

# On Elevating the Human Narrative – Kosmos Journal

*By Judy Rodgers, Gayatri Naraine, Rhonda Fabian*

**Judy Rodgers** | All good questions...practices, values, institutions, governance. I think decisions about things like governance or institutions source from our *awareness*. We can't build something if it's outside the scope of our awareness. We can't design a true commons if we're in a very limited consciousness.

I think, from an awareness perspective, if we believe we're spiritual beings—and for those who are monotheists, children of one father, one mother, one parent, one great spirit—then from that ground, the whole boundary notion becomes superfluous. That's the ground that has to be explored in order to get to good answers on institutional solutions or governance solutions.

One of the problems that we have, has to do with our notions of 'what is mine.' If we are absorbed—and I think in the U.S., we are in the worst moment in terms of this—by 'us and them'; outsiders and insiders; those who are welcome and those who aren't – then we're at the real nadir of our ability to understand global citizenship.

Part of it is that the man who is in office, who's doing the clownish acts, was put there by a whole bunch of people, so he's not alone. He speaks for people who believe that walls and boundaries and inside/outside is the truth. They believe that some people have rights and others don't. It's hard to talk someone out of that level of belief. It's hard to talk someone out of that level of value.

Also, there are well-meaning people whose philanthropy still comes from, "Well, I the endowed one, am going to give you, the unfortunate one, some gift. I'm going to write you a check, or I'm going to do something for you, you poor thing." Right? I'm congratulating myself on my insider-ness and my fortune, and I'm going to give you some crumbs so that you can feel better about what's going on. We are so diminished in that mindset. Our hearts are so shrunken by that.

It misses the whole point. There is no 'outsider.' If something bad happens to that one, then something dreadful has happened to me. My own neighborhood is sullied by what happened to that one, even my global neighborhood.

So, when you talk about global citizenship, I think it has a lot to do with our attitudes. Gayatri would have talked with you about the spiritual trajectory, I would imagine, this awareness to attitude...If you don't start with that awareness—that we truly are children of the same parent—then your attitude is bound to be compromised in some way, even if you're feeling generous-hearted.

So, part of the promise that the UN made around the SDGs was *universality*, which really said, "It's not like this generous North is now going to give the poor South the 'truth.' We're going to deliver our wisdom to them so that they can 'catch up' with us." That notion got removed in the SDGs, which was really a step in the right direction. And also we have been working on something with the UN about *transformation* as a spiritual concept.

**Gayatri Naraine** | [*Kosmos* Editor Emeritus] Nancy Roof was at one of those UN meetings. Rhonda, did you accompany her?

**Rhonda** | I was there as well, yes.

**Judy** | Okay, good. So this notion of *transformation*—what we’re really talking about is an inner shift. We’re not talking about more blankets delivered, or more water, fewer diseases, more vaccines. That’s not the metric anymore. You’re talking about the inner shift that allows for so many other things to happen. That’s really what we were trying to do with that conversation, and I think that’s what you’re trying to do with this issue on global citizenship. I think it’s to find new ground. Because as long as we’re only about social actions, we’re just really rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. We’re not getting at anything that’s substantially going to shift anything.

So, it’s very difficult! I mean, it sounds easy to say well, “Let’s all just be brothers.” That sounds like the obvious solution, right? I don’t think it’s so easy. I don’t think it’s so easy to think of ourselves as spiritual beings, and I don’t think it’s so easy to really experience a God that truly sees each one as his precious child. But if you really feel that affinity, then that love and respect would drive everything. It would drive your practice. It would drive your values. It would drive your institutional construction. It would drive your governance. That’s transformational.

I think that’s the experience we all need. I think people tend to have that experience or some version of it when they get some kind of a wake-up call; they have a near-death experience or do something heroic. There’s lots and lots and lots of stories of people who—in certain moments—all the limitations fall away, and that vision that’s living somewhere inside of us emerges. We do something beautiful, morally beautiful, as a natural act without any preparation. The better part of us comes forward, and we do this thing, and what we find in almost every case, is that afterward, people say, “Oh, it wasn’t me. I didn’t really do it. Anybody would have done that.”

**Rhonda** | I think we, as a humanity, are at such a moment right now. The future hangs on our morally beautiful decisions. Everything is ripening for us to wake up—to act. My teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, always said that the first step in waking-up is actually to *stop*. The first step is stopping in order to see what is real, what is going on around us. This is the kind of moment we seem to be in what the Tao calls the ‘still point,’ where one can see the infinite.

Gayatri, this is a question for you. What brought you to this edge, this still point? How has the meaning of the term ‘global citizen’ changed for you as a result of your work and all you have learned?

**Gayatri** | I first encountered the term ‘global citizen’ when we had the Earth Summit in Rio. I think it was in 1992. It was a time when the world was focused on the environment—not just politicians and environmentalists, but artists and performers who brought the whole concept of a living Earth to people’s hearts. The Wisdom Keepers came in, representing the different faiths, and the indigenous perspective, and, of course, the UN. You had to move out of your national identity because now you were looking at trans-border consequences. Like when a butterfly flaps its wings in one part of the world, there is a shift in another part of the world—those kinds of consequences.

I left Rio really convinced ‘I am a global citizen.’ A global citizen meant that you never looked at

something in a piecemeal fashion. You always had to look at it, as far as you could see it, from a holistic perspective. It meant everyone had to come together. And then a few years later, I was at the UN listening to a head of state from Africa speak, and he opened his comments by saying, “Yes, we are interdependent. We are interconnected, but don’t touch my resources—they belong to my country.”