

## FUNTUFUNEFU – UNITY IN DIVERSITY

It is important to recognise the fact that the people who advocate and carry out these mindless attacks on their African sisters and brothers are in desperate need of education. By “education” I don’t mean that they necessarily have to go to school – I’m referring to exposure to knowledge about themselves and the circumstances that inform the situation that they are trapped in.

We as artists must use our gifts and skills to alleviate them from this state of mind. I speak from several decades of experience in different parts of the world of utilising my creative gifts to resolve conflict. These experiences include working in Bosnia during a time when the inter-ethnic hostilities were still fresh. I used my skills in the Liberian refugee camps in West Africa, where my music was instrumental in literally averting a skirmish between opposing factions. As in Bosnia, I created the music jointly with the participants in a shared circle, in which our differences were subsumed by the unifying circle. We all together performed, with soloists taking to the centre when their turn came.

The key to the success of these sessions is the dissolution of the false boundaries that we erect between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In my personal experience, the space between the ‘performer’ and the ‘audience’ is eradicated, thus making us all part of a harmonised immersive whole unit. I cultivated this technique when I was growing up in a violent township in South Africa. As a teenager I used theatre, poetry and storytelling to address local issues including water shortages and the violence of predatory gangsters directed at shack dwellers.

So here’s a simple practical proposal: We gather into a reasonably sized group consisting of artists originating from South Africa and other African countries – musicians, poets, spoken word artists, storytellers, filmmakers, dramatists, dancers, painters, designers, etc.

We identify a particular ‘hotspot’ in one of the localities where some of these incidents have occurred. Make contact with the principal protagonists and arrange to meet with them on their ‘turf’.

We obtain every participant’s permission to document the entire process.

The ‘meeting’ will not proceed in the ‘normal’ conventional fashion of sitting and talking, but through the use of spontaneous improvisation in a circle. We will play creative games and generally evolve the environment of our gathering into one that is conducive to relaxation, trust, openness, self-respect, mutual respect and, above all, love.

We invite each participant to bring to the circle a small item/object that symbolises their personal story or the story of their personal journey. Each person in the circle is given a chance to articulate the essence of their personal item/object in the context of their life. This will lead to us all feeling at ease about being different yet occupying a common space. Once we have reached this point, we the artists then use our given creative skills to collectively explore the issues at stake. Benefitting from the heightened awareness that our given skills engender, we proceed to encourage individuals concerned about and involved in the perceived social encroachments to express themselves...

We develop towards a cadence that in no way is intended to be a definitive solution to the problems at hand, but a resolution in terms of having arrived at a point of collective and individual clarity about genuine **UBUNTU – I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE.**

If there is any particular objective of such an exercise, it is the attainment of inner peace and light as the composite foundation upon which we can each – and therefore all – build a future informed by love and not hate.

I am prepared to find the funding to travel to South Africa to help make this vision manifest.

**Eugene Skeef – 4 September 2019**