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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

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On Historical Consciousness

Who are you? Did you define yourself? Or were you defined by another? Is your self definition consistent with historical reality? Does your historical memory work for or against you? The answers to all these questions delineate the importance of historical consciousness. What exactly is 'historical consciousness'? Collectively it refers to a people's actual historical narrative, but more importantly it refers to their attitudes towards that narrative. It answers the issues of the reason the Creator created them and placed them in the circumstances that they find themselves. The historical consciousness is a vital element of the original nature (*fitra*) and is the ontological indication of Divine Unity (*tawheed*). The innate recognition of the Oneness of the Creator, and the unity of existence, results from a unification of the self, where the unconscious and the conscious are integrated in a symbiotic whole, where the individual sees himself or herself apart of a family, social unit, a nation and an universe which is connected and cohesively apart of a on going historical narrative. This is vitally important when trying to lay the foundations for a historical consciousness which is necessary in fusing the conscious with the unconscious in resolving the problems associated with slavery, colonialism and domestic colonization. These problems although resulting from physical and tangible trauma also lead inevitably to psychological and psychic trauma which, in many cases, is far more debilitating against a people than the former. Allah ta'ala says:

﴿وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ﴾

"And social strife is more severe than actual slaughter." He also says:

﴿وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ﴾

"And social strife is greater than actual slaughter." In both *Qur'anic* verses Allah ta'ala is indicating that the trauma of social strife resulting from injustice, slavery, oppression and the social repression of domestic colonization is far worse than actually killing the people outright. In this sense the freedom fighter finds in struggle and death a far more attractive end than a continued existence as a slave or colony. The Last Poets summed it up when they said:

"Blessed are those who struggle - Oppression is worse than the grave

It's better to die for a noble cause - Than to live and die a slave!"

It is for this reason that some modern scholars insist that collective historical amnesia resulting from the trauma of slavery, genocide or some form of domestic colonization can only be resolved through a collective reviving of that historical consciousness.¹ The history of a people exists in spite of their ignorance of it. It is apart of them and informs the present reality, in spite of their ability to know what exactly is informing it. Because history is in many ways an unconscious phenomenon,

¹ Joseph K. Adjaye, "Kwame Nkrumah and the Legacy of African Identity", unpublished paper, pp. 3-4.

this revival of the historical consciousness is in effect a spiritual endeavor and constitutes an aspect of existence which modern scientists are unwilling to recognize, or are incapable of measuring: - the miraculous event (*karamaat*).²

The entire history of the *Banu Isra'il* is predicated on the belief that they would be scattered throughout the earth and stripped of their connection with God, denuded of their historical consciousness or any knowledge of their past; and that those responsible for this trauma against God's People would take advantage of this spiritual and mental disconnect and subject God's People, robbing them of their birth right and enriching themselves in turn. The disconnect and subjugation would persist until the End of Time, when a miraculous event (*karaamaat*) would occur where these Lost Children of Abraham would rediscover themselves and reconnect to their collective historical memory and spiritual heritage. This 'reconnect' because it is a miracle will be measurable scientifically and explainable quantifiably and will not be based upon historical fallacy and leaps of imagination. This is in spite of, or because of the barriers intentionally placed to prevent this reconnect or 'return' from occurring. And because the historical consciousness constitutes the most impregnable fortress against all forms of oppression from the outside world, this miraculous 'remembering' will be the first building block in the reconstruction of God's People, and will be the key symbol for the beginning of the end of that system which oppressed them. No one said it better than the leading scientist of our people, Dr. Diop who said in an axiomatic fashion: "In the face of cultural aggression of all sorts, in the face of all disintegrating factors of the outside world, the most efficient weapon with which a people can arm itself is this feeling of historical continuity."³

The reality of historical consciousness is that it allows the present to carry messages from the past and the past to deliver messages to the present, but more importantly, it unites the collective historical subconscious with the cognizant present and permits dynamic actions which in effect preempt any and all debilitating actions or assimilationist social policies from those intent on maintaining the systems of oppression, or at least sustaining some form of continued domestic colonization. Historical consciousness contains two vital elements which in and of themselves require some form of political sovereignty in order to survive; they are: 'collective memory' and 'communicative memory'.

Collective memory unlike individual memory describes the common store of knowledge about the past that is shared by a collective group of people, be they a linguistic group, religious group, ethnic or cultural group. Thus, their collective memory can "be decisive for socio-political developments".⁴ This collective memory requires institutions to archive and preserve it for future generations. These institutions require some form of authorization and sway, which in turns require some form of autonomy or sovereignty. This logically leads to the next vital element of historical consciousness, which is communicative memory. Communicative memory is the collective memory of a group which they intentionally transmit to succeeding generations. It is thus institutionalized intergenerational communication about a people's language, culture, religion or ethnic history which distinguishes them from others. Its preservation and transmission is so vital that international resolutions have

² Chad Habel, "Ancestral Narratives and Historical Consciousness", p. 2

³ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, (Lawrence Hill Books, Brooklyn, 1991), 212.

⁴ Marina Grasse & Andrea Zemskow-Zuge, "The Future Needs Remembering – Remembering Needs the Future!: Short Glossary and Introduction to Analytical Work with Oral Accounts of Life Stories", unpublished paper, p. 2.

been established by the international community guaranteeing its recognition and status in multinational states where it is feared that a dominant majority can swallow up a national minority. Again the communicative memory requires some form of autonomy, empowerment and sovereignty in order for it to function properly. This was the fundamental reason behind the establishment of UN Resolution Article 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which reads:

“In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”⁵

Historical consciousness is not romanticism about the past, nor an attempt to turn back the clock. It constitutes *tajdeed* (revitalization) at its highest form because it is a readjustment of the self and the community with the best *Sunnan* of the past which have been passed down generation after generation going back to the *Sunna* of the Best of Creation, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. *Shehu* Uthman ibn Fuduye` said in his last testament to the nation:

"إتباعا لسبيل ءابائي واقتفاء لآثار أجدادي الذين سلفوا من كونهم ذوي الرشد والإرشاد والتدريس والجهاد في سبيل الله لاعلاء الدين واتساعه وابلاغه، إمتثالا لأمر النبي وإجابة لسوآله صلى الله عليه وسلم في قوله: ((بلغوا غني ولو آية))، وهذا وراثتنا ووراثة ءابائنا وأجدادنا، ونحن عليها دون الملك والسلطنة مع البغي والظلم، فمن اقتدى بنا فهو منّا، ومن لا فلا، وليكن عليه كل محبنا من الإخوان والأولاد والأحباب، بل كل ممثّل بأمرنا، وراض بقولنا، ومجيب لسوالنا...ينبغي أو الواجب على كل مؤمن عاقل اقتفاء آثار آبائه المؤمنين وإتباع سبيل أجداده الصالحين والإقتداء بهم، ولذلك اقتديت بأجدادي في أخذ السنة جدا لأكون دليلا على الخير مثلهم، لأن الدال على الخير كفاعله بعد ثواب استعماله ذلك الخير".

“...following the ways of my fathers and imitating the traces of my grandfathers who have passed. This is because our ancestors were the people of uprightness, guidance, learning, and struggle in the Way of Allah against the enemies of the religion; in order to make it wide and to deliver it. I am doing this following the command of the Prophet and answering his call when he said, may Allah bless him and grant him peace: “Deliver the message from me even if it is just a single verse...This is our inheritance and the inheritance of our grandfathers. We are upon that mission without being kings and rulers who practice oppression and injustice. And those who follow me in that then they are from me, and if not, then not! So that all those who love me from the brothers, the descendents and loved ones, rather all those who follow my commands and are content with my teachings and have answered my call – may know that ...it is necessary and obligatory for every reasonable believer to follow the traces of their believing ancestors, to follow the Way of their righteous

⁵ United Nations Publication. Protection of Minorities, Sales No. 67, XIV 4, p.41.

grandfathers and imitate them. For this reason, I have chosen to imitate my grandfathers in adhering to the *Sunna* strongly so that I can be a guide to what is good like they were; for the one who guides to what is good is like the one who does that same good and will attain the reward of those who act on it.”⁶

Thus the revival of the historical consciousness is a proactive action not a negative reaction. It is neither an offensive ‘in your face’ manifestation of one’s cultural dominance nor a defensive retreat in the face of cultural domination. The revival of the historical consciousness is a reconstruction of the actuality of history, or the presence of the past, as a preemptive mechanism, or deterrent; much like a *ribaat* (military fortress) which lies between the enemies and ‘mans the gates’ on behalf of the people. It unites the past with the present and allows the people collectively to prognosticate what actions they must take for their future. Thus, historical consciousness is not a ‘reaction’ to repression; it is a preemption of it and acts as a cordon against all toxic mental constructs designed to debilitate one’s sense of independence and self determination.

Like *jihad*, which is neither defensive nor offensive, but ‘*fi sabillillahi*’, ‘historical consciousness’ constitutes both an offensive and defensive element, but it is also medicinal, preservative, empowering and revitalizing. Genuine historical consciousness does not seek to dismiss the present nor is it an idealization or romanticizing of the past; a kind historical opiate designed to make one forget the immediate presence. On the contrary historical consciousness makes a person ‘*ibn waqtihi*’ (the offspring of his moment), because he is acutely aware of his past and his connection with the best aspects of his ancestors; he becomes the living paradigm of that tradition interacting with the presence; and thus he assures that this revitalized tradition not only has a place in the future, but defines the future. One of the Sons of Africa, the great intellectual and freedom fighter, Amilcar Cabral said in his memorial lecture at Syracuse University:

“A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture. Thus, it may be seen that if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.”

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⁶ Abu Muhammad Sa`d Uthman ibn Fuduye ibn Uthman, Wasiyya Shaykh Uthman ibn Fuduye`, (Gaskiyya Press, 1967). pp. 5-6.