

ONE KENYA: Why Tribal Identity should be treated positively by all

By Mwangi Wanjumbi Self published - October 2009

My Name is Mwangi, a Kikuyu who was born and bred in Nyeri, the provincial headquarters of Central Kenya. I have no apologies to make to anybody for being a Kikuyu. In any case, I never chose to be a Kikuyu in any way or at any time. Kikuyu people only happen to be the ones that I related with immediately I started experiencing this beautiful world. I am actually a child of the environment in which I was born. I took up and therefore eloquently speak the language that I found being spoken around my environment. I also speak and write English fluently- Yes, I was persuaded to adopt the language of our colonizers. I have nothing against this though. It has enabled me to become a global citizen after all, despite the fact that, I initially had no choice.

Along the way, I learnt to read and write Kiswahili our national Language. I also learnt Japanese language during studies. Unfortunately, I have had nobody to communicate with in Japanese, outside class. This has made me to slide into Japanese language illiteracy instead of advancing in the same. Over time, I have taken interest in other local dialects. I understand basic luyha, and luo languages. I can easily communicate in Kamba dialect.

Meanwhile, had my mother abandoned or given me out in Luoland, Masailand or any other place that is far off from my birthplace, I would proudly be a luo, Masai or any other. If in fact, I was dumped in the wilderness like the little girl who was discovered in Lake Nakuru National Park a few years ago, I would be conducting myself like a monkey as the little girl was doing.

Notably, the girl was still pouring and eating her food on the floor as well as making monkey noises, as she had been used to, even long after she was forced to join or is it re-join the human race. I do not understand this fuss about tribes in Kenya. There is no tribe that is superior or inferior to the other as far as I know. Do we not all go through the same biological and physical processes? On this, I believe the culture gurus such Gheete Hofstead who I have ably interacted with through their writings and teachings would support me as I perpetuate my ideas. I indeed, gather strength from their wisdom whenever writing or thinking culture-wise.

In the meantime, we all eat, drink, digest excrete in the same way, through a homogenous digestive system. We are all predominantly black in colour. We all go through the same biological process of birth and death. Even our blood circulation and breathing system is the same without any exception like every other member of the human race.

Physically, we pose, walk, or run in the same way. We likewise sleep and sit in the same way. Certainly, there is no walking style that is associated with Masai, Kikuyu Elmoror or any other for that matter. When people are walking in the streets of Nairobi for example, you can never tell whether one is a Kisii, Kikuyu, Luo or Mijikenda from Kenya; Yoruba, Hausa or Ibo from Nigeria; or even Baganda or Acholi from Uganda.

Internationally, a white man is simply that. You may not even tell the country of origin until one declares his nationality and even residence. Likewise, a Brazilian could pass for Kamau, Otieno or vice versa.

Interestingly, even where people seemingly belong to the same tribe and therefore speak the same language, they become victims of clanism. A good example is Somali where the almost one tribe country is about to complete its 3rd decade since they started tearing their country into pieces and shreds.

Here in Kenya, you can only know or guess one's tribe or nationality when he/she opens the mouth to speak. Clothing could on the other hand be deceitful because people have formed habits of donning attires that reflect wide ranging continental or even global cultures. Why then is this never ending fuss of tribes in Kenya? Is it a genuine challenge or just a deep rooted political con-game aimed at permanently dividing the country into tribal cocoons?

Sadly, the answer to the latter question could be in the affirmative. This is so because we are always encountering situations where political leaders are permanently pre-occupied in dividing the country only with the aim of establishing themselves into tribal chieftains. That enables them to excel through pouring venom and vitriol against other Kenyans especially from different ethnic backgrounds. It is not surprising that these people have even managed to hoodwink the rest of the world that Kenyan's are highly ethicized, when it is actually the leaders themselves who have been creating this situation.

Perhaps it is now opportune for Kenyans to realize that they are not any different from each other. Their difference in mother tongues and probably cultural habits do not make anybody lesser than the other. The thinking, biological and physical processes are all the same. Let us take advantage of our numerous similarities whereas appreciating the differences especially in languages and cultures of one another. This country belongs to all of us irrespective of our tribes or even races. We need to make the best out of our existing similarities if we are to take this country to higher levels of progress.

In that regard, let us ignore both the local and international trouble making political dinosaurs and forge right ahead. There is more to gain from our similarities than our differences. The Government should not shy from propagating the tribal identity in our census and any other situation. There is nothing wrong with the tribes. There is everything wrong however in those who are permanently creating rivalry and inexistent differences amongst different national or international communities. These are the only lessons that will successfully guide Kenyans towards the future.

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