

# INTERROGATING A COSMOPOLITANISM OF AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

The immensity and inevitability of global interconnectedness have necessitated higher education to be cosmopolitan in its epistemological, and skills and attitudes development scope. Much has been written about the urgency, necessity and proposed modes of cosmopolitan higher education in Africa responsive to modern day demands and challenges. However, there is an outstanding need to interrogate the ontological assumptions and subsequent normative implications of a cosmopolitanism that informs African higher education. This article argues that the globally predominant cosmopolitanism that also informs and is being pursued by African higher education is normatively problematic because it is exclusively grounded only in commonalities of the diverse people of the world, regarding their individuating differences as morally arbitrary and inhibitive of a realisation of cosmopolitan aspirations. Using Seyla Benhabib's (1992) difference-grounded moral universalism, the article argues that difference is constitutive of being a concrete individual or collectivity. As such African higher education ought to, as a matter of normative necessity, centre the subjectivities of the African experience. The central claims of this article have implications on endeavors of re-imagining curriculum design, curriculum content selection and pedagogy in African higher education.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitanism, African pedagogy, difference, higher education

## INTRODUCTION

This article argues for a difference-grounded cosmopolitanism in African higher education. It evaluates African higher education as being modelled on a cosmopolitanism that is based on

human commonalities only and at the same time necessarily excludes differences among the people of the world in the configuration of cosmopolitanism that education today must seek to achieve. Using Seyla Benhabib's (1992) difference-rooted moral universalism, the article contends that marginalising difference in a conceptualisation of cosmopolitan education in principle denies recognising and respecting the sources of elements that make an individual a concrete being, rather than a detached transcendent self. The central claim of this article is that a commonalities-grounded universalism as the one that prevalently informs much of higher education in most African nations is normatively problematic in that by recognising commonalities only and simultaneously excluding difference, such higher education strips off and undermines the individuating value of difference that is constitutive of the being of an individual and of a collectivity. The article therefore argues for the centring of the (contestatory) sources of concrete being for African situatedness in African higher education, if such education is to meet the core demands of cosmopolitanism it aspires to realise.

The first section of the article explores the different liberal strands of a cosmopolitan universalism grounded in commonality. We particularly focus on the seminal work on cosmopolitan education of Martha Nussbaum (2002) and the ideas of Jurgen Habermas (1994; 2001; 2003) on global citizenship. The proceeding section discusses Seyla Benhabib's notion of a difference-grounded universalism which does not inherently dismiss sources of differences among people as being morally arbitrary and empty. Later, upon examining the state and form of cosmopolitanism underlying African higher education the article, lastly, draws implications of a difference-cosmopolitan universalism on African higher education. The article concludes by calling for re-imagining cosmopolitanism in African higher education by grounding it in a framework that actively centres difference as the starting point for the configuration of cosmopolitan education, if the education is to be just (Chikumbutso & Waghid, 2019).

## **THE PREVALENT COSMOPOLITANISM OF EXCLUSIVE COMMONALITIES**

Global interconnectedness now characterises modern life and is now constitutive of being human today. The scope of those affected by individual or collective agency today extends beyond one's locality and national boundaries. Engaging with a hitherto un-encountered other is an inevitable part of life today. Furthermore, the depth and immensity of modern interconnectedness, today makes more vivid and real the notion of universal moral duties one has enact to the remotely distant others across oceans. Put differently, the individual today is affected by events beyond his or her locale, and most of his individual or collective exercise of agency affects others outside. The inevitability of encountering the other places a demand to consider the other in the exercise of one's agency and this necessitates the cultivation of

knowledge, attitudes and skills for living in the closely shared world today. It is therefore unsurprising that education has been regarded as an indispensable vehicle for the cultivation of cosmopolitan values.

While global interconnectedness is indispensable, there is a lingering challenge of global diversity given the cultural plurality if not contrasts among the people of the world. Thus, while on the one hand the globalised world puts all humanity in an intricate web of mutual interdependence, on the other hand global cultural diversity remains a part of who human beings are. How to respond to reality of global pluralism has resulted in different conceptions of what should constitute cosmopolitanism. What should be the form and substance of cosmopolitanism? In other words, how does the constitution of ideal cosmopolitanism reconcile the universalism of cosmopolitan impartiality on the one hand and the particularism of local life. Ultimately the dominant conception of cosmopolitanism that informs cosmopolitan citizenship in education including higher education, has been one that focuses on commonalities humanity shares, so as to avoid the particularities of global diversity in cosmopolitan citizenship configurations. Much of education in Africa particularly higher education is modelled on the aspiration of such a cosmopolitanism whose nature is that it esteems and exclusively assigns normativity to the objective commonalities humanity shares and simultaneously excludes the subjectivities of particularism as being normatively empty. The implication for such a cosmopolitanism is that it demands prioritisation of the objective and impartial moral values at the expense of particularism. In other words, for this brand of cosmopolitan which is dominant in higher education in Africa, the impartial cosmopolitan norms of human equality (that would apparently guarantee harmonious cooperation in global encounters) are incompatible with and antagonistic to particularism and its commitments.

Martha Nussbaum's (2002) seminal article on cosmopolitan citizenship, *Patriotism and cosmopolitanism* made a bold statement regarding the value and place of particularism with respect to cosmopolitan universalism. In this work, cosmopolitan universalism is pitted against patriotic commitments. The position that Nussbaum advances is that education for cosmopolitanism is incompatible with and antithetical to forms of local solidarity or patriotic commitments. The elements that constitute national community and which patriotic education advances include a shared language, common public culture, geographical territory, and a common history (Miller 1995, 27). For Nussbaum (2002, 4), and cosmopolitans of her ilk, "patriotic pride is both morally dangerous" and subversive of some of "the goals of national unity in devotion to worthy moral ideals of justice and equality", goals which in her words would "be better served by an ideal that is in any case more adequate to our situation in the contemporary world, namely the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, *the person whose*

*allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings*” [italics emphasis ours]. What such a position insinuates is that in the configuration of cosmopolitan citizenship, particularistic ideals and commitments are “morally irrelevant” attributes irrespective of individuals or communities deriving value from them (Nussbaum 2002, 5). Put differently, for such a school of cosmopolitanism the particularistic attachments and commitments they generate are both incompatible and antagonistic with cosmopolitan universalism and that such a position does not discount that individual persons derive some value from such goods. Such value is however, apparently not relevant and therefore dispensable in the constitution of cosmopolitan impartiality.

The cosmopolitan stance of prioritisation of universal commitments to all the people of the world, for Nussbaum (2005, 5), “has the promise of transcending these divisions [originating from group identities/belonging], because only this stance [of cosmopolitanism] asks us to give our first allegiance to what is morally good – and that which, being good, I can commend as such to all human beings”. However, as this article subsequently avers, local commitments have distinct normative value incomparable with the normativity of impartiality. As such, pitting local commitments against moral impartiality in a hierarchy of moral relevance where the local must be subservient to the impartial, is morally problematic. This is because in principle, such tendencies are a denial of the subjectivities in which reside the concreteness of being of a particular individual or community worth of moral respect. Such concreteness is either an expression of the exercise of agency or an indispensable enabling means through which agency is exercised and meaningful.

Such a form of cosmopolitanism that takes a radically exclusivist position over local particularism is referred to as radical cosmopolitanism by Appiah (2005, 232) or strong cosmopolitanism by Miller (2007, 43). In the spirit of strong cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum (2002, 6) argues that “we should recognize humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect”. Amplifying the Stoic idea of the primary normativity of the general worldwide human community, Nussbaum (2002, 7) holds that “we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings”. Such strong cosmopolitanism presupposes that the principle of impartiality must govern all human relationships, thus effectively stripping off normative value of any particularistic relationships. In other words, the cosmopolitan life is one of primacy and transcendence of impartial duties one has to all humanity undifferentiated by any form of situatedness.

With respect to education, Nussbaum (2002, 8), recommends an education for world

citizenship that is cognizant that local allegiances damage the political life of a group such that [global] political deliberation “is sabotaged again and again by partisan loyalties, whether to one’s team at the Circus or to one’s nation. Only by making our fundamental allegiance to the world community of justice and reason do we avoid these dangers”. For Nussbaum, the cosmopolitan life in the quest of putting right before country must put “universal reason before the symbols of national belonging and be not boring, flat, or lacking in love [for the nation]” (Nussbaum 2002, 17).

Positions that cosmopolitanism must at least exclude forms of local solidarity because commitments from such solidarity are morally arbitrary and inimical to cosmopolitan universalism, are also advanced by Jurgen Habermas (1994; 2001; 2003). The cosmopolitan future that Habermas (1994, 32) anticipates is one whose global deliberative democracy will not be based on the particularities of situatedness of the peoples of the world as peculiar communities, but rather will be based on “anonymously interlinked discourses”. The ultimate expectation is that ultimately, cosmopolitan or global citizenship will be “enacted in the paradoxical sense of compliance with the procedural rationality of a political will formation” (Habermas 1994, 32).

Since, the major effect of globalization has been that the spectrum of those affected by the agency of a particular collective is much wider than the territorial limitedness of the members, Habermas (2001, 70) therefore urges caution against the trap of territorial limitedness in theorization of democracy in the global era since local or national interests today apparently are no longer confined to boundaries. According to Habermas (2001, 73–74) democracy in the modern interconnected world must be grounded in an inclusive shared political (not necessarily local or national) solidarity becoming whose part does not require initially conforming to the cultural community of the collective. Understanding democracy as being grounded in a common culture that values common political procedures for deliberation and inclusive collective will-formation, for Habermas (2001) renders any forms of political/democratic solidarity that are based on elements of particularistic life lose any purported moral value. Thus, cosmopolitan citizenship globally should and can be built on a universalistic constitutional patriotism, that is based on globally shared procedures and structures of individual opinion-formation as well as democratic collective will-formation, rather than being based on the differentiating and allegedly exclusivist national patriotism. After all, for Habermas (2003, 86), global markets, which are among the most significant globalisation elements that make possible a vivid sense of transnational community, are sensitive to market forces only and are insensitive to such things as national as couched in national economic policies.

A common theme that has developed from Nussbaum’s (2002) cosmopolitanism is that of

pitting impartiality on the one hand as having normative value and therefore must always hierarchically transcend partiality that on the other hand is ostensibly narrow-focused and exclusive of others by virtue of their being non-members of this community. Other adherents of the position of radical cosmopolitanism include Nili (2015) and Arneson (2016). Nili holds that the solidarity that matters and enables democratic life for political cooperation for social justice resides in the shared political institutions every citizen individually values as the most optimal guarantee for realization of individual autonomy, that develops “mutual feelings and bonds of civic friendship” in a community of otherwise diverse individual projects (Nili 2015, 249). It is following this strand of thought that Nili (2015, 249) holds that “it is because of living under just institutions that we develop a sense of justice”. The implication of this position is that the elements of partiality in collective life, though of indisputable value to individuals as autonomous beings, have no place in the constitution of cosmopolitanism and imagination of education for cosmopolitan citizenship.

Arneson (2016, 562) makes a distinction between social norms and moral norms. For instance, a good friend is expected to be partial to his friend according to norms of friendship. However, Arneson (2016, 562) contends that such norms of partiality are internal to social practice only and therefore distinct from moral norms such that the partiality of friendship ought not to place constraints on moral impartiality. Though for Arneson (2016, 559) commitments of partiality are morally permissible, they are however not morally necessary because the extensive duties of beneficence one owes all human beings exclude duties that arise from voluntary commitments one may have to his or her local collectivity or compatriots. Thus for Arneson (2016) friendship and related commitments of partiality have nothing of inherent value in them that should place constraints on obligations of impartiality the individual has to global humanity.

The central tenet in strong cosmopolitanism is emphasis on building the cosmopolitan aspiration on the commonalities which people have in order to avoid the apparently mind-narrowing subjective elements that form the bedrock of the solidarity for life in a collectivity. Explicitly and implicitly, positions of strong cosmopolitans regard locality as being inhibitive of cosmopolitan life. Therefore, the constituents of local solidarity are in the normative sense tolerable only in so far as they concede their inferior status and subservience to the lofty impartiality commitments of cosmopolitan universalism.

Such prioritisation of the common aspirations of human beings as being the exclusive elements in the conceptualization of moral norms governing human relations, owe their heritage to Kantian impartiality that also necessarily regards moral impartiality as being the sole exclusive determinant of what is moral and that as much as possible moral reflection must avoid

the traps of partiality (Meyers 2005, 27; Pettersen 2011, 52; Code 2012). However, as subsequent sections will show, founding cosmopolitan universalism in impartiality only, actively excluding the particularities of localness as being inherently inimical to realization of human equality is problematic and ironically ill-serves the very ideal of human equality that cosmopolitanism sets out to defend and respect.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF STRONG COSMOPOLITANISM ON EDUCATION IN AFRICA**

The ever-increasing immensity of global interconnectedness renders directly or indirectly encountering the hitherto unknown other inevitable, making it no longer a matter of voluntary choice. Given the diversity of the people of the world, there is a real need to ensure that human beings as citizens of the world possess attitudes, knowledge and skills that will render global encounters respectful. Education therefore is tasked with the challenge of developing cosmopolitan knowledge and skills that the modern citizen must possess. The scope and breadth of education today is largely cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitanism model that avoids difference however has adverse and profound implications on human equality in African education. Education in Africa is by and large anchored in a cosmopolitan framework of commonality, necessarily and simultaneously actively de-emphasises the particularities of commitments of local solidarity. What is happening is that in education theorization and practice, those aspects of local collective life are either marginalised based on an apparent fear of promoting narrowness of mind as strong cosmopolitanism insinuates. Alternatively, such elements of particularity since they are conceived as being inherently morally arbitrary, are being sacrificed for other competing goods that promise high financial utility to education institutions, the graduating student, and the global market. In other words, once elements of local solidarity are regarded as morally irrelevant, de-centering them from education imagination is no longer regarded as normatively inconsequential.

The modern framework of African higher education largely owes its origin to the colonial era. The colonial experience was itself grounded in Kantian rationality of the impartial objective versus the particularistic subjective resulting into “the metaphysical denial of African existence and therefore, on the myth of emptiness” (Mungwini 2017, 8). During the colonial experience, Africa was deemed to be devoid of intellectual creativity on the basis that apparently African cultural worldviews and experiences did not reveal to be motivated by a positivistic and egocentric rationality of Eurocentrism (Mungwini 2017, 8). Subsequently, African experiences and knowledge claims were discounted from the philosophical domain, based not on the validity of the claims but rather on the basis that African experiences were different from the Eurocentric ones and as such were in need of adaptation (Mungwini 2017, 12).

Modern Africa still retains this legacy that trivialised locality. For instance, in most South African universities, the nature and content of philosophy topics as well as the substance of what forms the central problems of philosophy in higher education curriculums generally pertain to a Eurocentrism in nature and experience (Ramose 2016, 554). There is thus in African higher education a Kantian “knowledge hegemony” that does not allow for the diversification of the curriculum in respect of valid alternative knowledge paradigms and systems (Etieyibo 2016, 404). In other words, in African higher education there is systematic exclusion of local or indigenous “insights, ideas, information, experiences, practices, worldviews and perspectives into programmes of studies” (Etieyibo 2016, 404). The education curriculum of African higher education therefore is not meaningfully representative of the perspectives and experiences of Africans (Etieyibo 2016, 405). Put differently, in its commitment to a unitary cosmopolitanism education for global citizenship in Africa today sustains a context that generally assigns an inferior estimation of African experiences as an other culture (Etieyibo 2016, 411).

African higher education is under neoliberal pressure of globality to “become part of a global ‘knowledge society’” (Blunt 2005, 1370). A major characteristic of such knowledge that ostensibly aspires for global universalism lies in its nature to “tyrannically suppress difference” (Blunt 2005, 1369). Like the essentialist Kantianism that inhered colonialism, globality too essentially establishes hierarchies of knowledge production and validity that privilege egocentrism while at the same time unduly dismissing objects and aspects of local knowledge (Elliott-Cooper 2017). As Zeleza (2009, 131) argues, “the globalist tradition is rooted in Eurocentrism, which is inherently comparative and universalistic in its intellectual gaze and ambitions. Since the establishment of the modern academy in Europe, African phenomena have always been measured according to European master references—from humanity to history, civilization to culture, ethics to economics, temporalities to technologies, sociality to sexuality—and always found lacking, lagging behind Europe” (Zeleza 2009, 131). Thus, in modern Africa, “the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion, and many others have remained colonised” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 485). Modern globalist education therefore also typically structures phenomena in hierarchical categories based on alleged relevance or irrelevance, superiority or inferiority, core versus periphery, epistemic hierarchies, linguistic as well as aesthetic hierarchies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015, 487).

## **THE STATE OF COSMOPOLITAN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Given all the foregoing, and that African nations are yet to catch up in terms of economic well-being with developed nations, higher education in Africa is conceived as the sure means of



achieving global competitiveness. This ultimately has had implications on the role (if any) and value of sources of local situatedness in higher education. The philosophical ideology of a cosmopolitanism of commonalities, as opposed to difference, together with the global market-skills-oriented education, render the relegation of aspects of local situatedness as being normatively inconsequential and a matter determined by sheer economic utility.

As a consequence, there is no presence of African languages in higher and even the lower levels of education in Africa for instance. African governments no longer extensively invest in the development of local languages to be adopted as a medium of instruction, as capable languages for 21<sup>st</sup> century science and local knowledge is absent from academic spaces. For example, the University of Malawi has no dedicated study to any of Malawi's local languages or any major regional language. African languages are studied under the general umbrella of African Languages and Linguistics (Chancellor College 2019a). There is no course that is taught in vernacular and Malawian vernacular literature courses are taught in English. While English literature, and African literature written in English constitute the backbone of the English department, no congruent commitment to the study of Malawian literature in Malawian languages (Chancellor College 2019b). Like most universities in Africa, admission into the Malawian public higher education institutions and indeed the award of any school certificate at the primary and secondary school levels have a prerequisite of a credit pass in English. A pass in any language is not among the core determinants for qualification for a certificate which however has a prerequisite of a pass in English (Moyo 2001, 9).

In 2014, the Malawi government revised the Education Act and part of the new reforms were that use of mother-tongue instruction in the first four years of the eight year-long primary school be scrapped off and that English be the medium of instruction (Malawi Government 2013, sec. 78 (1)), in part motivated by the demand to be globally relevant and competitive (Masina 2014). The latest language census in Malawi of 1998 showed that English is a home language of less than 1 per cent of the nation while some local languages and their dialects together are spoken by around 70 per cent of the population (National Statistics Office of Malawi 1998). The socioeconomic context of Malawi is that 54 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and 85 per cent of the population live in rural areas (National Statistics Office of Malawi 2006; 2008). Such a removal of local languages is not conceived as a normative matter since the cosmopolitan framework of the education regards sources of local situatedness to be inherently morally irrelevant and can hence be relegated from the educational domain when they cannot favourably compete with other goods in terms of generating socio-economic utility, which is at the heart of modern neo-liberal education.

What all this shows is that Education imagination and practice in Malawi, like in much of

Africa, is modelled on a cosmopolitan of commonality that necessarily represses difference, regarding it as inherently inhibitive of cosmopolitan aspirations. The implication for this is that to achieve cosmopolitan education in most African nations such as Malawi, one must develop skills and capacities that appeal to commonalities of the people of the world. Such a project necessarily suppresses difference. However, as the subsequent section seeks to show, difference is both an indispensable and constitutive element of being for a human person or his or her collectivity.

### **A BENHABIBIAN DIFFERENCE-COSMOPOLITANISM**

Seyla Benhabib (1992) criticises forms of universalism that are exclusively grounded in commonalities only. The idea of the Kantian transcendent noumenal self who is also generally similar to the Rawlsian selves in the veil of ignorance who disregard their differences in pursuit of commonality as epitomic of the moral person, according to Benhabib (1992, 161) is problematic. The problem lies in that such noumenal selves cannot be individuated yet they are the basis for principles that pertain to individuated beings. For Benhabib (1992, 161) individuated beings are “embodied, affective, suffering creatures [with] memory and history, their ties and relations to others” are subsumed as part of the phenomenal realm which is a site of subjectivity other than a site for objective moral principles.

For Benhabib (1992), the problem with the concept of the impartial person as the prototype of the moral person is that the identity of a human being cannot be exclusively and exhaustively defined only on the basis of the capacity for agency alone. This is because for her, identity does not refer only to a person’s “potential for choice alone, but to the actuality of my choices, namely to how I, as a finite, concrete, embodied individual, shape and fashion the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life’s story” (Benhabib 1992, 161–162). Thus for Benhabib (1992), individuating characteristics cannot be ascribed to a transcendental self without including the empirical distinctive wants, and desires of individual particularity. She contends that there is no single “essence” of anger that is applicable for each and every angry individual. Rather, characteristics of individuation cannot be understood once they are divorced from their specific social, economic, cultural, and historical context (Benhabib 1992, 162). As such Benhabib contends that the Rawlsian and Kantian positions of moral universalism cannot universalize adequately. Given the foregoing, Benhabib (1992, 162) holds that “moral situations, like moral emotions and attitudes, can only be individuated if they are evaluated in light of our knowledge of the history of the agents involved in them”. In other words, the moral individual cannot be detached from his or her web of social situatedness.

With respect to approaches towards moral universalism Benhabib (1992) comes up with two approaches to universalism: the generalised other and the concrete other moral standpoints of universalism. The generalised other moral standpoint of being human pertains to approaches such as the Kantian and Rawlsian ones discussed earlier. The generalised other moral standpoint understands

“each and every individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other. We assume that, the other, like ourselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires and affects, but that what constitutes his or her moral dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common. Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of formal equality and reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from us what we can expect and assume from him or her” (Benhabib 1992, 158–159).

For Benhabib (1992, 159) human interactions under this moral standpoint are accompanied by the moral categories of right, obligation, and entitlement, with “corresponding moral feelings such as those of respect, duty, worthiness and dignity”. However, as can be gleaned, such a moral perspective ignores relations and feelings that pertain to elements that constitute individuation. In other words, it is incompatible with what differentiates human persons as well as their communities.

In contrast to the generalized other moral standpoint, Benhabib advances a concrete otherness moral perspective. The concrete other perspective

“requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotion constitution. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality, and focus on individuality. We seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what she searches for, and what s/he desires. Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of equity, and complementary reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behavior through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents and capacities. Our differences in this case complement rather than exclude one another” (Benhabib 1992, 159).

Human relations under the concrete other moral standpoint, though not exclusively private, are not institution-based and are governed by the norms of “friendship, love, and care” (Benhabib 1992, 159). These norms expect that one not only asserts the rights and entitlements of the other when confronted with the needs of the other, but rather that one also confirms, “beyond the humanity of the other, the individuality of the other” (Benhabib 1992, 159). As such, the “moral categories that accompany such interactions are those of responsibility, bonding and sharing. The corresponding moral feelings are those of love, care, sympathy and solidarity” (Benhabib 1992, 159).

The concrete other standpoint recognizes that to be recognized as a human being demands more than recognizing what is common about all humanity but goes further to recognize the individuating characteristics that define you. Recognising you only as a generalized being does not carry any particular moral import about you because it is what all humanity is. In other words, such a position does not recognize your agency. This is because for Benhabib (1992), recognising and respecting the agency capacity of an individual is meaningful in relation to the recognizing and respecting the actuality of the values, actions, and preferences that result from the exercise of the agency. However, the individual who exercises agency is a socially embedded being to which pertain, and in which are rooted the sources of individuality (Waghid, 2013). Even the most radically autonomous individual is embedded in a social context that has a common language, shared and contested values and is part of a common history. In other words, the subjectivities of mother-tongue, history, common public culture, and shared geographical territory, are not morally empty or irrelevant goods, but have some constitutive normative value for the autonomous individual. Abstracting commonalities only with the intent of sifting out differences therefore does not serve moral universalism.

In other words, the concrete otherness position places value on the moral feelings of care and elements of the social structures that enable and avail the care. The care is provided for through social institutions of common language, public culture, the home, schools and related civil society associations (MacIntyre 2002; Taylor 2003; Held 2006).

## **A DIFFERENCE COSMOPOLITANISM AND AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The central theme of Benhabib's difference-grounded universalism lies in that respecting human dignity must necessarily factor in difference as the epitome of being individual. In the context of cosmopolitanism, such a universalism demands that the differences across the people of the world should not be discounted and relegated from configurations of cosmopolitanism. With respect to education, this position entails centring the sources of concreteness of the communities of the world that are different from the dominant Eurocentric one. Without necessarily synonymizing such endeavours with endorsement of all forms of cultural differences across the globe, this position calls for extending, in African higher education, the similar privilege that Eurocentrism is accorded to the sources of concreteness of African communities so that they are also duly centred in education enterprises. Looked at this way, local languages and local philosophies assume their normative value that the prevalently neoliberal global educational order denied them of. This way, the project of determining the value of localness gets upgraded from being one governed by economic utility, to one that is normative as such questions of economic viability though in some instrumental sense important

should not be the primary determiners of what to include and exclude from African education.

Cosmopolitan education that builds only on similarities of human beings in order to circumvent the alleged obstruction that global differences pose, is in principle modelled to the idea of the detached transcendent impersonal person who must ignore the subjectivities of social-cultural situatedness which constitute his or her being human being and instead concentrate on what extinguishes his or her sources of concreteness from which the world is interpreted as an autonomous being. That African education must center the sources of embeddedness which host the sources of concreteness therefore is a moral matter that is grander than the economic cost of such endeavours. As things are, African higher education is promoting a cosmopolitanism that is based on the generalized other moral standpoint, simultaneously extinguishing the particularities that constitute African, yet in the name of global equality. Such practice amounts to undermining the being individual of the African student and the normativity of the concreteness of the African social context.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has argued that models of cosmopolitanism that are grounded only in commonalities people of the world share and, hence, necessarily normatively outlaw difference, ignore and undermine the sources of individual and collectivity concreteness. Being an individual human being cannot be detached from one's situatedness. Transcendent selves that extinguish the particularities of social embeddedness which are the sources of being a concrete human being and community are not exhaustive of the actual individuated being. Respecting human dignity requires respecting the subjectivities resulting from and supporting the exercise of both individual and collective agency. It is about recognising the normativity of the shared social frameworks embedding the individual that support one to achieve self-actualisation. The constitutive elements of social situatedness of an individual therefore cannot be divorced from recognising the individual as a dignity-bearing individual worthy of respect.

If African higher education must cultivate attitudes, knowledge and skills for global cooperation that is respectful, the cosmopolitanism configuration must centre other than divorce difference across the peoples of the world. Without necessarily outlawing the normative value of commonalities in humanity, individual and collectivity differences are an indispensable cardinal element of concrete being. Such differences must be engaged, interrogated, and embraced as part of respecting the dignity of humanity. The implication on higher education in Africa is that African higher education institutions must develop and centre African languages as mediums of instruction as well as centring African experiences as legitimate and valid objects of academic inquiry. Unless such endeavours are undertaken, African higher education will

remain alienating owing to its being grounded in a normatively problematic framework of cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitanism of exclusive commonalities.

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