

# **Cultural Diversity or Orchestrated Insensitivity to the Other**

## **A treatise from Zab Maboungou**

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When one is not accustomed to taking the long view of history, and it is in the making, deplorable shortcuts that impoverish the relationship between the political and the cultural can be expected. And with good reason, since the approach in this country, from the outset, has been well-rooted in the obliteration of the other.

We have, in effect, done what is necessary to avoid unduly slowing progress toward our historical destiny, lest an awareness emerges, which would prove costly in many regards. Thus, when other "others" arrive in our "homeland," it is, of course, necessary to make sure they fit into the accepted framework, in accordance with which they will be invited to fully participate in the so-called host society.

What more could be wanted?

Cultural diversity, replete with its undeniable potential for profitability, and boasted of in all international forums, stands sentinel. As long as these "diverse people" – some more diverse than others – don't take themselves too seriously and do not put a stain on our conscience they are tolerated. These people, only just fully emancipated, can then hint at non-convergent identities.

One way to manage all this is to oversee diversity, by making sure that a worthy representative of the host society plays the role of diversity supervisor, regardless of the fields in question. This supervision makes it possible, within a system built on pervasive ignorance, to ensure that everyone can benefit from and feed on societal benevolence. And let's not confuse society and culture: the latter, when it does not correspond to the official culture, is just an accessory.

It is well past time to rethink this process. Is this not what is proposed by interculturalism, whereby cultures interact and integrate into a social whole?

Cultural mediation, you say?

Cheerfully mimicking France and its republic, we are quick to speak of communitarianism and ghettos whenever faced with something about which we are shamelessly ignorant, but which we acknowledge precisely – to arise from the custom-made accessories.

Daily special or “à la carte?” Some play the game. Others are offside.

Consequently, for some time now, asphyxiation has been gaining ground, spreading, entering all fields: it arises from well-meaning denial that even ignorance can no longer justify. Meanwhile, those who see themselves reflected in each other mingle “naturally” and rub shoulders in places whose guardians they believe themselves to be, keeping the choicest positions for themselves and providing for their successors, as well as for their own fine days.

In Quebec, any attempt to denounce this state of affairs, unveils a frightening reality, as evidenced by our most recent major cultural demonstrations. They invariably end with a statement that takes the form of a profession of good faith aimed at completely absolving the so-called host society of any blame that might raise doubts about its good intentions.

When it comes to this, the media are experts. As are those who say, or think, they represent art and culture, and persist in this belief on the basis of a generally shared complacency and the unshakeable assurance that they are deservedly masters in their own house.

Attempts at reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and cultural diversity initiatives are demonstrably not immune to this trend, which is undermining the numerous efforts to change the status quo.

The fact is that these efforts cannot succeed without the due representation, in terms of education, expertise and openness (that's right...), that this engagement requires, including, of course, in the field of arts and culture.

Failing which, Blackface and Yellowface will continue to crop up on our stages, with no bad intent, but simply as an accessory in the service of art, culture and entertainment.

In the midst of all this, we will redouble efforts to encourage interaction and dialogue with Indigenous peoples, whose cultures precede us all, and which we still must hope will be able to welcome us.

Perhaps in time we will be worthy of this.