Social Solidarity in a Transnational Setting:
The Cosmopolitan Position

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This study investigates how people living in Europe construct themselves as ethical beings in the context of African poverty. Conceptually, the project draws upon Postcolonial Theory (Said, 1978; Hall, 1996) and contributions from a Social Representations perspective regarding identity and positioning (Elejabarrieta, 1994). One of the major insights of Postcolonial Theory is that Africa represents 'Europe's fundamental other'. To explore what this means from a Social Representations perspective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 'laypersons', volunteers and professionals working on poverty-related issues and/or structural change. Drawing on discourse as the unit of my analysis, I analysed my informants' applied discursive strategies (mechanisms) and six different patterns emerged of webs of people's world-views, their identity construction, including their self-image and their deconstructed self, and a link to action – what they give back into the world. One of these positions, which I will call the cosmopolitan position, will be portrayed in detail in this article. My results support Taylor's (1989) ideas, claiming that although most people's moral ontologies remain largely implicit unless there is some challenge which forces them to the fore, people construct their identities around an abstract notion of the good. And included in this are not only questions of our own dignity, the respect for other people's lives, and well-being, in short: solidarity, but equally personal answers to questions, for example, what makes our lives worth living, touching implicitly upon all grand questions of humankind.

In today's world humankind encounters more and more problems which require concerted action on a global scale, such as environmental and health issues. One might expect even people living in high-income countries to be directly affected by such issues and they should therefore have an interest in resolving them. However, when it comes to some other global phenomena, such as poverty, for example, it may not be apparent that people living in high-income countries have an interest in tackling the issue. Their interest in taking action may only be perceived from a particular world-view (Weltanschauung) (Aerts, Apostel, de Moor, Hellemans, Maex, van Belle & van der Veken, 1994), which I will be calling the Cosmopolitan position.

There is a whole range of variations between mild Cosmopolitanism, the docile view that all human beings are of equal worth, and robust Cosmopolitanism, the view that all human agents ought to treat each other equally and, in particular, have no reason to help any one needy person more than any other. This is discounted by many as not viable because it is grounded on such abstract principles that it neglects the human condition. I derive the criteria for the Cosmopolitan position from Pogge's (2002a) concept of so-called intermediate Cosmopolitanism. People distinguish in everyday life between duties to assist, help, give aid and so on – which philosophers call *positive duties* – and the ethically weightier duty to ensure that innocent people are not unduly harmed for insignificant reasons through one's own conduct – which philosophers call *negative duty*. Pogge's concept is based exclusively on negative duties. According to him, citizens in high-income countries violate this negative duty by participating in and imposing an unjust global institutional order on people living in low-income countries and by depriving them of their human rights. At the Vienna Human Rights Conference in June 1993, it was stressed by representatives from 171 nations that all the classical liberal rights and the social human rights are universal and interrelated. The articles most relevant in this paper are Articles 25 and 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care." "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised."

While it is important to remember that the foundation for the global institutional order was laid in a long process of, for example, slavery and exploitation – since this ascription of causes determines not only our choice of methods by which we hope to combat poverty, but

also our motivation – we are immediately responsible only for the present global institutional order. We are morally responsible for it if the following four conditions are fulfilled:

1) The affluent persons must *cooperate* in imposing an institutional order on those whose human rights are unfulfilled. 2) This institutional order must be designed so that it *foreseeably* gives rise to substantial human rights deficits. 3) These human rights deficits must be *reasonably avoidable* in the sense that an alternative design of the relevant institutional order would not produce comparable human rights deficits or other ills of comparable magnitude. 4) The availability of such an alternative design also must be *foreseeable.* (Pogge, 2002, p. 60)

In the following, I will assume that these four conditions are fulfilled. I will not demonstrate this in detail but only make a few remarks. Due to the prevailing asymmetric power relations, we, the citizens of the high-income countries, which means Europe, USA, Canada, Japan and Australia, who comprise less than 14% of the world's population but who account for more than 80% of global income, are able to exact a high price for access to our markets, or even protect them completely. In areas where poor countries could compete relatively well, such as agriculture or textiles, we are particularly protectionist; we impose so-called anti-dumping duties on imports we consider 'unfairly cheap'; our average tariffs on manufacturing imports from poor countries are four times higher than those on imports from other rich countries (Pogge, 2002, p. 18). The export subsidies due to these markets in poor parts of the world are flooded with products from the industrialized countries (Ziegler, 2005) are but one example of the interest-driven policies enacted by politicians elected on a national level. In the international context, they pursue the interests of their respective countries and citizens and thus actively shape the global institutional order. If, however, there is a global institutional order in which our interests are being actively pursued, the question arises whether we are not already global citizens and as such have the same unconditional duties which we already fulfil at the nation-state level. Accordingly, Pogge's approach to intermediate Cosmopolitanism asserts the fundamental negative duty of justice not to collaborate in imposing an unjust institutional order. Although we, as citizens of a state, might owe more to our compatriots, this does not decrease what we owe to any other person.

Following this line of argument, my criteria for a person taking the Cosmopolitan position is 1) the acknowledgement of violation of negative duties in a transnational setting

under conditions of a global institutional order which is judged to be unjust, 2) the experience of corresponding moral emotions with regard to the harm and deaths resulting from this global institutional order, e.g. shame, guilt, anger, outrage, and 3) the performance of action based on the identified causes of the problem (Park, 2007).

IDENTITY

Many social representations theorists have studied the relationship between social representations and identity processes, giving theoretical breadth to the dialectic between the intertwined processes of knowledge and identity construction (Jovchelovitch, 2001). The notion of identity is central to the theoretization of social representations because, without an understanding of identity, it could not be explained why and how different people draw on different but specific and particular representations for different ends, if they wish to legitimize, negate or even contest and change certain representations; and that they do so in order to express how they understand their position in the world and how they position themselves in respect of others. Both identity and social representations are ways of relating to the outside world and to the world of others (Howarth, 2005, 2006).

In making sense of the world people express their identities, and in this process construct a sense of who they are with dialogical others. For these dialogical relations, which may be internal, meaning that the person enters into a dialogue with themselves, but also external, where the person engages with social others, the physical presence of the other is not always required, as there may also be manifold symbolic others. The different social positions people take in relation to others with whom one has engaged have an impact on the multiple ways in which one thinks about oneself, others, and the world (Renedo & Jovchelovitch, 2007). Encountering the knowledge of others, moving towards the other, is often not a smooth process. It may even entail destructive tendencies (Kessi, this issue), including processes of dehumanization of others. But it is this relationship that the self develops with others which forms the basis of selfhood, knowledge and social life. "Without others there is no human life properly so called and it is in our relationship to significant others that we find both the ontological and social resources to become what we are" (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p. 213). Charles Taylor (1989) stresses, that although most people's moral ontologies remain largely implicit unless there is some challenge which forces them to the fore, people construct their identities around an abstract notion of the good. Included in this notion are not only questions

of one's own dignity, and respect for other people's lives and well-being, but equally, personal answers to questions, e.g., what makes our lives worth living?, which touch implicitly upon all grand questions of humankind.

Drawing on certain social representations but not others means proposing a particular interpretation of reality as much as it means proposing a certain identity. Thus identification and representation can be seen as different sides of the same coin. They are the delicately intertwined processes of one's collaborative struggle to understand, and to construct the world and one's position within it. This is because the organization of an individual's representational field, always with the aim of making sense of reality, and appropriating and interpreting it, is also always a statement of who one is, how one understands oneself and others, how one positions oneself, and which cognitive and affective resources are available to this individual at a particular point in time (Jovchelovitch, 1996, p. 124). Affects do not exist as such but are linked to other representational elements through symbols, or semiotic tools, and if symbolization is part of affect regulation, one may begin to see how an attachment pattern could evolve over time (Zittoun, 2003, p. 316). To put it briefly:

> There is no possibility of identity without the work of representation, just as there
> is no work of representation without an identificatory boundary between the me
> and the not-me. It is in the overlapping space of the me and the not-me that both
> representations and identities emerge. (Jovchelovitch, 1996, p. 124)

Social representations function as a network for mediating social meanings and they lend texture and material to the construction of identities. The construction of an identity is always a process permeated by social representations.

SOCIAL POSITIONING

Social identity can be interpreted as relational, contextual, and open to reformulations and re-constructions through social interaction "or through the successive encounters which make up the history of a particular interpersonal relation" (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990, p. 8). Hence, Elejabarrieta (1994) introduces a link between the concept of social representations and processes of social identity by the notion of social positioning: "If one considers social positioning as negotiated expressions of social identities that intervene in the communication

between individuals and groups, this may open up a new way of analyzing social representations" (p. 251). Every social encounter means that individuals and groups have to negotiate their social identity, to engage in states of cognitive polyphasia and to display an ability to cope with contradictory and competing representations; in this way people actively occupy different social positions in relation to each other. And vice versa: Via this social positioning, an individual displays processes of identity construction.

Clemence (2001) stresses in his conceptualization of social positioning the notion of the anchoring of shared knowledge in different groups. These groups are not only different because they do not have access to the same information, but also because their members share specific beliefs and experiences. Normative principles are developed during a socialization process and they position themselves using a map of common points of reference. Thus, social positioning is not only the expression of an opinion; it is also a way of processing information in order to adapt what we think to what society thinks. Consequently, it provides the means for articulating the variations between intergroup beliefs and knowledge, and provides for the temporary crystallization of a network of meanings in a given public sphere. Once a person has adopted a particular position as her own, she will inevitably see the world from the vantage point of this specific position. This includes particular images, metaphors, story lines, concepts into which these particular discursive practices are embedded, in which they are positioned – as part of an ideological web.

This notion of positioning has a long intellectual history, and theorists such as Foucault (1982), who theorized the subject and Althusser (1970), who framed it in terms of 'interpellations', made similar arguments. Foucault's work has been widely acknowledged as having made a major contribution to the decentring of the subject in recent social theories, viewing the subject as constituted, fragmented, reproduced, and transformed in and through social practice. Nevertheless, his idea of the subject as an effect of discursive formations is also considered to have a structuralist flavour. Davies and Harré (1990), strongly influenced by this Foucaultian tradition, managed with their concept of positioning to retain a sense of human agency, which is the crucial difference. For them, individuals actively produce social realities. They stress that the contradictions between individuals' multiple positions promote choice. Here, one can find parallels with Hollway (1984), who also draws extensively on Foucault, but who also criticizes his concepts as offering too little room for agency and choice, implying a nearly mechanical reproduction of discourses "as though discourse is the motor of social life with human agents following haplessly behind." (p. 229)

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND A CONSTRUCTION OF AN ETHICAL SELF

To elaborate on how the issues raised above come together, how an expression of social solidarity in a transnational setting relates to questions of positioning, processes of identity construction and encounters with 'others', I posed the question: How do we, people living in Europe, construct ourselves as ethical beings in the context of African poverty?

According to Postcolonial Theory, Africa represents Europe's fundamental 'other' (Said, 1978; Park, in press), onto which is projected what Europe wishes to dispose of and not see in itself; clearly a representation which has to be challenged and negated for a political actor in a transnational setting to display social solidarity. What I will be showing in the following sections is the complex interplay of issues expressed in one's positioning as part of one's representations of the (political) world one lives in and constructions of one's personal life: Representations of reasons for contemporary poverty, constructions of one's own responsibilities in a broader political setting and how this is related to constructions of the 'other' affected by this poverty. I will be showing how these representations (of the world) mutually reinforce each other and provide the opportunity to express forms of social solidarity adopting the position of a political actor in a transnational setting. This is a positioning which *compels* action; from which encounters with a social 'other' have no destructive elements, but in which the 'African Other' is constructed in a respectful way, including the acknowledgement of similarities with oneself. In this article, I will be using the term *Cosmopolitan position* interchangeably with an identity expressing social solidarity in a transnational setting.

To answer the question 'How do we, people living in Europe, construct ourselves as ethical beings in the context of global poverty?', I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Europeans (12 males, 8 females) in Berlin, London and Cape Town, of which, 50% worked as professionals or volunteers for NGOs working towards global justice or charities, and 50% were not institutionally engaged. I met the interviewees between 1 and 12 times and every interview lasted from 1 to 2.30 hours. Selection criteria for appropriate interviewees were: Being of white ethnicity, between 25 and 40 years' old, raised in 'old rich' European countries, holding a university degree and not having financial commitments (e.g. no elderly parents to care for, no children). I used NVivo as a technical tool, and conducted a discourse analysis.

I started from the assumption that unequal social systems are inherently conservative and have built-in economic and psychological mechanisms to perpetuate themselves (Leonard, 1984). Thus, people are always situated in an ideological web, trapped in contradictions and sometimes even by mutually opposing forces, confronted with dilemmas, and position themselves in relation to them (Billig, 2001) – which is reflected by the discourses one draws upon. And every discourse refers to another discourse and "makes available a space for particular types of self to step in" (Parker, 2005, p. 5). Guided by these questions, I devised a web of 'marker points' of six different social positions, in which the constructions of the 'African Other'' have a crucial notion: The 'African Other' is not randomly constructed as an 'other' but as an 'other' in a specific way according to one's position and depending on related needs in one's identity-building processes. In this article, I will only focus on the positioning displaying social solidarity in a transnational setting.

THE COSMOPOLITAN POSITION

Two men represent this position. Marcus is a British 33-year-old history and geography teacher. At the time of the interview, which was conducted in Cape Town, he had just finished a 9-month volunteer teaching job in a newly-founded school in Tanzania run by the Massai community. Francesco is a 28-year-old full-time staff member at an international human rights NGO based in London. At the time of the interview, he had just signed his first contract with this organization, after having worked 6 months for them as a volunteer. Born and raised in Italy, he chose his majors with the aim of working for this kind of institution.

When they were asked about their assessment of the world's most pressing contemporary problems, they listed severe poverty on a global scale, "the global HIV/AIDS crisis", "the Middle East conflict", "oppression of minorities in Latin America", and the disadvantaged situation of people without papers and refugees living in Europe. In assessing the reasons for global poverty, they revealed a high degree of contextual knowledge about the global institutional order: The interplay of the "politics of the European Union", "the World Trade Organisation", and "the International Monetary Fund." But most of the reasons for global poverty they ascribed to "colonization"; they perceived a clear link between their own countries' colonial histories and contemporary poverty. In a nutshell, the first criterion for a Cosmopolitan positioning is fulfilled: they acknowledged the violation of negative duties in a

transnational setting under conditions of a global institutional order which they judge to be unjust.

> Mostly colonisation, *officially* we don't have *colonies* any more […] but Europe and the U.S. are the main economic entities; *we screw up* the economies of these countries. (Francesco)[1]

Their unhegemonic view is expressed by a coherent self-including 'we' when it comes to the construction of causal agents for contemporary poverty. "We", which includes citizens and politicians in rich countries, impose in a concerted action a global institutional order which foreseeably and avoidably produces severe poverty; an asymmetrical global institutional order from which "we" benefit and on which our affluence is based.

> *We* are doing the same thing in a different way that we were doing *when we were colonialists*. (Marcus)

They argued that severe poverty was an issue that could easily be solved if the "political will" existed. In their opinion, the required infrastructure and resources exist to target the issue. And spontaneously they could think of many ways ordinary citizens, including themselves, could contribute to alleviating global poverty, e.g. by doing voluntary work, buying fair trade products, and campaigning.

> We [as citizens] do have *responsibility;* especially we have *a moral duty* to make the governments act. (Francesco)

Regarding the second criterion, the experience of corresponding moral emotions according to the constructions of reasons for poverty, interviewees use emotional language to express their anger and outrage, guilt and shame. One of the reasons for their outrage is that severe poverty, which is considered to be a direct consequence of an asymmetrical global institutional order, violates principles of justice. According to Aristotle, the prerequisite for the application of principles of justice is the acknowledgement of equality. And also this factor is given: the 'poor other' is not constructed as an 'other' but very close to one's self.

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[1] Concerning the transcription conventions used in this paper: Italics denote emphasis, while three dots in brackets, [...], denote ellipsis.

For example, Marcus used the same adjectives to describe people in Africa which he also used to describe his personal background: Being born in *England*, he identified himself as *British* with *Scottish* ancestors on his father's side.

> They are quite reserved, the Massai, like the *British*, and they sort of reminded me of the *Scottish*. They wear sort of tartan and stuff, you learn they have fashion *the same as we do* but it is different. […] They have *similar* values, money is still important to them, status is important, so there are certain *unifying sort of attitudes* they have *just like the English*. (Marcus)

And to see a 'morally equal other' die due to poverty related reasons, which are judged to be in principle foreseeable and avoidable arouses strong emotions. In some cases Francesco had trouble finding words to describe his emotions:

> **Interviewer**: Why should we do more?

> **Francesco**: Because it is unfair; these people are *equal* beings like we are and they have so many disadvantages, I mean ethically, morally, it is so unjust; *I can't describe how I feel, it is so unfair* [...] they are not living like human beings as human beings should live, [...] that is the reason why *I feel very guilty, guilty and angry, I am so pissed off*.

The idea suggests itself that the guilt Francesco reports feeling is what Montada and colleagues (1986) refer to as *existential guilt*. Existential guilt is a likely emotion if 1) people believe that their privileged position in the world results from controllable distributions that are unjustifiable, 2) they assume a causal relationship between their own privileges and the unfavourable situation of others, 3) they consider the discrepancies between their own and others' situation the result of an injustice, and 4) they feel solidarity with, and responsibility for, the disadvantaged (Montada, Schmitt, & Dalbert, 1986, p. 44), whom they would have to consider to be equal to themselves.

Marcus explicitly reflects how this emotion of existential guilt, aroused by the confrontation with severely impoverished people in India, motivated him to work for 9 months unpaid in the profession he was trained for in a 'grassroots' organisation in Africa –

which represents the third criterion for a Cosmopolitan position: action based on the identified causes of the problem.

> **Interviewer**: How did it make you feel to be confronted with people living in severely impoverished conditions?

> **Marcus**: That is *really shitty*, actually that is part of my motivation to do the voluntary work: When I was in India, you see people on the street, big cities, *where it is just like hell to live in* and you can't really do anything about it, really, I mean you can give money to people but that doesn't really help them in the long run so I thought I wanted to do something and [the decision to do voluntary work] was an *empowerment thing for me as well.* [...] *I hate that guilt thing*, I found, in a way, when you see so much poverty, that your compassion has to go on hold because you can't do anything about it; it's frustrating, fucking hell, I felt so powerless, the only way to deal with it is by closing off your feelings, taking away your compassion and then getting it back later and trying to do something about it, that helped me.

But what is 'it' precisely that he perceives and which makes him feel so strongly that he feels the urge to withdraw his compassion? Why do these emotions linger so strongly, and why does the mechanism of 'out of sight, out of mind' not function in his case? What is this "hell" he has seen? The crucial point about severe poverty and misery is that it goes beyond the state of privation, because it inescapably reduces humans to their most basic physical aspects. Certain physical needs cannot be ignored and thus subjugate humans, independent of status, class, race or gender, to a tyranny: a tyranny of needs (Arendt, 1963). And I would like to claim that it was this 'tyranny' Marcus was referring to when he described being in a poor place in India as "just like hell to live in". The assumption suggests itself that the experienced emotions are disgrace/dishonour and shame. According to Kant, an emotion like shame originates in a situation of defamation and expresses outrage about a humiliating situation, a situation which contradicts an original right every human has by virtue of humanity. Jean Ziegler (2005) calls this: "I feel shame about the ignominy which is done to others and disgrace for my own blotted honour as a human being" (p. 12).

What interviewees express via their political action is not only their interpretation of world events, their social representations of severe poverty, but they also express clearly who

they are and their ideas regarding the 'abstract notion of the good' around which they construct their identities. They see themselves directly positioned in relation to a severely impoverished 'other' and that the position the weakest member in a transnational setting is ascribed says something about the world they live in, about their position; hence, says also something about them. Therefore, they constantly seek more opportunities to inform themselves, to contribute to change and at the same time, feel that they do not do enough "not to help, but to stop this [injustice] from happening!" (Francesco) For example, two years after the interview and his time as a volunteer in Tanzania, Marcus went on a 6-month bicycling tour from Europe to China, participating in an awareness-raising campaign promoting human rights issues. Francesco, as well as his full-time position in a human rights organisation, goes to protests and organises petitions. Both interviewees have standing orders, buy fair trade products and seek discussions with friends and strangers to raise awareness and politicise people. The investment of their time and energy into these voluntary activities rather than into paid labour is a direct means of expressing their notion of the good, their personal values, their identity.

SEVERE POVERTY AS A VIOLATION OF PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE

If just behaviour is a means of gaining approval and respect from ourselves and others (Deutsch & Steil, 1988), what does it mean for the individual psyche to construct severe poverty not as a humanitarian catastrophe but as an unjust situation 'made by us', people living in rich countries? What are the consequences of these kinds of social representations with regard to one's identity construction? How does it make one feel about one's own political community, Europe? Are we all simply victims of a huge deception? Does this deception include all the stories we were told as children, stories which developed our notions of good or bad and right or wrong (Park, 2008, 2009; Kilomba, 2007)?

Principles of justice have important social and psychological functions. Justice has been called "the first virtue of social institutions" (Rawls, 1971), "the first requisite of civilization" (Freud, 1933) and "the uniting function in the individual man and in the social group" (Tillich, 1954), and requires, according to Aristotle, the acknowledgment of equality. In Western societies, conceptions of justice provide a sense of meaning and control by stipulating the guidelines by which the individual orders her or his world, conducts life and predicts as well as evaluates outcomes. Not only as individuals but also as members of a

social group the sense of what is just or not is used to assess what oneself and others deserve materially and psychologically. Just behaviour is interpreted as a means of gaining approval and respect from ourselves and others. If someone becomes the victim of an injustice, not only the person her- or himself is affected, but also the group or community whose norms of justice are being violated. Members of a group who accept common norms also share common obligations to protect those norms and to respond to their violation, meaning that the occurrence of an injustice which is not acknowledged and responded to is apt to generate feelings of alienation (Hafer & Olson, 1998).

The violation of principles of justice, with severe poverty in Africa being the example for global injustices, presents a threat to the interviewees' identity. The phenomenon brings into question the evaluative framework that provides a foundation for their individual action (Deutsch & Steil, 1988) in the context of the politics of the region they live in: Europe. According to Critical Whiteness Studies, what is threatening is not so much the idea that their own countries have more than they should, but that poor countries have less than they should (Chow, Lowery & Knowles, 2008). The characteristic marker of the Cosmopolitan construction is that the 'poor equal' has less to such a degree that 'we actively make them die' – an idea which they cannot bear and which arouses a cascade of emotions in them. Emotions are not suppressed but felt with awareness and consciously reflected upon. Interviewees are impatient regarding processes of political change, yet they realise that political change takes time; they get angry even up to the point of getting into violent fights, feeling appalled by political views which they consider to be part of the problem, yet they assume that their fellows would act and think differently if they were better informed; they blame themselves and all fellows as being perpetrators in a global sphere, yet they know that people may not have bad intentions and that there are not always ways to avoid doing harm; they feel guilty for not doing enough 'to stop this from happening', while at the same time knowing that they cannot do more in the positions they are in.

Interviewees take their emotions seriously and interpret them as saying something about the world they live in, how they are positioned in this world, and as saying something about themselves as people. The interplay between 'how they feel about their personal position in the world' and the knowledge they have of contemporary politics is crucial. Due to their work experience in poor countries, they can personally relate to abstract media information, so they deliberately devote time to seeking out more information, which makes the problem appear even more pressing. The acknowledgement of equality is a prerequisite for the application of

principles of justice, and for the Cosmopolitan position the notion of justice represents one of the cornerstones of their identity. The Cosmopolitans genuinely *feel* what they *think* and they wish to *act* according to their emotions; this gives the impulse towards political action. Situational hints of 'something could be done' drive them towards 'I just do it', without rationalizing that 'others should be doing it', too. This urge to give something back to the world fulfils two different but in this context interrelated psychological functions. The first one is the reaffirmation of principles of justice. One

> goal of action is to reaffirm the principles. One cannot expect that his or her individual activity can stop injustice or prevent killing, but one can ensure that the principles are kept alive as long as there are people who reaffirm them by their deeds. (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 219)

The second function is to contribute to reparation and to stop the perpetuation of (neo)colonial activity. According to postcolonial theory, becoming conscious of one's post-coloniser privileges in a post/neo-colonial world happens in several steps: Denial, guilt, shame, recognition and, finally, reparation (Gilroy, 2000). And it is to this idea of reparation that they dedicate their lives and which is reflected in every aspect of their everyday. The construction of themselves as being privileged based on others' poverty is one factor governing their actions; but it is this construction, coupled with an un-hegemonic construction of Africa, Europe and the 'African Other', that leads to them not wishing their actions to be understood as help, but as a contribution to ending injustice, from which they would also benefit themselves (Park, 2007a). Expressing the self-image that financial incentives are not the driving force in their lives, they live accordingly. For example, one consequence of their political activism is a socio-economic position below the average of their peers with a similar educational background: Unable to afford their own flats or even rooms, sometimes even too short of money to propose going for a drink on a romantic date. But they wish their lifestyle to be considered not a (socio-economic) sacrifice but a privileged lifestyle choice. 'Fighting for justice' is their consciously chosen way of giving meaning to their own existence.

POSITIONING: AN AMALGAM BETWEEN CHOICE AND DETERMINATION

What I have shown with regard to processes of ethical self-construction is that for people taking a Cosmopolitan position, according to criteria derived from Pogge's philosophical concept of intermediate Cosmopolitanism, it is impossible to construct themselves as ethical under the conditions of the contemporary global constitutional order. Rather than constructing themselves as ethical, their existence is dominated by existential guilt and emotions of shame and disgrace, anger and outrage. But by the same time, the interviewees consider it to be a joyful, privileged and empowered way of living to contribute to political change.

Characteristic of this positioning is how cohesively social representations of the world engage and reinforce each other (rather than engaging in cognitive polyphasia), displaying several mutually reinforcing circles. Thinking transnationally, interviewees displaying social solidarity have an empowered notion of the state and see opportunities for exerting influence; likewise, they operate under a conception of the world in which the political status quo is not automatically extended into the future; instead, structural outcomes are interpreted as 'made by humans', so that the status quo could be changed by contemporaries if the political will existed. In relation to this, reasons for poverty are constructed such that they already entail potential solutions, and ways of contributing to potential solutions are constructed according to one's role and power position in the political sphere: As voters, consumers, politicians, or members of civil society. And according to these roles, clear criteria are defined as to what responsibilities to act require and when they would be fulfilled (Pogge, 2002).

It appears that the development of an identity which performs social solidarity in a transnational context grows in various steps through an interplay of coincidences and actions, which can be visualized as a spiral movement. The context determines what people can experience, but people also decide to some degree which contexts they enter, so that certain experiences force themselves onto people and, at the same time, reinforce themselves in people; but it is also to some degree a choice to what extent one wishes to feel the impact of certain experiences (Cohen, 2001; Vollhardt, 2009).

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