



Hi Marta

While i was in Bali this past month I started writing a text for Es Baluard, but looking back on it from home it feels self-righteous and jumbled. So my default is to write to you as I often do, and hopefully this process will find its way to an acceptable text. You will help me.

It is so, and understandable, that Africans are deeply, overly, concerned about their 'identity'. Particularly, it seems to me, South Africans - who are schizophrenic about the conflicting influences of indigenous heritage, evangelical conversion, colonisation, slavery, ubuntu, oppression, Americanisation, Africanisation, xenophobia and giving sanctuary to refugees and adventurers...A cauldron of emotions and ideologies, perhaps too spicy for the 'western' pallet.

Africa is in a 'post-colonial' era. But in many ways, colonization continues, altering only its means of manifestation. It is more subtle... rather than the butt of the gun, it is now a compote of commerce and distorted values that have colonized the brain... These insidious means may explain the tense resistance and sometimes violent objection to its continuing presence. There is amongst young African thinkers a need to destroy the symbols and patterns of colonization.

It is understandable, but it is living in the past. In the present, the reality is that there are white people and black and all the colors between, together trying to make their way through a dark past to a better present. There are good and bad buildings, gardens and wastelands, developments and dereliction. These realities are what we can change, build on and enjoy for what they are and what they are able to be. The concentration on re-arranging the past is a diversion from what can be done today. Starting with our inner selves.

Which makes allowance for me to indulge in thoughts about my own identity and my way of addressing the challenges...

I am an 'African'...

I consider myself from this place. This piece of earth and this unique society, torn and diverse. Equally I am of European stock with inculcated reverence for the values that centuries of (misguided) development and dominance have imposed on most of the world.

I suppose that the record will show me as a 64 year old white South African...former maverick lawyer who escaped for a remote life at NIROX, vainly fostering the arts in the Cradle of Humankind, a Unesco World Heritage Site steeped in the ancient landscape on the western outskirts of Johannesburg. I am not much concerned nor in accord with this record.

I am here by hazard - displaced by the inhumanity of the Russian pogroms and Hitler's destruction of my forbearers - due to a religion that i never chose. I am equally and unavoidably a product of the privilege that white people still enjoy from the oppression and dehumanisation of others less fortunate for the colour of their skin.

So it is, I find myself a white 'African' – at once the unwitting privileged beneficiary and the victim of human prejudice and greed.



I have the material wealth and the emotional scars to prove it.

It is an uncomfortable place, but it is also filled with prospects and possibilities, where all is not yet 'set' and a difference can be wrought. Though it seems pious, it's a place I feel bound to commit my life to as some kind of penance, and a duty to help put right in my way the pall of the past.

For all this, I am unsure of and largely unconcerned about my 'identity' in these terms. My interest in identity is concerned with what makes me a separate being from the material and immaterial world around me - more exactly, what is the nature of my existence? And this question is unconcerned with my age, or my heritage as a human, or my relations with other humans. These are icing. I am looking for the cake.

I am an 'artist'...

In my family I was 'expected' to be an artist. Making art absorbed most of my early life, but things went wrong and I was sucked into commerce. I continued drawing and making art, alone and out of context with that world. Now, looking towards life's closure, I think myself again an artist...and I find myself helpful to artists who visit the residency that I have established in the sacred space of NIROX. Art envelopes me again as it did until my early twenties.

My activities as an artist – the process of conceiving and making something that was not before and the inexplicable fascination with a process and outcome that has no 'purpose' or 'use' – comes closest to defining or explaining my existence...Making art and making love; I mean intimate love, not Christian love, which is something else with its own virtues, but something quite different...And being in and at one with nature...These things define me. This is my identity.

It has nothing much to do with where I am situate or how I came to be there.

And so...



*Marta Moriarty*

I return to African identity, and what diverse Africans regardless of color, should be doing about our present and our future. What systems must change? What attitudes? How do we organize and construct the fabric of society and our place on the land?

No doubt there are many possible ways of seeing. For me, addressing the outside will forever fail. Humans have lost their way...living overwhelmingly in their brains and under the misconception of the superior importance of their species.

The answer lies more in knowing who we are – each of us – than organizing how we engage with each other and the universe. Knowing this will unavoidably negate our ‘differences’ and our competitiveness with each other and other material being. African or European or American or Oriental simply should not matter enough to occupy our time.

Without doubt there is a lot that needs to change. But this cannot be taught or systemized. Sustainable change comes from within. And its manifestation will prove itself, as it has for me...in my eyes...through the physical place and the relations at NIROX; in the making of art, whatever its outcome; in the people, animals and land around me. We have our own ways. This is mine.

I pause there, not really knowing what to say next. I am not finished. I never will be...

You will tell me.

What you think...

xxx