USING THE CAPABILITY APPROACH TO CONCEPTUALISE AFRICAN IDENTITY(IES)

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KEY CONCEPTS

African identity; agency; capabilities; citizenship; heterogeneity; public deliberation

ABSTRACT

In a context where “African identity” is a category that is often homogenised across a vast and diverse continent and beyond, there is a need to interrogate and better understand the concept. The prevalence of migration and cultural exchange in our interconnected world makes it imperative to look beyond race and space as a way of understanding identity, speaking both to sameness and difference. Acknowledging the complexities and the contested nature of identities and in particular, African identity/identities, this paper argues against an essentialised approach to identities in a global context. It explores and builds on arguments for plural identities, mobilising concepts of heterogeneity and plurality, agency and public deliberation from the Capability Approach in order to advance a way of understanding and negotiating identities that allows for a reasoned, flexible and inclusive approach. The Capability Approach is proposed as a generative normative framework which provides an important way to explain and negotiate identities in Africa based on human development grounded in social justice. In doing so, the paper acknowledges an understanding of identity as multifaceted and fluid, and when informed by human development and capabilities, is able to strengthen values like tolerance and accommodation of the “other” on the basis of recognition, respect and equality. I focus on the freedoms, opportunities and choices available for individuals to deliberate on the type of identities or African identities that they value on the assumption that identity is an object of

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reasoned choice, even though subject to constraints, and that more than one identity choice is possible.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature in the humanities acknowledges that identities, also African identity, are concepts that are both complex and contested. Various explanations have been advanced, varying from personal identities to complex group identities, often explained by geographical positioning of what constitutes "Africanness". In addition, explanations proposed by race-based approaches, including Pan-African positions which foreground black consciousness, have also been put forward (Butler 1990 & 1993; Mbembe 2001; Wright 2002). This paper responds to these explanations arguing that African identities are dynamic and heterogeneous rather than rigid and monolithic. Although there may be some enduring qualities which can be found in what constitutes African identities, these will vary depending on context. For example, anyone who originates from Africa but is now settled out of Africa remains African, notwithstanding the potential of adopting other identity dimensions associated with their new contexts. In this regard, African identity should be understood as any distinction or deportment reasonably claimed to be African by the bearer(s) without shutting out other possibilities. Drawing on the Capability Approach (CA) as an attractive normative evaluative framework (Nussbaum 2000; Sen 1999), the paper rather proposes acknowledging heterogeneity and plurality, public deliberation and agency in understanding African identities. The CA, I suggest, is an overarching evaluative framework through which diverse identities can then be understood in ways which advance democratic citizenship and more equality in and across societies.

In developing the argument, this paper is divided into two sections − the first focuses on approaches to understanding identity and the second on citizenship identities and the CA. Under approaches to understanding identity, I discuss essentialist perspectives on identity in general and African identity in particular, with special reference to their limitations as argued by Sen (2006), Chipkin (2007), Wright (2002), and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009; 2010). The paper will then highlight how monolithic perspectives on identity of individuals or groups lead to definitions that do not capture the complexity of identity and African identity. I then discuss how Pan-Africanism and black consciousness are politically significant but nonetheless run the risk of essentialism by defining identities as uniform, static and rigid; limiting their explanatory power in advancing African identities which are less inclined to othering and xenophobic tendencies. This is followed by highlighting how a pluralist perspective is more useful in mapping an approach to African identity which is more inclusive and provides spaces for oppressed or marginalised groups in contexts where democratic space is limited. The paper further explains the complexities of identity

in a global context and the significance of understanding identities as complex and plural in such a context. This section looks at citizenship identities and the CA. It frames identity within citizenship discourse, which includes plural identities in order to move beyond these polarised perspectives which ignore the complex nature of human identities in the global context. It is argued that people should identify themselves as citizens bound to all humanity by ties of respect and compassion rather than as citizens of some local or regional group (Nussbaum 1997). Lastly, the paper demonstrates how the processes of rethinking African identities through the lens of the CA can be useful in this regard by allowing for heterogeneity and plurality, choices, reasoning and agency.

APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

This section sketches essentialist perspectives on African identities as the first stage in making an argument for considering the conceptual lens of the CA to expand discussion of African identities.

Essential identities

Essential identities refer to forms of categorisation of individuals or groups as homogeneous, exclusive and impenetrable and those who advance this approach are essentialists or solitarists (Hudson & Melber 2014; Sen 2006). Many arguments by essentialists indicate an intention to segregate and pigeon-hole people based on ethnic group, skin colour or race, or some other category. Wielenga (2014) argues that those who are at the centre of power in politics and media may make use of essentialist discourses to "construct propaganda narratives" in order to mobilise support for a particular agenda not necessarily advancing the "common good". Xenophobia in South Africa is an especially compelling example of mobilising people in conditions of poverty in ways which advance neither their own nor the common good. It is also true that scholars, including philosophers, may consciously or unconsciously provide inspiration for such propaganda narratives. As an example, Mlambo (2013: 63) argues: "Historians and history writing have played an important role in shaping perceptions of Zimbabwe's past and in influencing present conceptions of [essentialised] nationhood, citizenship and belonging." In this regard, nationhood, citizenship and belonging are variants of identity. The same can be said when debating African identity. Narrowed identities are at the heart of othering. In the Rwandan genocide, for example, Hutus were mobilised into believing that they were a special ethnic group who were supposed to rule over others, especially the Tutsis, generating extreme violence. When race theorists divide humanity into distinct race categories which are hierarchical, that is done to undermine some as less human (Keet 2014), as both slave and apartheid society did. Similarly, using the identity tag of race, Africa

and Asia were colonised under the auspices of a "civilising" mission. Sen (2006), as well as Goff and Dunn (2004), also argue that identities which are essentialised are potentially explosive and can be used to mobilise violence and xenophobic tendencies. The apartheid systems in South Africa used physical identities captured as fixed social groups to marginalise and ruthlessly oppress Africans and construct a "them" (black) and "us" (white); bolstered by crude notions of "*swart gevaar*" and further reinforced ideologically through schooling and churches. The idea of them versus us was also used in the Rwanda genocide between the Hutu and Tutsi (Wielenga 2014). The xenophobic attacks in South Africa are further examples of the effects of them-us identity-based discourse and practices (Daimon 2014). For this reason, identities and how we understand ourselves and our relationships with others, become especially significant for the advancement of peace and development.

Pan-African approaches[1]

In opposing racial identities, Pan-Africanist, nationalist and the black consciousness movements adopted the slogan "Africa is for Africans", derived from Marcus Garvey's poem "Africa for Africans" (Africa speaks). However, some of these groups were not clear on what they meant by Africa or Africans and the implications of what they meant for African identities. For example, Kwame Nkrumah viewed Pan-Africanism as a nationalist and anti-colonialist venture, a struggle for independence of the whole continent rather than a local or national one. Yet for others like Steve Biko this understanding of Africanness was rooted in local/grassroots political organising and activism that sought to develop an African/black consciousness of national culture and liberation (Dei 2012). Nonetheless, Pan-Africanists' understanding of "Africa" and "African" marked a departure from the former "othered" understanding by racists and imperialists which undermined the humanness of those categorised as Africans. But in the process, they fell into the same trap of essentialising identities leading to "othering" with the same consequences of instituting segregation, marginalisation or even violence against the othered (Hudson & Melber 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). When Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) and Mlambo (2013) ask the question: "Do Zimbabweans exist?" or Chipkin (2007) asks: "Who is a South African?", they advance significant questions which upset notions of nation states and nation building which tend to oversimplify the idea of post-colonial nation states and national identity. They suggest that these nations are work in progress rather than already concluded. These questions in turn are critical in disrupting traditional views on what constitutes Zimbabweaness, South Africanness or even Africanness. Zimbabweaness, for example, was decided by the whims of the politics of the day

1 For more insights on Pan-Africanism and black consciousness read: 1) Ackah, W.B. 1999 *Pan-Africanism: Exploring the contradictions, politics, identity and development in Africa and the African diaspora*, and 2) Thompsell, A. What was the black consciousness movement?

without seriously engaging a reflexive understanding of what is meant by such a definition. I extend the questions of Chipkin (2007), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) and Mlambo (2013) cited above to our rethinking of African identities.

Advocates of black consciousness seem to have been aware of complexities of identities by arguing that blackness is not constituted by skin colour but is a mental attitude (Azanian People's Organisation 2001). In addition they emphasise that "the term black is not all inclusive, that is, the fact that we are all not white does not necessarily mean that we are all black". This implies that they also recognise the possibility of moving away from racialism and toward seeing each person as only a person, not seeing colour at all. Thus, within the black consciousness movement there are varied opinions on what should be regarded as black consciousness. For example, one perspective holds the opinion that "the white man is sealed in his whiteness whilst the black man is sealed in his blackness" (Fanon 1967: 19). This conception categorises people using skin colour. In addition it presupposes narrow and fixed identities with no possibility of any other. The identity dimensions associated with Pan-African and black consciousness notions of Africanness vary from a multiracial identity of Africanness to one that is framed within fixed racial contours and geographical space. Mbembe (2001) rejects an African identity defined by geographical space on the grounds that to do so is to construct African identities within a conceptualisation of Africa as one place, rather than a territory or territories. The implication is that a place denotes a fixed landscape whereas territory/territories suggest ever shifting constructions of people. For example, defining Africanness in terms of a fixed landscape, Africa, would exclude Africans in the diaspora. In that case there is need to avoid a conception of African as a geographical and ideological construction framed in colonial language and text (Hudson & Melber 2014). Its exclusionary nature does not work well in a context where multiple identities should be recognised. A combination of complex forms of defining an African as a homogeneous, essential or solitary category could be viewed as one way of trying to recreate and perpetuate hegemonic conceptions of the African. These conceptions will not fit well in the global context, as will be demonstrated in the next sections.

Plural identities

How to negotiate preferred identities is at the centre of identity discourse in general, and particularly in Africa, hence the focus of this paper. In contrast to the essentialist views discussed above, pluralist perspectives argue that identity is complex and multi-layered (Banks 2008; Sen 2006; Wielenga 2014; Wright 2002). At a personal level, persons may have many identities, depending on what suits them best in that particular context. Sen (2006) illustrates this by noting that a person can be identified as a father, a scholar, a vegetarian or a citizen of a particular country. Sen's argument also applies to group identities, for example ethnic, religious or racial groups. In each

of these intersectionalities it is possible to find more subcategories, for example one's political party, residents' association, or a professional group. Without necessarily exploring these diverse intersectionalities, I will articulate the complex nature of identities and the possibility of how one can reasonably choose one's identity preferences. The freedom to choose any one of these identity categories may be limited by the way others either conceptualise, accept or refute identity claims by the individual. In some contexts some identities may simply not be available, for example in very patriarchal cultures independent female identities may literally lead to harm and even death. Similarly, race is another identity that one cannot choose in many (not all) circumstances. Within oppressive political circumstances some identities (for example oppositional to the ruling elite) may not be publicly available. In some African countries it has not been easy for citizens to choose identities regarded as unusual in their contexts, based on popular traditions or culture in such contexts. For instance, homosexuality is regarded as illegal in Zimbabwean and Ugandan societies.

In the light of contesting global identities, where socio-economic and political power tends to marginalise the weak, favouring the already powerful, and where migration has become widespread, rethinking essentialised African identity becomes critical. Wright (2002) explains that Africa has long been marginalised in global considerations of culture, economics and geopolitics and African identity is a category that is over-determined, overgeneralised and homogenised.

Identities in a global context

In situating African identities in the global context, both Bornman (2003) and Mbembe (2001) acknowledge the ambiguities that are found in the discourses and realities of African identities. This paper draws on their arguments to expand further the dangers of viewing African identities as narrow and monolithic, claiming that doing so will be borrowing from a colonial understanding of Africanness, which has been described in the section on essential identities. Bornman and Mbembe both argue that identities in a global setting are homogenised and universalised even though they are localised and diversified at the same time. This argument flows from the very nature of African communities which tend to differ as they widen and draw together as they become more localised. Bornman (2003: 24) calls this an "extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon". He adds that identity in this setting is a paradox because of the "tendency towards homogeneity, synchronisation, integration, unity and universalism" whilst concurrently bearing the "propensity for localisation, heterogeneity, differentiation, diversity and particularism". While people tend to differ in many aspects regarding their identities, they also tend to be similar in many others. African identities portray these contours in varied intersectionalities which include culture, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality and language. Within these

differences and similarities, changes may occur within time and space. In this sense I agree with Bornman (2003: 26) that cultural identity can be interpreted as a shared identity "among people of common historical experiences", with enduring "cultural codes" which tend to foster solidarity within the group. These enduring cultural codes are defined as "symbols and systems of meaning that are relevant to members of a particular culture (or subculture)" (Hyatt & Simons 1999: 23). These codes often cut across intersectionalities such as culture, sexuality, ideologies, gender and so on. At the same time cultural identity speaks to difference in the sense that it "recognises points of difference in the course of history". Because of changes that often occur due to other historical factors, such as the nature of states and political economies (national, regional and international), the notion of African identities has continually changed and assumed many forms (Mlambo 2013). Mudimbe (2003) argues that diversity becomes one of the essentials in African identities, which means identity can be both inclusive and also exclusive. In such a context, Sen (2006) argues for recognition of plural and diverse identities which individuals have and emphasises the role of reason and choice in deciding preferred identities. Whilst this is true, how to negotiate and blend the intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, region, language and culture is still a challenge with which scholars on identity grapple (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010).

The above sections explored debates around identity and African identity, in particular using two broad perspectives which are an antithesis of each other. On one side are essentialists who define identity in monolithic terms, as homogeneous and unchanging, whilst pluralists define identity as multifaceted, complex and contested but ever changing. Essentialists categorise people in a way that often leads to violence against the othered. The paper then situates these debates in a global context in which African identity is often marginalised, and when considered, homogenised. Drawing on Mbembe (2001), Bornman (2003) and Sen (2006), I argue that African identity speaks both to difference and sameness and that it should be subject to reasoned choice. In the next section I turn to citizenship identities and the CA as a framework to help understand and negotiate reasoned choice of a particular identity.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

This section proposes that to understand African identity better, it could be framed in citizenship terms which will allow for the possibility of multiple identities. Problems associated with a citizenship perspective on negotiating identity are elaborated, drawing on Sen's five instrumental freedoms as necessary in cultivating an atmosphere where a reasoned choice of preferred African identity will be possible.

Identity as citizenship

Following Lange (2012: 3) I perceive citizenship as "the enacting of human freedom (action) exercised in relation to interrelated spheres: the public sphere where citizens act in concert through deliberation and the common world". In this regard citizenship can be considered as a never complete "project" through which alternative identities remain open to contestation and supplementation (Purvis & Hunt 1999). By the same token, negotiating African identity as a citizenship identity should be viewed as an ongoing project exercised in relation to the public sphere through deliberation. Marshal (1964) appraises citizenship as a fluid concept that increases equality as it expands and reflects historical developments within a context. This means as citizenship rights increase, inequalities based on class, race, gender, sexuality and other categories should become minimal. However, it might be that the rights of non-citizens decrease, and thus inequality of foreign nationals, for example, may get worse. In this case, citizenship should be exercised in relation to interconnected contexts making it important in a modern democratic state to ensure that it expands to include "cultural rights and group rights within a democratic framework" (Banks 2008: 131).

Nonetheless, taking a cue from Gutmann (2003), I acknowledge the potential of group identities both to obstruct democratic values and to facilitate their realisation. For example, it is much easier for oppressed or marginalised groups to mobilise for recognition and social transformation than it is for individuals. Nonetheless, democratic processes which place emphasis on making decisions based on a majoritarian principle tend to perpetuate the tyranny of numbers, thereby obstructing the recognition of minority group identies. This is what makes a reasoned choice by individuals important in deciding both affiliation and identity. Situating identity in citizenship discourses is problematic in that citizenship is usually first configured within fixed legalistic identities along ethnic, national, or continental fault lines (Sen 2014). In conceptualising citizenship as a legal status, McCowan and Unterhalter (2009: 2) say that either "one has a citizenship of a particular state or one does not". From that angle one whose citizenship can be claimed within the geographical location of Africa, becomes an African. This way, it may be difficult for those who fall outside these parameters to acquire a preferred African citizenship identity. Wielenga (2004) argues that citizenship discourse has been ineffective in dealing with identity issues in Rwanda, and calls for the use of what he calls "lived identities" which are more complex and diverse than identities based on citizenship. In addition, because of its legalistic nature, citizenship tends to ignore the historical contexts of the people affected.

This paper suggests a more open and democratic citizenship dialogue based on reasoned choice as essential in overcoming narrow African identities based on race or ethnicity. Citizenship identities based on liberal and democratic values provide a platform for reconstructing preferred forms of African identities, conscious of

historical processes and reasoned choices. Sen (1999) argues that for a citizen to enjoy the substantive freedoms and opportunities to choose and act reasonably, there must be key instrumental freedoms in place such as political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective securities. Frahm-Arp (2009: 86) adds that: “A democracy made up of citizens only emerges when fraternity, equality and liberty, are exercised with ethical responsibility, in line with universal human rights principles, by all members of that state.”

The interconnectedness and importance of the instrumental freedoms listed above give room for reasoned choice and can be used to advance the importance of citizenship rights in claiming and fostering identities which Africans value. Nonetheless, while this may be easy to understand (at least at an epistemic level) and to implement in more integrated democratic regions where instrumental freedoms are fostered, in the African context it may not be as easy. A classic case emerges from a white Zimbabwean farmer − Campbell − who sought to claim his right to his property as both a Zimbabwean and African citizen through a regional court but did not succeed because the Zimbabwean government saw this as interference in its internal affairs and threatened to withdraw from the SADC body (Ndlovu 2014; SADC tribunal 2013). Although this is no longer the case, in 2000 the Zimbabwean government passed a law determining identity and citizenship in narrow terms where mostly whites and former farm workers were excluded (Daimon 2014; Mlambo 2013). Campbell’s case sheds light on how identities and citizenship rights can be limited in contexts where instrumental freedoms are not respected. It also demonstrates how complex it could be to demand justice beyond borders and boundaries of a state or a region (Sen 2014).

The effect of the unilateral determination of borders and consequently citizenship and identities by colonisers cannot be over emphasised. A new dimension of determining citizenship alien to Africans grew, bringing the question of what African identity is. One of the views which I believe had a Pan-Africanist orientation, claimed that real Africans are the people who were in Africa before colonisation by Europe. Hence the popular phrase “Africa for Africans”. Keet (2014: 25) argues that Africa and African was presented by the colonisers as that which is “incomplete, mutilated and unfinished”. Yet beyond this derogatory view noted by Keet (2014) above, Africans exercise their agency through relating and identifying themselves within their own framework. Now that the colonial framework of citizenship is a reality, ways have to be found to negotiate our African identity. To do so is not accepting Eurocentric perceptions of our identities, or citizenship. It is to realise the “possibility of a more expansive conceptualisation of African identity” that accepts both diversity and sameness in more than one way (Wright 2002: 14). This makes the rethinking of African identities a continual project, as explained above. A capability framework explained below provides some concepts useful for this complex conceptualisation.

The Capability Approach and African identity

The major strength of the CA is that it offers an alternative theoretical lens providing "a general normative framework" which can be applied more generally to other areas besides the domain of human development (Unterhalter, Vaughan & Walker 2007). The CA is a flexible framework rather than a precise theory (Robeyns 2005; Sen 1992) which I will use in order to reconceptualise African identities. This paper proposes that the CA, through its concepts like heterogeneity, agency and public deliberation, provides a clearer alternative for reconceptualising African identity. It opens up democratic space to deliberate and acknowledge individual difference, fostering individual or collective potential agency as well as citizen aspirations. I will explain how it can be mobilised as a lever to claim African identities which are both fluid and expansive, but without ignoring enduring cultural codes.

A capability is a real opportunity or freedom to choose what one has reason to value, to be, or to do, which is also called potential functioning, and a "functioning is what one actually manages to achieve or do – and the list of functionings is endless" Sen (1999: 75). Walker (2006: 128) reasons that "it is the practical realization of one's chosen way of life". It might include quite basic functionings such as "being well-nourished, having shelter and access to clean water and being physically safe, or more complex functioning like being well educated, having paid professional work, being respected, taking part in discussions with your peers, being scientifically literate", and so on. From these examples, it can be argued that the realisation of the functioning follows the availability of an opportunity and the freedom to choose to convert the opportunity into reality. In democratic citizenship, it can be inferred that taking part in deliberations is secured by the availability of real opportunities to do so. By real opportunities I mean having the necessary voice and space to influence decisions and actively participate in deliberations without some form of inhibition emanating from power structures in the society. This idea can be borrowed to resolve debates on who should decide on what or who is an African. To avoid hegemonic tendencies, public deliberation/reasoning should be used as an essential element in making such decisions, taking cognisance of possible constricting societal structures. For example, in patriarchal societies where men tend to dominate in deliberations and women are expected to be subservient, educational programmes empowering women to have the capability of voice will be useful.

While other models clearly explain the historicity, fragmentary, complex and contested nature of African identities, they fail to step back and rethink how to situate themselves in post-conflict terrains so as to advance social justice (Chipkin 2007; Mlambo 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). For example, Wielenga (2014: 130) reminds us that identity framing through citizenship in Rwanda has not been successful because "the relationship between citizens and the state is one of fear rather than trust". Whilst the CA is weak on explaining a common and expansive view of identities, it is quite strong in negotiating spaces for individuality and

diversity, public deliberation and equality of opportunity, which we can then apply to a wider context.

The CA advances two normative claims: "[F]reedom to achieve well-being as being of primary moral importance and that freedom to achieve well beings are to be understood in terms of capabilities" (Robeyns 2011). Considering that "the key idea of the CA is that social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities – their freedom to promote or achieve functionings, I contend that the emphasis on advancing freedom and choices is of significance in the process of rethinking African identities. The reasoning is: if identity exists in its people, their dreams, ambitions and goals (Ikalefeng 2013), then it is the people themselves who should be given an opportunity and freedom to define themselves. To avoid a situation explained by Munusamy (2013), where politicians increasingly use "Africanness as a political shield" and in the process distort what it means to be an African, it is the people themselves who should be given the freedom and opportunities to choose what identities they value in their various contexts, based on their informed reasoning.

Thus, linking the CA to citizenship becomes relevant in claiming citizens' capabilities of affiliation, which is essential in the process of rethinking African identities. In this sense what citizens do and how they negotiate affiliation with identities that they value within and through their varied contexts, should be of importance. More so, diversity is important and should be sustained as a way of recognising individual or group differences rather than as a way of categorising and segregating individuals across different intersectionalities. Sen (2006) points out that one's perception of one's own identity may change over time. As a result, freedoms, opportunities and choices that are available to achieve this, should be expanded. Nonetheless, the weakness of the CA in integrating historical processes is acknowledged.

The significance of public reasoning in the CA is best exhibited in debates that emerge from Nussbaum's list of capabilities. Sen (2006) argues that public reasoning is one concept against the idea of generating a fixed and universal list of capabilities. For the same reason Nussbaum (2011) argues that her list is just a starting point in generating deliberations on a list of capabilities. Crocker (2008: 204) adds that if "the list is determined prior to public deliberation and dogmatically shuts off debate" it would not be a meaningful list. He further argues that the issue between Nussbaum and Sen is not about the list but rather about the manner in which the list is generated. In the same way, how we define African identity is significant in determining its acceptability or meaningfulness for the people whose identities are defined. Keet (2014) argues that lack of collective reasoning due to structural prejudice embedded in societal structures, promotes forms of injustices which will result in othering. Drawing from these arguments, the CA considers public deliberations an important aspect when making decisions which affect people. In a sense there is a close link between deliberations and people's capabilities. Public deliberation is also a virtue in

deliberative democracy, which becomes important in negotiating identities in a society that continues to be complex and constantly changing. McCowan and Unterhalter (2009: 4) note that "Sen sees democracy as involving on-going participation in decision-making and the exercise of public reasoning". In this vein it can be argued that public deliberations are critical for the determination of citizens' identities. They are important particularly where people with different interests, backgrounds and unequal power bases are considered. In such a context, the quality of the deliberation is normative in the sense that power dynamics at play − both visible and subtle − are strategically managed and dismantled by giving the powerless and voiceless an equal opportunity to deliberate and to be heard. The sources of power which should be managed could be embedded in structural arrangements, political or economic positions in the society. Deliberating on identity issues acknowledges "identity as existing in the relationship between people rather than within categories" (Wielenga 2014: 123).

Drawing on this analysis, this paper argues that a democratic polity should be interested not only in whether citizens have the potential and freedom to participate in their environment (social, political and economic), but also in how they actually participate. Sen (1993: 37) extends the argument by stressing that "the functionings make up a person's being: what we do is what we are, so that the evaluation of a person's well-being has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements". Therefore, whilst national constitutions may reflect genuine capabilities (potential freedoms and opportunities) for the formation of certain identities, it is the realised functionings that must be the standard of measure of a successful realisation of a critical democratic citizenship. Sen (1993) argues that the quality of life depends on the "functionings" that are feasible to achieve in the contexts within which we are located. In this regard, the connection between capabilities and functionings is unquestionable but also depends on other factors like agency, which will be discussed next.

I draw on the arguments raised by Bonvin and Thelen (2003), Nixon (2011), Nussbaum (2000) and Sen (1999) to explicate the concept of agency. Borrowing from Sen (1999: 75) I advance the notion that it is the "motivation and engagement of the citizen that renders 'functionings' significant and that transforms the individual or group of people into a capable human being(s), capable, that is, of choosing how to employ these 'functionings' and to what end". Sen agrees that agency occurs whenever a person acts on purpose, goal or reason. This becomes "reasoned agency" or "critical agency" because the process involves a critical inquiry and discussion about reasons and values (Dreze & Sen 2002). Agency is also significant in the way people choose their identities. In our African context, I concur with Wielenga (2014) that essential identity categories inhibit natural development towards different ways of engaging each other. For this reason, Nussbaum (2000) argues that citizens must be left to use their agency to determine what they make of the capabilities that are

granted them. At the same time, what individuals make of their capabilities will depend on a number of factors. Walker (2006), Sen (1999), Bonvin and Thelen (2003) argue that functionings and individual agency depend on a combination of factors which we can call conversion factors in capabilities language. Individual functionings therefore are influenced by a person's relative advantages or disadvantages in society. On the same note, functionings can be enhanced or inhibited by public and policy environments. The implications of the exercise of agency for citizenship or identity formation centre mostly on how the potential to be critical by individual citizens may be upset or promoted by the context in which they operate. This includes personal attributes and other power dynamics which could be socio-economic, cultural or political. To this effect CA is equally important for acknowledging heterogeneity, which is briefly explained below.

Heterogeneity warns us against essential, homogeneous or "othered" identities. McCowan and Unterhalter (2009) as well as Walker and Loots (2014) affirm the significance of heterogeneity as distinctively contributing to citizenship that can be regarded as fostering human development. This is because heterogeneity recognises differences in individuals but does so with respect of the other as an equal human being. In a deeper sense this acknowledgement suits well the interconnectedness of humanity, which is essential in understanding identity in a global setting. The CA thus acknowledges difference in a more humane manner that acknowledges plurality of identities as well as the potential for individuals to choose their lived identities in a complex world. This is different from acknowledging difference in a way that subjugates others, as was the case under apartheid and imperialist ventures across Africa.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledging the complexities and the contested nature of African identities, this paper argued against an essentialised way of understanding identities in a global context. It explores weaknesses associated with essential identities and argues for democratic citizenship as a way of rethinking African identities. It situates this in democratic citizenship identities to avoid narrow notions of Africanness limited by geographical, ethnic or national boundaries. Pan-African notions of identity are useful as political arguments for explaining African identity which takes us forward from colonial categorisations of Africanness, but not far enough, hence the turn to citizenship identities. Drawing from the concepts of heterogeneity, agency and public deliberation, I advance a way of understanding and negotiating identities in an African context and broadly in the global context. Given the porous nature of geographical and national boundaries, it is important to acknowledge that even though Africa as a continent (geographical) may be constant, it is not constituted of monolithic African identities. Its history, as well as other forces which include globalisation, makes it

a heterogeneous entity. This is particularly necessary in post-conflict contexts of either post-colonial Africa in general or the current interconnected global world. Acknowledging diversity only is not enough, because this can be done as a way of propagating identities that are derogatory and do not mirror identities as reflected upon by those who bear the identities. Colonialism and apartheid acknowledged diversity among humanity, but used this to underscore selfish and oppressive regimes which viewed Africans and other races as subordinate to the white European race. The powerful concept of heterogeneity in the CA provides an important way in which to explain and negotiate identities in Africa based on human development which is grounded in social justice. Thus, to acknowledge heterogeneity is to affirm plural identities and to tolerate and accommodate the other on an equal basis.

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