

Text N°5: Being Proudly African

I recently engaged a group of people in a conversation in which I was lamenting the loss of our culture in Ghana. The rice we consume is imported from America and Thailand, for as long as we promote fried rice over plantain, it means our plantain farmers will have less of a market. And this will lead to unemployment, which can lead to crime. The norm in our shops and on the streets is now apples and grapes. It's great to have the option of eating a variety of foods, fruits and vegetables. However, each time we mock our local foods in favour of the imported ones, we kill the life of the local farmer.

Each time a woman in Africa buys Brazilian hair, she empowers the Asian economy because it is not Africans who are producing these products. If you encourage women to wear their natural hair, you are considered radical. Today in Ghana, the majority of women wear Brazilian, Peruvian or Indian hair. This is not all. They top the fake with Taiwanese nails and China-made eyelashes.

I don't understand why the right to choose means those of us who choose to respect our cultures and traditions are made to feel as if we are wrong. When I talk about young boys walking around the streets of Ghana with their underwear showing, I am told the world is moving forward. So I have to ask, forward to what? Today the way some Ghanaian women dress leaves very little to the imagination. Most of these women are walking around looking like hookers. But because they dress like Rihanna and Beyoncé, this makes it acceptable. If I were to dress as my ancestors did, I would be considered a mad woman. If it's African, it's crazy. If it's from America or Europe, it's fashionable. So once again the freedom to choose means those of us who choose the African way are stupid.

Driving around Ghana, you will notice a number of billboards advertising skin-bleaching products. Again, it is the right of any individual to choose to bleach their skin. However, their choice affects me because if I don't conform and bleach my skin too, I will be considered ugly. It's not uncommon to hear of our actresses bleaching their skin to get roles. But why should I have to bleach my skin to get a job? Why can't I keep the black skin my God created me with and still have an equal chance when it comes to competing with others? (...)

That is the problem with the African of today. The rights to choose- but it seems all their choices are about choosing not to be African any more. As another year begins, I think we need to take some time, out and really ask ourselves, what are the choices we are making? And more importantly, how do these choices affect African society as a whole? In any way, these are just the reflections of an ordinary African woman.

Adapted from Akua DJANIE, *New African*, December 2013, pp. 40-41.