South-South Dialogue: In Search of Humanity

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This paper is a meditation on the idea of South-South dialogue, beginning with the *South-South Dialogues: Situated Perspectives in Decolonial Epistemologies* symposium held at the University of Queensland in 2015. I interrogate the concept of South-South dialogue, apposing it to the Cartesian 'I think', and then question the plausibility of the concept. On the basis of a Gadamerian conception of understanding, I suggest that what passes for South-South dialogue is in fact more likely to be North-South or even North-North dialogue. This is buttressed by an examination of Valentin Mudimbe's *Parables and Fables.* I go on to suggest, however, that by staying within the realm of the concept, in what could be called a Cartesian paradigm, Mudimbe misses the important role that South-South dialogue can play. Drawing on the work of Sara Motta, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and the concept of *hunhu*, I claim that the promise of South-South dialogue is the creation of spaces in which humanity is fostered.

■ **Keywords:** Coloniality, abstraction, understanding, fiction, space, *hunhu*

So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim to the top. Nevertheless, I will make an effort and once more attempt the same path that I started on yesterday (Descartes, 1984, p. 16):

For Descartes, as for Leibniz and John Locke, the concept of person is defined through the reflective concept of self-consciousness, without the Other coming into consideration at all (Gadamer, 2000, p. 286).

Opening a series of reflections on the concept of South-South dialogue with an epigraph taken from the beginning of René Descartes' second meditation, followed by an excerpt from German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's retelling of the history of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in Western thought, is clearly a provocation. But a provocation to what end?

In a helpful response to a paper that I presented at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy's 2015 annual conference, Peter Banki referred to the title (A Madman, a Black Man and a Jewish Woman Go to a Conference . . . but 'the King Stay the King') as a 'clear provocation'. That paper was something of a mirror image of this one. Delivered before a predominantly white, Australian audience, my aim there was to challenge the assumption that Continental European Philosophy in Australia can neither engage meaningfully with, nor admit into its corpus, what comes from 'the South'. The experience of being 'an allergen', a foreign Southern body in that context, was markedly different to that of *kuva munhu,* being a person (a concept to which I return in the conclusion), that I experienced the previous month at the *South-South Dialogues: Situated Perspectives in Decolonial Epistemologies* symposium, at which an earlier version of this article was presented before various 'others'. The provocation here lies around the possibility of *being* differently; it is a provocation around moving and being moved.

Frankfurt (2008) suggests that while Descartes' *Meditations* are 'autobiography, the story he tells is of his efforts to escape the limits of the merely personal and to find his generic identity as a rational creature' (p. 4). My aim in what follows is to demonstrate the importance, for those of us engaging in and grappling with South-South dialogue, to remain grounded; anchored in our subjectivity or better yet, personhood. It is a call to the cognisance of

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ground or situation. A lack of awareness of one's situation risks following Descartes, albeit via a different path. Derrida (1978) claims that Emmanuel Levinas 'is very close to Hegel, much closer than he admits, and at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion'. This, Derrida suggests, is the case 'with all anti-Hegelian thinkers', a state of affairs that he suggests 'calls for much thought' (p. 99). The same may be true of those opposed to Descartes.

Descartes. Hegel. Derrida. Levinas. Gadamer. Why, when meditating upon South-South dialogue, begin with Western philosophy? What is the meaning of this provocation? It is a provocation to think the possibility of the South, and the meaning of South-South dialogue; a provocation to think what it means for a person to incarnate, to stand in place of, or to be enfolded in the 'South' of South-South dialogue. To think this in the first person, as a person in relation to other people. This here begins for me with the people before whom I shared an earlier incarnation of this paper in a small room in one of the older buildings of the University of Queensland towards the end of 2015. I stood before that gathering a black man; an African-Australian. Colonised in front of the preceding hyphen, coloniser behind it. Subjected to racial discrimination at times, and beneficiary of the governing colonial, patriarchal order at others. As whom did I speak before those people, among whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, people from South America, and other 'others'? Is my 'South' status valid only in sub-Saharan Africa, or does it travel with me even in places where I am the beneficiary of colonial dispossession and conquest?

In his *Meditations*, Descartes (1984) abstracts away his situation, his place in the world, and even his body. This leaves him with clean, simple abstractions — 'clear and distinct ideas' such as the *res cogitans*, the person as a thinking thing. Is the concept of the South-South dialogue, however one understands it, not a similar abstraction? Does it admit of a person in all of her complexity any more than Descartes' *cogito*, his 'I think'? It bears considering Dussel's (1996) observation that Descartes' 1636 *ego cogito* 'was not the original philosophical expression of modernity'; it was preceded, by the *ego conquiro,* the 'I conquer' (p. 217). It also bears considering Levinas' (1969) claim that representation, the reduction of exteriority to conceptualisation, is the beginning of violence. This, notwithstanding Maldonado Torres' (2012) observation of Levinas' failure to engage with Dussel seriously and the consequent limitations of the former's philosophy as it relates to the colonial subject (p. 75). What are we to make of the subject who stands in the place of the 'South' of 'South-South dialogue'? Are they not an abstraction? Is not the very concept of South-South dialogue, be it used in reference to two individuals, two groups, two schools of thought, two approaches to knowledge, two geographic locations or two traditions, a violent reduction?

South-South, North-South or North-North?

Let us set aside the person briefly, and deal in abstraction. Why valorise the idea of South-South dialogue? Why turn to that? I suspect that the answer is that there are problems with the current configuration of what we can provisionally call North–South dialogue, as it typically stands. It occurs on an uneven playing field. One plays the role of big brother, or master. The other is subservient. One speaks. The other, Spivak (1988) has told us, cannot. And yet we sense an imperative that the other who cannot speak, speak. Mungwini (2015) casts what is at stake powerfully, and his position warrants careful consideration:

> African philosophy is a philosophy born of rage and humiliation; it was born to overcome, and to redeem Africa. Its aim, among others, is to repair wounds and find lost dignity … As a philosophy with a liberative agenda, engaging in intercultural dialogue creates a platform upon which African philosophy can engage with its counterparts to deal with the current condition in Africa, much of which relates to unresolved problems of the past. Through genuine dialogue, extant supremacist tendencies and intellectual attempts at fortifying particular schools of thought find no further nurturance. The ability by African scholars and other indigenous peoples who have suffered unjust conquest and subsequent domination to resist the seductive lure of universalism is crucial to the success of inter-philosophical dialogue (p. 398).

What is at stake therefore, if Mungwini is correct, is emancipation and redemption. Descartes (1984) has the privilege of beginning his *Meditations* in a study, in a dressing gown, sitting by a fire, preoccupied by questions of whether one can tell the difference between sleep, madness and wakefulness; what one can grasp by means of the 'natural light' that is reason; the status of the body; and the immortality of the soul. Mungwini (2015), writing primarily for an African audience, begins with rage and in a state of humiliation. His preoccupation is with arresting harm and promoting dialogue that is reparative. Similar concerns are expressed by Nakata (2007) in the introduction to his *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*:

> My experiences as an Islander and the analyses and understandings I derived from these, my family's, and the collective Torres Strait Islander experience have enabled me to hold one tenet central to the investigations that led to this book. This is the idea that Islander experience and the analysis derived from that experience - however ignorant of historical fact; or however ignorant of the context of events; or however much it derived from just mere popular memory - are grounded in something that is significant to the ways that we have historically viewed our predicament and have enacted our lives. This experience continues to shape our ongoing responses and it cannot simply be re-explained or re-interpreted by informed, educated or expert people outside of our communities. To do so is a negation or denial

of our experience and our understanding of our own position as we confront alien - and alienating - practices and knowledge (p. 8).

Nakata here illustrates the dangers in 'the seductive lure of universalism' to which Mungwini refers. Failure to take the particularity of those who do not belong to the hegemonic, colonial culture seriously is tantamount to the negation, denial and alienation of the colonised. South-South dialogue, or dialogue with the South, offers the promise of repair and healing. Reflecting on *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees, CTUs) in Venezuela, Motta (2011) notes the promise of what we can call the South-South, or more accurately the intra-South dialogues that constitute these committees. I realise that 'South-South' typically refers to some interaction between two geographically and probably culturally distinct populations, for example the exchanges described by Heyman and Stronza (2011) between Caribbean and Central American fishers on one hand, and Indigenous ecotourism operators in the Amazon on the other; or the kind of interaction between nation-states described by Sridharan (1998). However, it seems to me that there is no sensible way of limiting the distance between the populations in question, or the number of participants necessary for something to qualify for South-South status (see for instance 'South-South Dialogue' (1979). I therefore take a dialogue between members of the same or of proximal communities in the South, such as 'intra-South' dialogues within CTUs, as a subset of South-South dialogue.

Motta (2011) notes 'the attempt by the CTUs to develop collective knowledge-forming processes through which to forge the movement's strategy, identity and analysis'. This stands in contrast to traditional Venezuelan politics, and Motta will argue, traditional academic practice in the process of researching and producing knowledge out of this type of social movement. The CTUs, she claims,

> instead seek to develop their utopias as part of the process of creating alternative logics of being and doing. The CTUs project is relational and open, always moving, adapting and evolving. It is a prefigurative post-representational politics, a politics that is intellectual, affective, subjective and collective (p. 179).

Mungwini, Nakata and Motta all argue persuasively for the importance of dialogue, for the importance of taking seriously *who* is taking part in that dialogue, and for the importance of *knowledge* that is produced dialogically. It is worth tarrying on this point and quoting Motta at some length before moving on:

> The experience of the CTUs (one among many) points to the necessity of developing an epistemological orientation in which the conceptual dualism between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, and the division of labour that accompanies this, is transcended. Their experiences are illustrative of the formation in struggle of a synthesis of theory

and practice. Experiences such as these have to be reflexively factored into our epistemologies. They imply a shift away from the hierarchical form of research in which the researcher is the subject creating theory of/for our object of study (the movement) towards a horizontal form of research in which the researcher is a node within a network of emancipatory praxis . . . This involves a change in how we conceptualize knowledge, away from its reification and fixation and *towards a fluid and open understanding* (p. 192, emphasis mine).

Here, we see the reparative aspect of South-South dialogue in operation. Knowledge is reconceptualised in a way that leads to a more democratic, and one assumes a more just state of affairs. But what of understanding? I take Motta in the last sentence of the quotation above to have meant to say 'a more fluid and open understanding' *of knowledge.* She does not go on to address understanding itself, which is unfortunate because while I agree with her and see great promise in the model that she puts forward, doubt arises when I think about understanding. That is, on what grounds do the interactions that Motta describes take place? How do participants understand each other? In which, or better still, according to whose conceptual system is meaning shared and mutual intelligibility achieved? The challenge here has to do with movement, and movement not only along an epistemological plane, but the sort of ontological movement which renders previously held epistemological lines not applicable, void, nonsensical, or even incommensurable with newly established ones. That is, if I am situated in a particular tradition, what movement is demanded of whom for the achievement of understanding that allows for shared meaning with someone situated in a different tradition?

'The great challenge of the coming century, both for politics and for social science, is that of understanding the other', claims Taylor (2002, p. 126). According to Gadamer (2004), it is our 'presuppositions' or 'prejudices' which determine our understanding. That is, we are all 'situated'. As Warnke (2002) puts it, 'not only are we always deciphering the story or stories in that we are a part so we know how to go on, but also we are always already in the process of going on' (p. 80). We *are*, in a particular context, a place and a time, and it is from that vantage that we make sense of the other. As such, Gadamer (2004) suggests that 'we imagine [our understanding] is so innocent because the results seem so self-evident, the other presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other' (p. 300). That is to say that there is a 'horizon' along which our understanding takes place by virtue of our situation. While Gadamer notes that this horizon is not static, but fluid, or changing, the very 'concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have' (p. 304). Understanding then occurs by virtue of 'a fusion of these horizons' (p. 305).

All of this is promising, especially in light of the dialogic practice that Motta presents. Caution, however, is called for when one reads the following against Mungwini's comments above:

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather it always involves *rising to a higher universality* that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other (Gadamer, 2004, p. 304, emphasis mine).

Mungwini warned against 'the seductive lure of universalism', which many who bear the marks of colonialism know only too well. Chalmers (2014), for instance, arguing for the decolonisation of Australia's legal system, warns that hidden beneath the seemingly benevolent gesture that is the current proposed constitutional recognition of Australia's First Nations Peoples, which can be cast as a call to Australians to 'rise to a higher universality', 'is a reaffirmation of the colonial subordination and erasure of the several hundred original nations' peoples and ways of being' (p. 27). Is not therefore this idea of the fusion of horizons as the attainment of 'a higher universality' a manifestation of understanding's semblance of innocence, about which Gadamer warned? Taylor (2002) seems to think that it is. Thinking through the mechanics of the fusion of horizons, he notes that the powerful, when in dialogue with those less powerful, tend not to need to do very much of the work required to come to an understanding:

The kind of understanding that ruling groups have of the ruled, that conquerors have of the conquered ... has usually been based on a quiet confidence that the terms they need are already in their vocabulary ... And indeed, the satisfaction of ruling, beyond the booty, the unequal exchange, the exploitation of labor, very much includes the reaffirmation of one's identity that comes from being able to live this fiction without meeting brutal refutation. *Real understanding always has an identity cost* - something the ruled have often painfully experienced (p. 141, emphasis mine).

There is a cost to understanding that is borne in terms of identity, and it tends to be borne by the less powerful party. Before the issue of epistemology arises, before debates about conceptual frameworks or methods for gathering the views of the marginalised, there is the question of the horizon from which understanding will take place — about who will have to shift, ontologically; who must bear the burden of the price of mutual intelligibility; who must do the work, must perform the labour necessary for the realisation of understanding. This, it seems to me, is what is most striking about Valentin Mudimbe's *Parables and Fables*.

Mudimbe (1991) situates himself at the outset, noting in the preface his hope that the book 'bears witness to ... and provides insight into the unfolding of an intellectual odyssey that began in the academic year 1968–1969' (ix). Part of the Faculty of the University of Paris-Nanterre, which was the epicentre of the May 1968 'revolution'; commuting to Louvain, Belgium, where he read ancient Greek, Latin and French works; in the process of writing a dissertation in comparative philology and a thesis on political philosopher Ber Borochov; in an intellectual atmosphere that featured the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan; Mudimbe describes his situation thus:

Such an intellectual context could not but force me to articulate a number of questions about myself. Here I was, so to speak, the margin of margins: black, Catholic, African, yet agnostic; intellectually Marxist, disposed towards psychoanalysis, yet a specialist in Indo-European philology and philosophy. How could all this relate to myself, my origins, and my transcendence as a human being? I presented at Louvain my dissertation on the concept of *air* and my complementary thesis on Ber Borochov's language in 1970 (p. x, emphasis in original).

In which language did this polyglot ask himself these questions? Mudimbe is a polyglot in a linguistic sense, but horizonally, situationally, can there be any polyglots? Can one stand on multiple grounds and inhabit multiple horizons? Is it surprising that he came to ask himself the following:

How does one think about and comment upon alterity without essentializing its features? Second, in African contexts, can one speak and write about a tradition or its contemporary practice without taking into account the authority of the colonial library that has invented African identities (p. xi)?

Could not these be questions raised by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian of the Australian context? It is not surprising that Mudimbe questions the possibility of grasping Africaneity, or identity more broadly, in noncolonial, nonimperial terms. Nor is his horizon surprising, even if his depth of insight is:

I thus thought of using my own education as a framework in which I could, thanks to some methodological lessons from Sartre's phenomenology and Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, rewrite my personal readings of some beautiful African fables and parables. Concretely, I was caught between Sartre's existentialist philosophy and historical perspective ... and Lévi-Strauss' masterful ahistorical demonstration that seems to negate such a position and, in any case, questions the tension between the "savage" and the "scientific" mind. It became important to position myself vis-à-vis the Cartesian cogito and reconcile the impossible dialogue about the cogito which simultaneously separates and unites Lévi-Strauss and Sartre (p. xi).

Parables and Fables is on the surface a South-South dialogue par excellence: the child of a Luba-Lulua mother and Songye father who received his primary education in a 'Swahili cultural context' and his secondary one in a 'Sanga milieu' (p. 125), meditating on Luba and Songye traditions and stories, ostensibly primarily for the benefit of Central African philosophers and theologians. One

might even be tempted to call this a South-South-South dialogue (Mudimbe-stories-scholars). But is it? Mudimbe himself, reflecting on anthropological accounts of Central African traditions and stories, writes that the 'myth becomes anthropological knowledge in the ambiguous exchange which unites the politics of an informer and those of an anthropologist' (p. 81). What of the ambiguous exchange between the child removed from his context, acculturated into a Western one, become Western philosopher, reflecting on 'texts' that could not have gone untouched by colonialism, for the primary benefit of Western educated African scholars? Mudimbe (1991), in an account that may resonate with those of Australia's Stolen Generations, writes that at the age of ten years, he entered a seminary which attempted

> to be completely self-sufficient and has a minimum of contacts with the outside world . . . some 120 students under the care and surveillance of ten European Benedictine Fathers . . . Our real language of communication is French, and our reference mythology is Christian. No contact with the outside (no vacation, no visits from friends or parents) is allowed for at least six years. I entered the place as a child in 1952 and had my first contact with the external world in 1959. I was then almost eighteen, completely Francophonized, submitted to Greco-Roman values and Christian norms (p. 94).

Much of *Parables and Fables* is the apposition of Central African stories to Christian and psychoanalytic ones, along a horizon which one could call a twentieth century French philosophical horizon. It is not only he who finds himself along the horizon of the North as, in arriving at understanding, at a fusion of horizons, it is the South that must do the work or pay the price of intelligibility, and that by ceding something of the South's identity, even if the price to be paid is not always as explicit as that extorted from the young Mudimbe. Yet even if it is not always this explicit, is it not a price that we *all* have to pay in some form? Is colonialism, or more accurately coloniality, not inescapable? While I have argued that colonialism is 'inescapable', and specifically that 'the colonised cannot escape colonialism' (Mukandi, 2015, p. 530), Maldonado-Torres' (2007) distinction between colonialism and coloniality in his account of 'the coloniality of being' provides a clearer, fuller picture of the state of affairs. Coloniality, Maldonado-Torres explains:

> refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday' (p. 243).

What looked like a South-South dialogue turns out to be a North-South, perhaps a North-North dialogue, depending on whether one holds the idea that Central African stories today can take a form that allows them to maintain the designation 'South'. I confess to being skeptical. This skepticism is augmented by Maldonado-Torres' (2007) elaboration of the anteriority of the *ego conquiro* over the *ego cogito*, in which he suggests that Cartesian dualism 'is preceded and even, one has the temptation to say, to some extent built upon an anthropological colonial difference between the *ego conquistador* and *ego conquistado*' (p. 245). If the subaltern cannot speak, which is to say that the subaltern is unintelligible along the horizon of the North in the subaltern's own terms; and if what *there is*, prior to Cartesian questions around subjectivity is the conqueror and the conquered; if these structure our understanding, 'our' referring to we who are enfolded within, or who are in or in dialogue with the North; if dialogue with the North comes at an identity cost in which those in the South are only intelligible along the horizon of the North; can that which we apprehend as Central African stories be anything but something translated into the terms of the North?

As for the concept of South-South dialogue, consider academia. There are valid political and ethical reasons for maintaining something like a predisposition towards reading, grappling with and citing the works of scholars who belong to or identify with groups that are underrepresented in the academy. Andreotti (2016a) demonstrates this wonderfully when she notes the following:

> my reading of Indigenous philosophies and ethics is that, in critiques of colonial and totalitarian logicalities, Freire's logic is still based on colonial and totalitarian assumptions. However, Freire's scholarship is also recognized as useful in opening opportunities for political negotiations within the settler-state totalitarian logic, a logic that not only determines the extent of control of lands but also the parameters of normality of knowledge and being, and the intelligibility of resistance (p. 285).

It is along parallel lines that while I hope that it is *useful*, I am nevertheless doubtful that my engagement with African, Latin American, Asian or Indigenous scholars is tantamount to participation in South-South dialogues. My position is perhaps best understood by paying heed to the following passage from Adichie's (2007) *Half of a Yellow Sun*:

> 'You know, pan-Africanism is fundamentally a European notion.'
> . . .
> 'Maybe it *is* a European notion,' Miss Adebayo said, 'but in the bigger picture we are all one race.'
> 'What bigger picture . . . The bigger picture of the white man! Can't you see that we are not all alike except to white eyes?' . . .
> 'Of course we are all alike, we all have white oppression in common . . . Pan-Africanism is simply the most sensible response.'

Bryan Mukandi

'Of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe ... I am Nigerian because the white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed *black* to be as different as possible from his *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came.'

'But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race' (p. 20, emphasis in original).

My point is that the 'South' is as much an abstraction, and an abstraction along the horizon of the North, as is the cogito, or as Adichie observed, pan-Africanism, the nation, the tribe, white and black. Furthermore, the valorisation of South-South dialogue understood as the work of academics from 'the South' engaging with that of other scholars from other parts of 'the South' is predicated upon the idea that 'we all have white oppression in common'. Be that as it may, such a conception of South-South relations is, as Adichie shows, a construction of the North. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is instructive in that it tells the story of the violent repression of an attempt to secede; the disciplining of the other; the reduction of the Biafran other into the Nigerian same. The deployment of another 'other' into the same — the reduction of alterity into a political same — is both at play in the refusal to grant Biafra its independence, and the reduction of alterity into the homogenous abstraction 'South'. This is not a claim of equivalence but the demonstration of a similar logical process at work.

Can there be South-South dialogue given our global political, socioeconomic and cultural configuration? Not one in which I can participate. Like Mudimbe, my situation is such that whoever I am in dialogue with, that dialogue occurs with my feet planted firmly along the horizon of the North. When Motta (2011) writes about 'researchers attempting to participate in the co-construction of prefigurative epistemologies with movements in the global South to deconstruct our epistemic privilege and blur the boundaries between research and politics, public and private, subject and community' (p. 194), my response is to ask her to look at the ground on which the researcher as well as the participants in those movements are standing. It is not incidental that she is putting forward a challenge to critical realism as a methodology, and calling for a rethink. I can conceive of a more just academic practice, but I cannot see how an epistemic change leads to a different ways of being, in the most fundamental sense. But supposing I were simply being myopic, I cannot understand how, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how ethically I wanted to interact with others, I could will myself into understanding in terms other than those that are hegemonic. If movement is possible, if a shift from my current situation can take place, I do not *understand* how that is so.

Weeping

Fanon (2008) concludes his 'The Lived Experience of the Black', the central chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, as follows:

I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribed for me the humility of the cripple. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but the eviscerated silence surged towards me with paralysed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep' (p. 119).

I could so relate to his description of the pain of contorting oneself in order to be understood that I too wept, and was deeply troubled, when I read that chapter carefully for the first time. But my grandmother wouldn't understand it — not at a linguistic nor at a conceptual level; not without translation, both linguistic and conceptual. Fanon resonates because when Fanon says 'I am a Frenchman,' I know that if I am honest with myself, I have to echo that, "I am an Englishman", "I am Australian," "I am of the North".[I] Tragically, I may understand my grandmother to the extent to which we are both European, or we both 'speak' European or can translate things into European. Weeping seems an appropriate response to this tragedy. Weeping as a means of sitting, or grappling, or coming to terms with the tragic. Weeping such as I have experienced in Shona households, where a community of the bereaved gathers for days, and those who constitute it allow themselves to be affected by their loss, and grieve together, weeping intermittently, attending to practical matters that demand attention, remembering, laughing, persisting, teaching and learning from each other how to bear grief. The place of weeping as a station of paramount importance in colonial meditations; a stage as important to the way of the colonised's life as are Søren Kierkegaard's (1988) aesthetic, ethical and religious to the coloniser's life's way.

What does this tragedy mean for the concept of South-South dialogue, this abstraction of Cartesian proportions, this fiction? The Cartesian fiction that is the cogito has been productive for Western thought. What kind of fiction is South-South dialogue? It is a fiction that has the power to open or create spaces in which we, like Nietzsche's (2001) madman, as a prelude to tending to each other's wounds, ask each other if we realise the gravity of our situation, and if we understand the catastrophe that has taken place.

This European, this madman, found that those around him were not willing to face their situation. We find

[I] I remember being troubled some years ago, when my French teacher, a Parisian philosopher, disappointedly remarked, "*Tu es anglais* [You are English/an Anglophone]!" I was troubled both by the fact that she expected to find in me some radical alterity, and by the fact that she found none. Instead, she found herself face to face with someone with whom understanding involved little work. The same was true for me because I had long since put in that work, which is to say that I had already paid the price required of me to be intelligible to her.

ourselves in a similar situation, where there is an unwillingness on the part of many of those who consider themselves members of the South, because we do not care to come to terms with just how much our intelligibility has cost us, or just how lamentable our situation is, even here, where I find myself conjuring dead Germans in order to communicate the distress of the suspicion that dead Shona may be out of my reach. One of the most powerful expressions of this distress of which I am aware comes from a dead Shona hero of many, writer Marechera (1993):

> She spoke of many things, and fragments of things ... I in turn told her about my nervous breakdown when I became aware of persons around me whom no one else could see. They could not have been the black heroes whom I sought - or perhaps they were, I don't know ... They began to *talk*. I could hear them talking compulsively ... the voices continued to torment me; growing not only in intensity but also in their outrageousness ... The absurd, the grotesque, it seemed, had come home to stay. Where are the bloody heroes (pp. 28–9, emphasis in original)?

As if he were in conversation with Marechera; as if he were trying to ward off the former's distress, or grappling with a similar ailment, here is Nietzsche (2001):

> Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning (§125, p. 120)?

Why South-South dialogues? Because we need to light lanterns. We can learn from each other's attempts to light lanterns, and from each other's comportment in the darkness of this cold morning. We can learn how to mitigate the excesses of coloniality from each other (Motta, 2011). We can laugh at and with each other about the paradoxes, the entanglements, the complicities and struggles of attempting to get beyond the limitations of coloniality by means of colonial tools in colonial institutions through colonial communities of practice. We can in short, attempt to make things better — better in the sense in which Derrida (1978) wrote of opting for a lesser violence by 'avoiding the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse' (p. 117) — and discuss with each other what better might look like. Most of all, we can attempt to create spaces in which the unquestioned humanity of the other, and the manifestation of one's own humanity, make up the backdrop against which we grapple.

The issue of humanity is raised towards the end of Dangarembga's (2001) *Nervous Conditions*:

> In the city Maiguru's brother immediately made an appointment with a psychiatrist. We felt better - help was at hand. But the psychiatrist said that Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene. We should take her home and be firm with her. This was not a sensible thing to say in front of my uncle, who found

these words vastly reassuring and considered going back to Umtali at once, turning a deaf ear to Nyasha when she begged to see an African psychiatrist ...

> There were no black psychiatrists, but she was persuaded to see a white one. This man was human (p. 207).

Nervous Conditions is a work of fiction. That does not mean that it is not a true account, and it is here that I part ways with Mudimbe. For someone who has written several works of fiction and takes stories seriously, Mudimbe has a surprising lack of faith in the power of fiction, or at least he seems not to take fiction sufficiently seriously. In what for me is a painful conversation to witness, Boaventura de Sousa Santos repeatedly asks his interlocutor, Mudimbe, about the possibility that, reversing Hegel's formulation, Europe no longer has much to contribute to global discourse and that it is time to pay attention to Africa, and other parts of the global South (Mudimbe & de Sousa Santos, 2014). Either seeing more clearly than I, which may very well be the case, or wedded too strongly to Cartesian abstraction, Mudimbe is unable to bring himself to say that Africa has a unique philosophical contribution to make. He sees no way out of coloniality, and the only gesture that he is willing to make is to expand the concept of Africa to the point where Sartre is included in the conceptual category 'African'. Only a European Africa can speak. And while I agree with the first gesture, with the idea of inescapable coloniality, I also see the potential of the colonised, the power of even the shackled to act. This, it seems to me, is the import of a the depiction of slaves who are full persons, who plot and act, and love and live, as in a film like Gerima's (1993) *Sankofa* or Chamoiseau's (1997) novel, *Texaco*. Interestingly, Levinas (1969) comes to a not too distant position meditating on, and in agreement with Descartes' position in the latter's third meditation: '[t]he body indigent and naked is this very changing of sense. This is the profound insight Descartes had when he refused to sense data the status of clear and distinct ideas, ascribed them to the body, and relegated them to the useful' (pp. 129–30). It bears noting that the French *sens*, refers to both meaning and sense.

Once one leaves the realm of abstraction, of 'clear and distinct ideas'; once we allow our conceptions to be *affected* by *people*, by others, our concepts as Descartes supposed and Levinas affirmed, are muddied. The fictitious, even the absurd, becomes credible. And it is in this muddy light, rather than in Cartesian clarity, that the distribution of the burden of understanding can be more just — a phenomenon to which I can attest, having experienced for myself an academic gathering in which there were no implicit questions posed about the status of my humanity, the gathering in which these reflections first saw the light of day.

I have no doubt that the concept of South-South dialogue is a fiction. In relation with other 'others' however, one can perhaps begin to catch a glimpse of the

task to which this fiction may be deployed. As Sara Motta explained (2011):

> [CTUs - a form of South-South dialogue] seek to develop their utopias as part of the process of creating alternative logics of *being* and doing. The CTUs project is relational and open, always moving, adapting and evolving. It is a prefigurative post-representational politics, a politics that is intellectual, *affective*, subjective and collective (Motta, 2011, p. 179, emphasis mine).

Funkadelic (2005) titled their 1970 album *Free Your Mind . . . And Your Ass Will Follow*. Bracketing questions of mind–body dualism, or entertaining the fiction that is Cartesian dualism for the moment, I do not hold much hope for my mind. I wonder though, if contrary to Funkadelic's proposition, creating a little space, finding a decent seat on which to plonk my ass for some time with others, with other 'others', and human non-'other' others, may not lead my mind, and yours, to greater degrees of freedom.[II] If not freedom, then less restraint perhaps. This, it seems to me, is in line with the 'prefigurative post-representational politics' that Motta presents. Motta's work therefore represents an opening for me — it is a provocation to grapple with the relationship between the affective and ontological movement; affection and the inclination or predisposition towards carrying a more just portion of the burden of understanding; affection and cognition.

A closing thought. Dangarembga tells us that the psychiatrist who finally attends to Nyasha is human. In Shona, the language in which the story takes place, albeit rendered to us in English, one would most likely say of the psychiatrist, *ane hunhu. Kuva nehunhu* is to have, to incarnate, to express, to have (already) taken up one's humanity. In having taken up their humanity, the psychiatrist in question allowed for the emergence of a space in which Nyasha could begin to heal. Fiction or otherwise, South-South dialogue's potential lies in its ability to foster spaces in which

people manifest *hunhu*, or *ubuntu* as it is called south of where I grew up. This is important because, to quote Ramose (1999), 'to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them. *Ubuntu* understood as be-ing human (human-ness); a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others'. In fact, as Ramose goes on to note, 'be-ing human is not enough. One is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being' (p. 52). South-South dialogue can be a space in which the imperative that each become a human being is taken seriously; where those partaking in the dialogue are orientated towards that end.

The promise of South-South dialogues, the hope in service of which I am willing to employ this fiction, is the creation of spaces in which one is more likely to find a human interlocutor than not. The hope of being in dialogue with someone *ane hunhu.*

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[II] Andreotti (2016b) seems to hold a similar position. She notes, under the subtitle 'Intelligibility', the following: 'In my practice as an educator and educational researcher . . . the greatest challenge that I face is indeed one of intelligibility. This challenge has two dimensions. The first is a *cognitive* dimension related to what is legible within an audience's normalised world-view . . . Communicating dissenting perspectives (for example, of Indigenous groups or social movements) and proposing analyses that implicate the audience in ongoing harm becomes a difficult task that requires the pedagogical *reduction of complexity* if one wants to be effective in inviting people into conversations where their self-image and world-views will likely not be affirmed' (p. 105, emphasis mine). This lack of intelligibility—the result of a lack of the movement along an epistemic axis that would allow for 're-framing', the result of a lack of ability, or desire, is a minor variant of the challenge that I have set out, where the movement required for crosscultural intelligibility is ontological. Andreotti nevertheless appears to arrive at the same conclusion as the one to which I have arrived. 'How can we disarm and de-centre ourselves and displace our desires and cognitive obsessions to wake up to face a plural, undefined world without turning our back to the violences we have so far inflicted upon it', she goes on to ask (p. 109)? The movement necessary for mutual intelligibility, she seems to suggest, appears to have an affective component, where, at the risk of reading too much into this statement, *affection precedes cognitive change.*

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