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## CULTURE AND TRADITION

How much of who we are is shaped by the traditions we face? Growing up in the countryside really shaped my cultural identity by both traditions that were passed on from my family from many generations from time to time which were added up to the new traditions I picked up from living in the big city of Nairobi, Kenya.

Apart from being Kenyan, there were also sub-communities that people were sub-divided into like kikuyu, Kamba and others which had unique and different languages. The sub-community my family and I belonged to was referred to as (Kisii) and the language spoken was called Abagusii. Growing up there were traditions that clearly defined us and our lineage. There were practices that tended to be followed in the past and up to this day are still in practice for example; when a child was born, it was tradition that the new born had to have their head shaved in order to protect them from evil eye of the community which up to date I would say was kind of a weird custom. Having to grow up in this type of culture, I had to learn to appreciate some cultures as others to be honest seemed to be really demining to other people like it was tradition to when a lady is married to the husband, she was not to return to her home as where she was married to was considered her new home. This tradition left me in question as to why they were never allowed to visit their parents and where they were raised from childhood. According to me, I would say that even though some traditions were accepted and followed in the past, some were extravagantly overstretched and had to be thought through. As a result of these far-fetched

traditions, my siblings and I felt a sense of separation from my mother's culture and never really got to know where she grew up and what shaped her life to this moment.

Much of my life was spent in the city where I got to meet up with people from various communities who all had different beliefs and practices. Even though I was never fluent in either language, my ability to understand and converse in both dialects (SWAHILI AND ENGLISH) helped me connect with people from diverse backgrounds. This multi- language upbringing has enriched my perspective, allowing me to embrace both my heritage and the diverse influences of the urban world I grew up in. Apart from that, having studied the most of my school life in Kenya, I would say gave me a cutting edge to get to know more people and learn new skills that ended up being helpful in my life up to this day. In addition to that, I went to a boarding school for the most time of my school time in Kenya but mainly when I was in high school. One thing you need to realize about Kenyan high schools is that they typically differ to the schooling experiences in the Us. In Kenya, it is common for students to live away from their families to focus on their studies and develop independence in some areas of our lives. This experience was a significant part of my life as I learned to navigate life without constant support from my parents. This navigation was brought about by the fact that we were not able to rely entirely on our parents as we needed to make some decisions there and then. Through this, I would say it helped me become more confident in my own decision-making abilities towards various situations in school and also in my life today. While the transition was challenging at first, it helped me build resilience, time management skills, and sense of responsibility. Boarding school also allowed me to form close friendships and gain a deeper understanding of myself and others.

Even though I felt a sense of belonging from my city life experience, I still felt a bit separated from my community as I never learnt my language (ABAGUSII). This tended to cause

a type of conflict for my parents as my siblings, and I would go to visit my grandparents in Kisii. Normally, my siblings and I were not really driven by the pressure of learning our sub-language when we were young but immediately, we got older, the tension rose. Many times, during our visit there, it was tradition for people even not familiar with you to come have tea in your house as a way of showing that the community is welcomed , so at times my siblings and I would wake up in the morning finding just a bunch of random people in our house just munching on our food. As tradition dictated, we would greet them before they greeted us as they were our elders. What I disliked from their greetings was that they would use the language assuming we understood it and when they would realize that we are not, they would start criticizing our parents as to why they never taught us to speak the language and at times due to their increase in complains, we started to understand when they would start their complaints again. This criticism ended up flooding into most of the community which led to people starting to speak ill of my family, even creating non-realistic stories. To be sincerely honest, I would say that there was a time I was interested in learning the language but after my family faced all the criticism, I really lost interest in doing so. Aside from the criticism, I came and decided for my benefit to learn it bit by bit for my own benefit rather than doing it for the benefit of others. As we speak, I am not able to speak fluently but have learned to pronounce some words and I can now understand when one is talking to me by relating the topic a hand.

Over the years, I felt a sense of separation between my life back in the city with that of the countryside due to the language barrier, but I came to accept the fact we are all born with different personalities and traits but it is better to encourage rather than trying to force something upon someone. There was a time when I sat at family gatherings slowly stretching my exaggerated smile pretending to understand a dialect that felt more like a secret code than a native tongue. This essay is for anyone who has ever felt that pressure to conform. I basically

learned that belonging doesn't always come from perfect pronunciation or tradition, it comes from being honest about who you are and finding your own way to connect. By taking the initiative to have the basic understanding of my language I felt as if I had just created a bridge connecting two worlds together just like the Bridge of Americas connects north and south America. While writing this, I took a flash back on every activity and new traditions I grew up under and I could not be more grateful for my parents besides facing constant critics from their family and the community itself, they have never forced or pressured me to learn the sub-language and for that I will always be grateful. Of course, there were times that even if they were furious because I did not show interest but to it but always encouraged me to do everything not only learning our sub-language but also in everything, I do to perform it for my benefit not to please others. Through this act of my family standing by not only my side but also my siblings', this impacted to our family being close enough to share when they had problems or had issues to address which I believe was a huge milestone we had to practice as we were not in the instance to do so in the past. Looking back, I would say that traditions really made a significant impact on my life in the present.