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The problem as it exists today is one of identity.

What do I, as an African youth have to offer the world in terms of culture worthy of respect.

What do we as Africans offer our children, that which they can be proud of and be willing to hand down to their own children, without any generation obtaining the familiar attitude of it being backward?

A possible solution to the mindset shift that has left continental Africans branded as paddlers of H.I.V.

Exploring some sources of the masochistic attitude, that many have toward their own cultural identity.

THE MODERN AFRICAN

THE PLACE OF AFRICAN TRADITION IN OUR LIVES AS AFRICANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND ITS ISSUES, AND THE FORM THAT IT MIGHT TAKE TO SOLVE THEM AND BE RELEVANT

THE BACKGROUND

Let's get a few issues straight before I begin;

- ✚ Though I have promised this document to people for so long to the offended I say sorry but revolutions wait for no ignorance, please quote me if necessary.
- ✚ This is not political, not personal and not authoritarian at all...it is however a critic of the reigning system, its cultural direction to be more exact
- ✚ I will not mention many names of individuals nor the ideologies they represent as this is both unfair and deviational at most.
- ✚ You have this document as I wish that you join me in the battle to reclaim our identity as Africans (all races - Black, Arab, White, Mixed and others - and tribes resident included), that we raise awareness to the problem at hand and were it is leading us. That you, me and the potential-full masses create the reality of an African sophistication that is deep rooted in our collective pride which itself springs from cultures borne of the mother continent.
- ✚ We challenge the false view presented by the retrogressive elements amongst us that the African religious world view is the same as any African cultural lifestyle.
- ✚ **This seeks not to promote a particular culture but to equip any man of any culture to promote his identity as is in line with progress and pride.**

THE PROBLEM

I was privileged a few months ago to be witness to a so called holy man as he paraded his ignorance on television show; he went on and on about how culture -including his own apparently- and his religion should never be desired to co-exist. it was a debate so like most people I just brushed it off and chose to listen to my own version of the truth.

A few days later I saw what turned out to be the fuel to put my thoughts down.

I went to watch a rugby game with a friend, it was late afternoon and the game was about to end, a few beers had done their job so the conversation I was in was at its peak. Next to us was a multi-racial group of guys who seemed to have learnt together from the little I could gather, then I chanced a couple; a dread locked guy in his late 20s or so, his child and his wife I hope. I noticed that he spoke to them both in English but occasionally in vernacular to the lady. Well that seemed a bit off, so as we left I mentioned it to my friend where we decided that be they a family or not there are some families which are like that out there today, 21st century families that's what they pass for these days apparently.

It was a week after that when I drew a connection to these separate incidents. As I mentioned at the start of the paper, no organisation or body is being supported here, I feel the need to mention this because certain right wing ideas may seem to protrude when this is not intended at all.

The connection and general problem brought to surface was basically as follows: our idea as a society of modernity has become the obtaining of pride from almost all elements which are not our own, instead of developing for ourselves an image of sophistication we are slowly decaying into a masochistic identity extinction...in the two cases the view of the older man who vehemently states anti-africanism in one of its not so subtle forms and then the younger supporter of that same system of thought who displays a subtle belligerent inclination to who he is.

It had to be established how far into our personalities this infection of cultural laziness had spread, its symptoms and the consequences if left untreated. I call it laziness because what else allows men let their image of pride fade into a hollow shell and lets them borrow their neighbours' for fit when they could very well fashion a new one. I am not the first to call for this I will mention one name only a Dr. Pitika Ntuli who has published on the topic, the only differences is that for expediency sake I offer my issue for free to spread.

I will keep it short and precise so that it fuels many an anecdote after a quick peruse.

THE DIATRIBE

AN ILL AND OLD TRADITIONAL VIEW OF TRADITION

The issue falls on two basic questions:

- i. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE? and
- ii. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PROUD AFRICAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

It is fact that as a group our pride has been replaced by a slow poisoning of our own image, an experiment is quite easy and I conducted it myself, simply asks your friends and family what elements in culture they are proud of and what they are proud to offer their children as heritage.

On one occasion I was answered by a fellow who not only totally rejected the idea of culture but did so in English embellished with a touch of Latin, I am sure he isn't the only "coconut" out there, and he might have been a milder form of some more virulent version with influence in our society.

At this moment it is probably important to introduce the definition or meaning of culture from a celebrated expert:

Sir Edward Taylor, a British anthropologist defined culture as "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, morals, law ,arts, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"

(Taylor 1871/1958, p1)

Since it is clear what culture is, then what importance can be drawn from that?

The usual opposition to any talk of culture has been that in the modern age we should be free to do as we wish, after all advancement has always been associated with cosmopolitanism. It will be argued- by what I believe to be naivety- that talking of culture is equivalent to backwardness.

This approach misses a critical state of any society which is the presence of right and left hand elements. If one does not include these in their judgements of what is 'appropriate' and what is 'absurd' then we will become victims of ourselves, continuously relying on external patronage.

In simpler terms I mean that every society is in dynamic equilibrium in the ebb and flow between:

1. Stringent anti-progressive morality that neurotically holds on to past ideals and justifies them at the expense of cosmopolitanism and individualism.
2. And unhealthy support of "*freedom*" that may even be detrimental to the individual and society...this is the "do as I may" state, were pornographers and plastic surgeons

reign. Here one person's neurosis can be justified by the media and become an epidemic.

Now which of the two paths are you supporting? Believe me we have nations on this earth that represent each of these in their ugliness. And remember this fight is not just for your now; it's for your tomorrow and your children.

Culture for me is tool with which each of us can sieve out the chaff in the media and secular society and know what to retain, it is the system of values that not only promote identity but ones healthy participation in this global village- were an individual's contribution is guaranteed to be great and unique.

After all what is a cosmopolitan society, the answer for me would be a society were globalisation is represented in the tolerance of its members to each other. A society of options by people who have integrity, self respect and tolerance... now what tolerance and self respect is there in a society that seeks homogeneity and total denial of a person's heritage? Heritage has our individual histories and is the source of our differences, good and bad.

In that view now we can look at what it means to be a 21st century African who lives in a world were "*sophistication and class*" are defined by corny foreign adverts that use odd French and Latin and even Asian words to describe quality? Were we missed it is a matter of debate and who caused this is no longer the issue. The issue is: what is your role in the perpetuation of our obsolescence as bearers of quality and value.

The question is how much you value your cultural 'norms', those practices and philosophies that have been handed down to you? In these we include how relationships, marriages, christenings, funerals, births, and interventions are handled; then in each of these what elements represent both you and your heritage, these are the elements you seek to hand down to your children.

This solves the issue of what you have and are that if you go to let's say Qatar you will not appear as backward and tribal or the contrary i.e. overzealous to forget who you are, but will command respect for yourself and your background as a continental African facing modern but very cultural indigenous people. What is the source of the rift that a lot of southern Africans in particular have compared to the mindset that some examples have in their displays of pride in tradition in modern settings, e.g. a Japanese business man bringing a foreign client to his house to sit on the floor as tradition commands and his wife wearing a kimono serving them tea(they even boast about these things on international television), an Indian family in the U.K. still marrying the way they have for centuries, and a Nigerian family with its trademark accent, mannerism and dress code.

Then there is the classic oppositions that will tell you entertaining culture is bringing to the fore the tolerance of traditional healers or "witch doctors" as they have been branded (what a negative connotation!)

To set the record straight there is a difference between African culture and African religion, these have been known to exist in the same person but never has this been the rule, in fact I

would like to state that after reading this paper please acknowledge ignorance when ever such ideas come up in your mind. My religious views are not the subject of this paper but from what I have gathered about the issue is a calling into the practice of healing by The Creator through ancestors is much akin to ministry; the initiate finds meaning in life, from the calling and a certain level of purpose that they would have been lacking. We can even see things in a new light were the modern interpretation of ancestors is as law rather than plague in the realm of African religion. As opposed to viewing an alternative medicine clinic which uses foreign herbs as commanding more respect than a traditional healer's home no matter how certified, do an experiment I dare you see how people you know react near each of these premises!

SOLUTIONS AT A CROSS ROADS

These only fall into one universal approach: A PERSONAL DEFINITION OF UBUNTU. Rather than some over-recycled dictionary idea of "what a good African man and woman is." It's time we appreciated that it takes individuals to create a society. It is in the hands of young people like me and you to set the standard of what it means to be a pro-African modern African, this is not an African renaissance it's us rebranding sophistication by our actions with no right wing authoritarianisms, getting this right I am confident will see economical missing links falling in place.

Those elements you hand down to your children and charges are given as primary education, which up to now has been the realm of external influence, then give accessibility to culture to children for their interpretation when they grow older, it worked on me.

As to the place of culture and its involvement in relationships I'll pose this case study to you and then decide because even I am in no place to claim a solution yet.

What is passing for culture today as I type this is a system that has left us in a dire crisis somewhere along the road our idea of relationships has led us to 2 terrible realities:

1. We have one of the world's lowest divorce rates but this is in stark contrast with the fact that we have the highest prevalence of H.I.V. One wonders whether the way we are cultured ill equips us in terms of approaching serious relationships.

2. We have to be weary of the new popular form of relationships: do we still have what it takes to be proud of how relationships are conducted in a way that pleases our forbearers (not that the relationships become for our parents) but so that we display maturity and discretion. The form displayed by our renegade contemporaries of doing things on their own were the next thing you know is pregnancy and “vat en set” a live in relationship, while the family is notified by infrequent phone calls. I say that if there was an element of truth to it we wouldn't have so many AIDS cases in veiled returns home

Self acculturation would change these surely, just involve the appropriate family member to test you and your partners commitment at the engagement stage, all cultures have methods of doing this. With marriage I think changing a person is a tall order not to mention unfair the best advice I have been told time and again is that if you are not with the person you were looking for, best change lanes; it's not for the reason of having children it's about companionship; the way to go at it is to look for a lover with the qualities of a best friend so they say.

From what our myriads of heritages have given us, let us pick the good as dictated by law and common sense. From there we can truly boast of sophistication that is African.

I hope that I have managed to give you a bone to chew on, that after whatever deliberations are excited in you, you will be at a better position than you were before had this topic not come up to you. That now you will see the importance of culture for our 21st century generations.

Continue the discussion at

THE 'House of focus' PAGE ON FACEBOOK,

And please feel free to send a copy of this pdf file to as many people as you please...now be proud of your roots, flourish and prosper!

The Earth's Heartbeat

Here I stand

Ground once my ancestors trod

Myself I seek to mend

Ear to the ground I hear it still thud

Mud in my hands making meanings of months

Those that have passed, digging into meanings of chants

Chancing my eyes toward lost culture, beat after beat it commands.