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Is cultural diversity our biggest assest or liability? by Deborahswa

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A nation is enriched by the people within it. The more diverse they are the more we are enriched as a whole, and the more we grow as individuals. I firmly believe that cultural diversity is our biggest asset â€“ but then how can it also be a liability? The answer really is simple â€“ in trying to help people retain their cultural heritage or ethnic identity we manage to lose the message about UNITY.

UNITY is something we â€“ as a nation â€“ apparently strive for, but itâ€™s the one goal we consistently fa achieve. The UK Government searches desperately to identify what is â€•Britishnessâ€• so that it can bring a sense of belonging and UNITY to the nation. It has consistently failed to do so. I believe that is because, in spite of searching for our distinctive core values, they have not dug deep enough into the values of the nation and fundamentally do not understand about our Cultural Code.

Why is it that the French are very secure in who they are and why do Americans pride themselves on taking the oath of allegiance and flying the flag? Why is it they seem to have UNITY â€“ at least to the concept of nationhood â€“ and we do not? Thatâ€™s because they are French or American before they are anything else.

People have gone to America to start a new life â€“ and create a new home; for most of them there was no turning back. They had to pull together so that they could survive. They went to the â€™New Worldâ€™ to become American. It is not surprising, then, that Americans have a very strong sense of home that extends further than bricks and mortar; it extends to the land â€“ their homeland that they had to cultivate. Americans have a very strong sense of â€˜bringing their boys homeâ€™ when they go off to war and openly celebrate with yellow ribbons and parades when they are repatriated. Thus the concepts of home, homeland, and nationhood are all strongly intertwined.

The British have a very strong sense of home in the sense of the physical space in which they live. The idea that â€œan Englishmanâ€™s home is his castleâ€• was famously given context by Sir Edward C first Lord Justice and framer of the Petition of Rights(1628). Over the following three centuries it has remained true that, in Britain, our homes have been enshrined by law and tradition as an area free from state interference â€“ somewhere we can be ourselves and drop our guard. This is what the British truly value â€“ owning a piece of land where no one can tell them how to behave or how to worship. Where we can be the individual that God created us to be. It has to be remembered that before 1628 religious persecution had been rife and the nation swapped from being Catholic to Protestant and back and forth with many dying for their beliefs. We didnâ€™t have to fight our enemies on the beaches we had to fight them on our thresholds. And this is deep in our psyche.

The British have only suffered the threat of invasion without suffering occupation by an enemy force for nearly 1000 years. How different a story from the French, whose attitude to their homes is far more transient? Their hearts belong to â€˜La Patrieâ€™ not to their rented accommodation. They have fought, spilled their blood and died on their own soil to keep their nation intact. No wonder they have a very great sense of being French.

For every culture â€˜homeâ€™ is one of the most important concepts. However, it does not always equate to a physical space. Nomadic Arab tribes have a strong sense of home though they are always moving and reconstructing their living accommodation â€“ their intricately designed tents. Home for them is belonging to their tribe â€“ not nationhood. The French and American concept of home is less concerned with owning a piece of land or a house (although it is important to Americans) and more to do with the concept of homeland. For the Brits, the concept of home is everything to do with our own physical space.

When immigrants come to Britain we help them set up home and start a new life. At the same time, we help them to celebrate their ethnicity and hold on to their own traditions â€“ so they can be themselves in their new home. In my experience, when immigrants come to this country they are looking for a new life and want to start afresh. Many have escaped appalling circumstances and lost their homes. They arrive wanting the chance of a better life. They arrive wanting a sense of belonging, of UNITY with their new homeland.

I believe that the UNITY the government so craves for us will be difficult to achieve as long as they fail to realise that the British cultural code for â€˜homeâ€™ is FREEDOM. While they discuss what the distinctive British values are so we can have a better sense of British identity â€“ in order to bring about social cohesion â€“ they will forever be chasing their tales.

What they fail to recognize is that the concept of Britishness is more civic than ethnic. Britishness has been superimposed on top of other identities â€“ Scots, Welsh, English â€“ so being British has always allowed for multiple identities. Britishness and multiculturalism could be argued to be synonymous. For the British, a sense of nationhood cannot be forged from flags, from ceremonials, from statements of values or even from definitions of citizenship â€“ because Britishness is all about the FREEDOM to be ourselves.

Multiculturalism will be our greatest asset when all of the inhabitants of these islands believe that they are equal and valued citizens irrespective of whatever identity they may individually select to prioritise. When Britishness stands for equality of rights and sovereignty of the people, shorn of rank and â€˜antiquated elementsâ€™, dedicated to tackling racial and sexual discrimination, then you will have UNITY and the sense of belonging that we all crave at heart.

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Hello, I'm Deborah Swallow and, for the last fifteen years, I've worked in over thirty countries addressing the complexities of people working internationally across multiple cultures or a Cultural diversity so individuals and organizations alike can gain an authentic competitive edge and win in international markets.

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