

Righteous Responsibility

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We live in a world that markets itself as a post-racial dream. A world where the Rainbow Nation is considered a reality and not just a mere far-fetched fantasy. A dreamy place where everybody can live in harmony. Instead, the lived experiences of people of colour tell a different story: a nightmare where the monsters are no longer white people but rather our own reflections in the mirror. Racism is surviving by evolving into a system that is perpetrated by its own victims. The memory of white people instigating hatred and division amongst us has crept into our present-day psyche and has infiltrated our sense of self. Inferiority has become so intertwined with our perception of skin colour and race that we project these feelings of insecurity onto our brothers and sisters. We continue the cycle of shame and humiliation in our communities. We are responsible for perpetuating racism.

Racism is desecrating our mental health. White supremacy has left an indelible imprint on our minds. We have been indoctrinated to believe that whiteness is the highest standard of humanity. So, what does it mean if we deviate from this standard- does it mean that we are not entirely human or that we lack the goodness that is inherent to white skin? Our curiosity has been piqued, and we are left questioning if we will ever be worthy enough. If whiteness is placed upon a pedestal, then where does that leave us? We are left with shame and embarrassment embedded into the pores of our dirt-brown skin. We scrub and scrub away at our skin as we desperately try to distance ourselves from our roots. Our hopes and dreams become a waste as we conform to the colonial gaze. We throw our traditional wear to the side and choose to follow western fashion trends. We straighten every kink out of our hair in an attempt to look neat and presentable like them. We hate our hooked noses as they sharpen our already 'ugly' faces and inject the need for plastic surgery into our veins. This is the norm. It is normal to alter our appearance under the guise of having the right to do anything that makes us happy. But if we stopped to consider why we perform these rituals, would we even try to change how we undervalue ourselves and our communities?

Our insecurities end up hurting one another. A peer makes a remark on how dark and undesirable our skin is or perhaps an innocent comment on how lemons and baking soda can be used to lighten skin or possibly a gentle reminder to stay away from the sun even if it means missing out on the unforgettable memories of a warm summer's day. We ruminate on these words as they fill us with disgust and humiliation, a confirmation that there is something wrong with us. The pain we feel is so wretched and debilitating and yet we pass it onto the next person who looks like us without any concern for the scar that it will leave on their sense of self. We soon realise that passing the pain onto another person does not take away from our own, so we sit with these words and enable it to creep into our perception of the world. We find ourselves desperate to look like our lighter-skinned peers as we chase validation from people who look nothing like us. Because what is love if it isn't a currency that increases in value when it is given to us by people who are 'better' than us. This 'love' puts us in a trance. We have taken a drug that wipes out all of the times that we were laughed at, all of the times that we were made to feel less than. A hallucinogen that alters the lifelong

insecurity that we were never good enough. A high that numbs the inferiority that we have carried with us since we were children. The rush that we feel from their validation and approval inevitably wears off. We are ashamed to cry out for help as we enter the cycle of suffering in silence again.

It is disappointing knowing that this is the legacy that we are leaving behind when we have the potential to stop this cycle, to display kindness and respect to each other and the world. The close-knitted nature of our communities should be what we memorialise. The line between friendship and family is often blurred; food is seen as sustenance. Food is how love is shown and how we enrich each other's souls. Gathering around a table with a massive spread of food, prepared by elders who cook with such profound warmth and love, is one of the many aspects our heritage that we should highlight, instead of allowing internalised racism to taint the fragile image we have of our community. Elderly people foster a culture of inspiration and warmth in our circles. We wish to grow up and be exactly like them. We want to emulate every aspect of their being. We want to be as hospitable and giving as them. We want to stand tall in the face of adversity like them. We want to take dignity and pride in our heritage like them. These wishes of ours fade as we grow up and realise that the world does not share the same sentiment as us. We recognise the beauty in the elderly's wrinkled faces as the whites of their eyes reflect the hardship that they so bravely endured to give us a chance at a life free from the shackles of judgment and indignity. And yet, we still choose to be controlled by ideals that were conceived so long ago. Every quarrel that we have with our culture is an active decision that we make in choosing a life that lacks confidence and integrity. We claim to love the people who tried to make us feel proud of our heritage, yet we despise the features that they gave to us and the very culture that they live and breathe for.

It comes to a point where we have to take responsibility for ourselves and how we want to live our lives. We cannot lack self-esteem and project our insecurities onto each other and then blame it on the legacy of the apartheid or colonialism or whatever else we can find to evade accountability. It is fair to assign racism as the cause of these insecurities but to use it as a justification of the continuation and spread of low self-esteem is an excuse which implies that we have no control or autonomy over ourselves and our behaviour. We cannot be enslaved by memories of the past that we replay over and over again. We cannot be puppets of a hateful rhetoric that is centuries old. We cannot be our own opponents anymore. I refuse to be racist any longer.

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