



## Abandoning toxic tribalism and achieving socio-political prosperity

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“For the nation to live, the tribe must die.” – Samora Machel

In the historical sense of the term, tribalism has deemed the association of oneself to a cultural or ethnic identity, an identity unique to a group of people, and an identity that separates that group of people from another. We have, however, emerged into a new era of tribalism, an era where the instinct to be tribal is no longer about family, clan or village; instead, it is about socio-political ideology and socio-political identity. In this new era of tribalism, we have maintained the “us” vs “them” mentality, but what exactly is determining the “us” and what is determining the “them”?

As human beings, we naturally find ourselves associating with groups of people that maintain similar interests and beliefs. People are, however, increasingly latching onto groups and social movements in which they have little knowledge about. It has become so much easier for people to conform to the prescribed views of others rather than creating their own opinions. Being misinformed has become easier than being uninformed and we have begun to allow these groups and movements to define us and to waive a part of our individual identity without being fully informed of what we’re conforming to. To what extent can we then allow these groups and movements to define who we are? How far are we willing to let these tribal loyalties write our narrative?

Ubuntu – “I am because we are” – a philosophy and sense of belonging, rooted in the communities of South Africa. The concept of Ubuntu came to be during the Apartheid era when, more than ever, South Africans needed a beacon of hope and a sense of unity to endure and overcome a time filled with hatred, racism and unthinkable inequalities. The African National Congress (ANC) and Nelson Mandela were key figures in the fight to end racism. On the 27th of April 1994, people of colour voted for the ANC for they were the ANC and the ANC were them. People of colour were united under the ANC and owed their loyalties to the party that helped liberate them.

25 years later, the ANC that liberated South Africans from the shackles of Apartheid is the same ANC that has applied a new set of shackles – theft, dishonesty and corruption, words commonly used to describe South Africa’s ruling party. It is imperative to ask how far South Africans are willing to allow their loyalty to Mandela and his party stand in the way of a better South Africa, a South Africa that Mandela would have wanted. It is in that moment, when one decides to associate as the “us” as a result of loyalty while they know that the “them” is the correct and logical decision to make, that we encounter toxic tribalism. The concept of “us” and “them” evolved for the purpose of detecting danger, but it is this concept which has now become the source of the danger, the source of toxic tribalism.



Toxic tribalism is what is keeping society, and in this context South Africa, from prospering. South Africans have allowed their narrative to be diluted by their tribal loyalties and are failing themselves each time they allow such loyalties to overrule their logical instinct. Abandoning toxic tribalism does not require that loyalty as a whole be disregarded by society, it merely poses the question to decision-makers – how far are you willing to allow loyalty to stand in the way of prosperity? To what extent are you willing to apply logical thought and allow intellect to overrule instinct?

“It is through violence that social animals defend their groups” – an outcome that South Africans have been trying to depart from since the Apartheid era, an outcome that is still ever so present. South Africans and society need to move away from the “us” and the “them” and form a united front geared towards a common purpose – to exist equally and to exist in peace. You see, when groups are in conflict, they most often find themselves fighting for the demands of their individual group. In this narrow vision to “win” the fight, they fail to heal the fractures underpinning the conflict, resulting in the same issues of conflict reoccurring.

Idowu Koyenikan is of the belief that “You can no longer see or identify yourself solely as a member of a tribe, but as a citizen of a nation of one people working toward a common purpose.” This is precisely the mentality that South Africans and society as a whole should adopt. We cannot keep basing our decisions on loyalties based on the past, loyalties that no longer make logical sense. At the same time, it is vital that the past is acknowledged and that unresolved conflicts be resolved. South African needs to put tribal differences aside and unite to heal the fractures underpinning the existing conflicts. Once a mutual understanding can be reached and South Africans can forgive one another and work together to redress the damage caused by Apartheid they will begin to see the country flourish.

In order to prosper, individuals must abandon their reliance on others to fix their problems. We are always hearing complaints or complaining ourselves about the lack of leadership in our countries, leadership that we expect to resolve our issues for us. Government officials blame business, business blames the government and communities blame both government and business. The truth is, they’ve all failed each other, nonetheless by sitting around complaining and waiting on leadership to fix things for us we’re failing ourselves. We’re so obsessed with the worst among us that we’re building a narrative that dictates a future that we’re all afraid of and none of us would desire, instead of employing our energies to build the future we want. We need to use our voices and votes to reclaim our power and call for action, even if this means jeopardizing our tribal perspectives in order to find a common voice. We need to have pride in our countries and abandon our toxic tribal mentalities in order to see our countries prosper.