) suggests that South Africa's relatively peaceful transition to democracy occurred because political leaders reframed their thinking around power from a win/lose to a win/win paradigm. He suggests that South African political reality was transformed as leaders changed the way they spoke of that reality, how they rhetorically referred to other political players and how they re/defined the relationships between them:

> … the more conflictual and violent this relationship was characterized as, the more violent their actions towards each other became and vice versa. In turn, the more each side was rhetorically humanized by the other, the more peaceful their relationship became. In other words, as discourse became increasingly relational so did political reality (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018a:45).

Such reevaluations of power reshape discourse and refashion social reality (see also Boulding, 1990; Giddens, 1984; Miller, 1982; Nussbaum, 2011). Similarly, laying bare the (mostly oppositional) ideas of power implicit in many discourses around identity formation helps us to begin reframing those towards a more relational, complementary and textured understanding of identity and social practice. For example, what we find embedded in identity formation that is construed and evaluated in oppositional ways (see Hogg, 2006:111) is a traditional idea of power as domination. This means that power is thought of mostly in terms of material resources, struggles for ascendance, and as that which can be used to control others or at best be balanced out and leveraged (see Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018c). When conceiving of identity in this way and in the context of a country where there are various competing (rather than complementary) identities, this has implications for the way in which people relate and organise, for governance and social practice. It deepens an adversarial approach (see Karlberg, 2004), where affairs are thought of as inherently oppositional/conflictual rather than bound up, and individuals and groups can but vie to control resources, ideas and systems. Conversely, where identity is thought of in terms of relational, complementary and mutually reinforcing characteristics, political aims and strategies can be coordinated more easily and brought together towards shared ends.

2. IDENTITY AND AGENCY

2.1 Identity

"My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours" (Tutu, 1999:31). The idea of identity that one finds associated with the African philosophy ubuntu is one that assumes deeply relational and immaterial understandings of power and motivates an all-encompassing "we". Here power is relational, force-based and understood as that which is between people and grows the more it includes rather than excludes (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018c). However, critical of the way in which ubuntu has been misappropriated in exactly the opposite way, namely to bolster a nationalist ideology that glorifies an imagined past, Marx (2002) posits that nation-building in the name of ubuntu has taken on the form of cultural conformism that is not unlike that of Afrikaner nationalism. In analysing the xenophobic attacks of the years following the end of apartheid and even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings, he draws a parallel to cultural nationalism and says that it "offers the exculpation as well as the clearance of the conscience, the means as well as the legitimation for … dehumanization and degradation" (Marx, 2002:49). Similarly Ramose (2002: 487) proposes that:

> In an effort to win the support of the numerical majority population in the country, the conqueror appealed to Ubuntu and used it tactfully to remove the causes

of its own fear. Here it is important to understand that the majority of the South African population continues to be nurtured and educated according to the basic tenets of Ubuntu, notwithstanding the selective amnesia of a small segment of the indigenous elite.

Msimang (2015:n.p.) in turn criticises the "choreographed unity" associated with the reconciliatory path laid out by Nelson Mandela and calls instead for "robust disharmony" as a path to dignity. Such sentiments echo the work of Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte and Cain (1998), who provide a conception of identity that is defiant and confronts such problematic expressions of unity and related social constructs. Their conception accounts for both the free will of individuals and the structural constraints that envelop them at the nexus where individual circumstances intersect with changing/evolving social contexts. According to this line of thinking, persons are formed (and form) through collectively realised cultural worlds (Lample, 2015:147). These "figured" worlds "are socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al., 1998:52). Of particular significance in this context are "positional identities" (ibid.) that establish an individual's location within (and often in opposition to) everyday relations of power, deference, entitlement and affirmation. Through op/positional identities individuals create responses to the (problematic) social structure of figured worlds by drawing on and responding to the meanings and patterns of action they see in it.

2.2 Agency

Intertwined with this focus on op/positional identity are broadly agonistic (confrontational/ challenging) conceptions of agency with a focus on the individual. For example, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) describe agency as the possibility of imagining and then asserting a new self within a figured world. This notion of agency emerges in questions regarding the relationship between individual interests and actions and the social structures within which they occur. Accordingly, the dialectic of structure and agency is thought to allow for the possibility of social change (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979). What emerges is the assumption that structure and agency are diametrically opposed and that agency is associated with freedom from constraint. This is reflected in Sen's (1999) characterisation of development as freedom, where development identifies and removes impediments to freedom such as poverty, tyranny, lack of economic opportunity and other systemic deprivations. The enhanced ability or agency of people to help themselves and influence the world is identified as freedom and drives purposeful social development (Sen, 1999:18; Lample, 2015:81). Similarly and within the context of (science) education, Roth and Calabrese Barton (2004; see also Calabrese Barton, 2003) advocate an approach that enhances an individual's capacity to change their own life and the circumstances around them. Here education facilitates awareness/literacy in the problems individuals face in their own lives rather than those framed by established scientific discourses. Specifically they characterise agency as "the room that they have to maneuver, and the possibilities for acting and thereby changing their life conditions" (Roth &

Calabrese Barton, 2004: 17). What these understandings of agency have in common is the potential to act in opposition to societal forces or at least somewhat independent of them – albeit, of course, in the pursuit of social change and social justice (Lample, 2015: 83)

The notion of critical agency specifically focuses on constructing and strategically leveraging identities in order to advance a more just world (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). This entails forging specific roles, positions, voices (i.e. identities) and nurturing a critical mindset, with which one can analyse forces and take actions, relating to and drawing in this way on the work of Freire (1970). Critical agency helps conceptualise ways in which traditional power structures can be challenged towards transformative purposes by developing identity and advancing related goals, particularly those that have been historical dismissed or undermined (see Basu, 2008). The empirical studies often associated with critical (science) agency involve the strategic use of resources in pursuing one's own goals (Lample, 2015:86). Often thought of as explicitly political (Turner, 2012), critical agency looks at how identity can help align political goals towards confronting or breaking free of the status quo.

However by operationalising critical agency largely in terms of an individual voice, emphasis is placed on the freedom to exert one's individual preferences and shape things according to those (Lample, 2015:92). In this context, what is implied is that "all freedom is good and all constraint is bad" (ibid). From within this realism, rights ascribed to individuals have primacy and all others "including social and political belonging are secondary and derivative, ultimately intended to feed individual interest" (ibid.: 93). This reflects trends in current economic theory, where there is little room to conceive of collective good and where, instead, gains for society are equated with the sum of gains to the individual (see Daly & Cobb, 1994) and no explicit intention or responsibility can be found toward the collective/community. Rather, intention is directed toward the shaping of reality in terms of one's own vision. Likewise, Holland et al. (1998) give attention to the ways that systems/structures exist prior to the individual, and shape their actions, and at the same time how the individual has agency to use the tools of the figured world for their own purposes. The implications of focusing on individualistic perspectives (and op/positional identities) are detrimental to the cohesion required of community/societal development. This dialectic offers little space for the ways that systems/structures can open up capacity to act and how individual agency might imply sacrificing one's own preference in order to contribute to a common/collective goal.

2.3 Ubuntu, identity and agency

Ubuntu helps evolve both these concepts, casting agency as the capacity/capability to act and the room to navigate not necessarily in opposition to or independently of social structures but rather together with them and in ever growing/evolving ways. As such, it backgrounds the need to limit the influence of structures over the individual and foregrounds the possibility of individuals engaging with them and contributing towards their transformation. Ubuntu identity is one that is textured, specific and unique while at the same time empowered by a higher order sense of identity that binds and enables. This opens the possibility that identity/agency

can be rethought not so much in terms of individual freedom from social influence but rather in terms of opening the possibilities for action in a direction that is beneficial to one's own as well as one's community life.

2.3.1   Identity

While acknowledging all the ways in which ubuntu and conciliation have been misunderstood, misappropriated and taken up in essentialist ways (see Tomaselli, 2009) we can consider it as a compelling ethic that emphasises on our common humanity, and which takes plurality very seriously:

> Ubuntu dictates that, if we are to be human, we need to recognize the genuine otherness of our fellow citizens. That is, we need to acknowledge the diversity of languages, histories, values and customs, all of which constitute … society (Louw, 2010:4).

From within a normative, contemporary and non-essentialist conception of ubuntu, the relationship between uniqueness and interrelatedness becomes pertinent and adds invaluable nuance to discussions of identity. It helps us challenge the idea that identity must needs be constructed oppositionally (see Burke, 1969; Brewer, 2001; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brigevich, 2016; Calhoun, 1994; Citrin & Cides, 2004; Hogg, 2006; Tatham & Bauer, 2014; Turner, Hogg & Oakes, 1987). Instead, individuals can reconcile multiple salient identities relatively easily when bringing them together into one nested identity, where lower-order identities are encompassed by higher-order identities (see also Brewer, 1999). In this context I can be a mother, a Bahá'í, a wife, a scholar, an artist, South African, Austrian, Persian and many other things without any of these categories necessarily competing or conflicting with one another. What ubuntu offers in this context is an overarching "higher" or "highest order" identity that is "human" (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018a) or, in the context of South Africa, "South African", and which nestles the many other textured and nuanced sub-identities found within it.

It is precisely this idea of an inclusive identity that binds together the various elements of society while nurturing diversity and fluidity that essentially forms the basis of what we've come to call the "rainbow nation" and which experienced a surge in the early years of post-apartheid South Africa (see Salazar, 2002). In those days people began to move away from the rigid perceptions of "Black", "White" and "Colored" to explore a more textured perception that ranged from "'Cape Colored' to 'Tswana' but also from 'quite White' to 'African', from 'Boer' to 'Child of God', from 'English' to Afrikaaner' and often simply 'South African'" (Salazar, 2002:102). People recognised that they have "multiple, overlapping, non-exclusive and partial identities", which they derive from "gender, age, family, ethnicity, nationality, religious beliefs, occupation, personal interest, socio-economic status and so forth" – none of which inherently "preclude a sense of "oneness" with others" (ibid.). Individuals are seen "as special in virtue of their capacity to enter into relationships" (Metz, 2015:78). Of course these various social identities vary in subjective

importance in people's minds and at different times (Hogg, 2006:115), so the question becomes how far this discourse on identity is alive today, not only as lip service in public service announcements, but as an internalised form of selfhood, which can significantly transform the way people relate and organise.

2.3.2   Agency

The conception of agency provided by ubuntu is "measured in terms of the sustainability of the effects associated with human actions" (Chasi, 2014:290). Transcending temporary (material) personal gains or short-term planning horizons, agency in ubuntu looks towards the wellbeing of community/society as a whole. However, this "commitment to humans as participatory beings avoids the opposition between individualism and collectivism by its unity-in-multiplicity" (Christians, 2004:244). In this way it eschews collectivism or corporatist notions. It assumes that agency or power derive from immaterial force or "vital force in participation" (see Shutte, 1993:52) rather than from material resources, thus turning attention both inwards and towards others.

Metz (2015:77) clearly articulates a relationship between identity and agency when he speaks about solidarity. For him, ubuntu identity is shaped by an understanding of "we" that is bound up in others and cooperative in nature, while solidarity is indicative of "agency" that is directed towards actions that benefit and improve the wellbeing of this "we". Agency is essentially derived from the cooperative, concerted effort, which "we" put forth. This has vast implications for social practice, where ubuntu has been associated, for example, with non-partisan, collective decision-making processes, exploratory deliberation and participatory citizen journalism. Against this backdrop, the notion of freedom takes on a distinct meaning. While "Western individualist democracy insists on negative freedom, that is, freedom of the sacred self from intrusion by others … In ubuntu a person's freedom depends for its exercise and fulfillment on personal relationships with others" (Christians, 2004:243). Hence freedom is not so much the right of individuals alone but rather "freedom of expression means a community is able to freely articulate its questions and concerns" (Blankenberg, 1999:47) and this, according to Louw (2001), amounts to "power sharing". In other words freedom ceases to be defined in terms of individual constraint but rather in terms of collective empowerment.

While the above does not constitute an exhaustive discussion, it becomes clear that by carefully re/considering the values associated with ubuntu we are able to reclaim those discourses that are either glossing over deep-seated problems in the name of conciliation or those that remain confined by tribal, national, religious or otherwise divisive or oppositional notions of identity and which have historically prevented various South Africans from subordinating their short-term interests to the wellbeing of the nation as a whole. What this supports is the relationship between "identities" and "interests":

> As long as people understand the world primarily in terms of "us" and "them" – whether those categories be racial, national, ideological, or religious – humanity

will be unable to realize its common interests and work toward them. This is because interests are so closely linked to identities (Karlberg, 2008:312).

When identities become richly textured yet entwined, social and political issues can be conceived of as bound up, rather than conflictual. Then it is possible to consider social structures as enabling rather than inherently constraining of freedom and freedom can be thought of as that which is realised with and through others, rather than in contradistinction to others.

3. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

A series of exploratory and conversational interviews I conducted with parents of a Johannesburg public primary school provided me with a sounding board for some of the above thoughts. Known as a "former Model C school" and with a semi-private structure (see Featherman, 2009), this constituted a natural environment to me, where I am situated as a parent and have developed several years of rapport and trust towards parents of various racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Though somewhat of a "non-South African", by virtue of my accent and upbringing in Europe, I am seen as relatable across the spectrum of milieus and am able to elicit fairly candid views. My conversations engaged six adults aged 24-50, four women and two men, who describe themselves in the first instance as: "South African", "Xhosa", "African", "South African", "Afrikaans", and again "South African", respectively. For the purpose and scope of this paper, the reflections that emerged from my conversations are condensed in broad strokes only and do not offer any detailed presentation or analysis. This can be taken up elsewhere. Instead, my purpose here is merely to share additional insights that were provided to me by my conversations and which a theoretical discussion alone cannot achieve:

Briefly, although the idea of a "rainbow nation" and a common sense of identity were clearly thought to exist throughout the respondents' social circles, and although these were deemed by them as ideas that were powerful enough to shape South Africa in noteworthy ways, in many contexts this identity was still considered fragmented. Many parents viewed themselves as "White" or "Black" or "Zulu" or Afrikaans, etc. first and South African second, unless they were thinking of themselves in an international context, for example in sports or when travelling. Related to this, an us/them perception and rhetoric was still very much alive. By viewing themselves as "Afrikaans" first, "Zulu" first, "White/Black" first or "educated/not educated" they found it difficult if not altogether impossible to align interests and find long-term solutions to governance related problems, for example in school PTA meetings. Instead each group viewed their interests (consciously or unconsciously) as more valuable, higher in priority or more defensible than those of others.

What emerged was a need to improve communication and to create safe spaces where identity could be negotiated and explored without the threat of judgment. There were also a lot of things left unsaid in the interest of protecting a false or incomplete sense of unity/ubuntu. This was particularly visible in the view of several parents, who expressed that talking about race and racism would keep a community locked in the past, suggesting, as Msimang (2015:n.p.) critically

points out, that some think talking about racism is itself racist. However, when a binding identity, or as Louw (2010:4) says a "plurality of personalities" in a "multiplicity of relationships" was thought to shape a space (e.g. a committee or PTA meeting), then a safe zone was created, communication became candid and joint progress was seen as a possibility. According to some parents, this was achievable and happened on occasion but required a deeper kind of listening, introspection and sacrifice, especially on the part of those who continued to speak from what is essentially a colonising voice.

In this context Swanson (2012) provides a particularly insightful approach to this introspection By reexamining her journey as a White South African pedagogue she proposes being directly implicated in the construal of false unity. She lays bare her own "voice of violence, of what brutality I had done in feeding into the deficit discourse, on 'disadvantage'" and proposes that her own thoughts "framed within the discursive roots of" of her socialisation, "had established that 'disadvantage' as 'plain to see'" (Swanson, 2012:46). Moreover:

> I had been taking on the colonizing voice that produces the deficit, and that creates, validates and establishes "the problem" from outside, from a place out there that can speak unmonitored by its own surveillance …. The source of the problem lay silently behind the construction of the "problem" itself …. I was complicit with a system that establishes "truth" on "deficit" and lays blame (Swanson, 2012:46).

Importantly, by assuming a collective yet humble "we" identity she is able to reframe the deficit discourse from what was previously seen as "advantage" and "disadvantage" and to redirect it towards a collective journey of prosperity and healing, without occupying the whole space that is "we".

4. CONCLUSION

Though it is often assumed that a shared sense of identity follows from a shared lived experience, in this article I support the claim that an overarching sense of identity can lead to aligning our interests and to creating an interconnected experience. By being cognisant of the transient, experience-based nature of lower-order identity categories, it is possible to nurture a higher-order sense of South Africanness where individuals and groups need not adhere too strongly to their ensuing "positions" and can find flexibility in their views, strategies and political orientations while still regarding them as valuable (see Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018a:67). They can acknowledge the "contingency and relativity of their … experiences without relinquishing their … validity. Individual truth can be seen as somewhat relative and perspectives as complementary" (ibid.). Distinction and complementarity become the defining features of identity rather than otherness and opposition. This does not mean sameness or homogeneity, as Marx (2002) and Ramose (2002) caution, but rather a celebration of texture and diversity where interconnectedness comes first and binds the citizens of a nation (or world) one to another. Being an individual in this context means being with others (Louw, 2010:15) and allows "for each individual viewpoint to be fully appreciated in what becomes a harmonious blend of complementary clues to something that is bigger than the sum

of its parts" (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018:87). It is in its normative conceptions of ubuntu, then, that we can find an understanding of "humanness" or a common humanity that encompasses connectivity and allows for us to think differently about our perceived interests and identities. It emphasises individuality within inclusiveness and interdependence and is transcultural in nature (Christians, 2004).

In terms of agency, ubuntu introduces the dimension of collective cohesion required of community. In this way it opens the potential for social structures to be empowering by providing opportunities for action. It allows the outcomes of critical agency to be conceptualised beyond individual terms and towards collective ones that include implications for family units, groups, institutions and communities at large. It foregrounds the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities and takes into account the various collective configurations that exist. Therefore, while maintaining the appeal of social transformation that critical agency provides us with, the vision that ubuntu centres on offers an enhanced capability to act that requires both freedom to choose on the basis of personal/collective preferences and the structures that shape action. As such it orients agency towards development objectives affecting both individual behavior and collective social processes.

However, it is also clear that nurturing such conceptions of identity and agency require collective will. In consulting with members of a (school) community in Johannesburg with whom I had particular rapport and who critically reflected some of these thoughts back to me, it became clear to me that for identity to be able to align interests and be translated into an agency of togetherness, we need to deconstruct the false reconciliatory/ubuntu-based narrative, which serves only those who were previously privileged and which perverts the very meaning and significance of unity in multiplicity. As a result of this perversion many are understandably calling for "acrimonious and robust disharmony" (Msimang, 2015:n.p.) in order to deconstruct a false reconciliatory narrative, which serves only those who were previously privileged. What this misappropriated sense of identity leads to is another generation of one portion of the population denying the injustices it has done to children of another and for those children to accept idly the privileges that many South Africans still enjoy under the guise of forgiveness and unity (ibid.). A common sense of identity with an ensuing sense of shared destiny is not achievable as long as some highjack the entire space that is "we". By considering and reclaiming the truly relational notions of power associated with ubuntu a relational, horizontal and textured sense of identity can emerge that is bound up.

If constructs of identity lie at the heart of human perception, motivation and action, then reclaiming the meaning and significance of unity in multiplicity becomes imperative in transcending the inherited social constructs that rely on divisiveness and social hierarchy and continue to prove problematic for social progress. Cultivating an inclusive and non-appropriated sense of rainbow citizenship, of ubuntu and interconnectedness plays an important role in enabling social progress for all citizens of a nation. Only once these personal efforts are made can a nation like South Africa hope to move towards a shared sense of destiny and collective will. Specifically and against the backdrop of apartheid, where South Africans have thought and spoken of identity as "race" and in terms of keeping these races separate or in a state of being "apart" (and effectively in a hierarchy of

power), the idea of becoming the citizen of a "rainbow nation" provides a liberated way of thinking and talking about our relationship to others and our place in the world. It allows us to reconsider our perceived interests and to see ourselves as expressing unity (one rainbow) in diversity (multiple colors) through a relationship of harmony in multiplicity. The discursive construct of the "rainbow nation", then, can be thought of as an evolution or expansion of our discourses around identity, which move us out of some of the more exclusive and schismatic ways of perceiving identity; i.e. tribalistic, nationalistic or sectarian constructs and into more inclusive and relational ways of being with one another, i.e. as unity in multiplicity. Faced with challenges that affect the entirety of the nation (water shortages, the mismanagement of electricity, crime that follows from ever-entrenched extremes of wealth and poverty, unemployed that follows from unemployability or skills shortages and various other social ills), drawing on a schismatic and power imbalanced I/ other dichotomy for the construction of identity may not serve the advancement of the nation as a whole, but rather entrenches these problems, which stem from this very thinking in the first place.

The same principle can be applied on a global scale. Having arrived at a moment of unprecedented social, political, economic and ecological interdependence globally, we have yet to develop the ability to relate to one another in ways that advance a sense of global citizenship and make us responsible for our shared planet. In other words technologically and practically we have become one global country, but in our perceptions we remain primarily citizens of particular nations, members of religious groups or adherents of specific philosophies or political parties. Captives of old cultural patterns, we would do well to re-appraise our inherited identity constructs in order to meet global ecological crises, health pandemics, nuclear armaments, displacements, migrations, drugs and crime, and close the gap between rich and poor.

As Hitt (1998:n.p.) suggests:

> The global citizen has a sense of oneness with the human family … Most of the life-and-death problems facing humanity are global problems, and these critical problems will never be resolved by individual nation-states working independently. The only way that humanity can cope … is through building a global community … The issue is one of identity.

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