

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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## **The Adult in the Room Nafsi ya Jamii By Wilson Riles BC Columnist**

That term, "the adult in the room," has a complex, sometimes biased meaning. I do not intend to imply that there is not an obvious difference between adults and children. However, I want to raise up to your consideration the **false**, unvoiced assumption buried in that term: **that the adult is always right**. I know that many people are able to quickly reject that buried assumption and many are able to keep open a bit of their mental-ear to the possibility that the child in the room might be the one who should be listened to in order to reach the best result. The child is living with the circumstances of the moment. Some cultures **highlight** and call for **continuous** attention to the possibility of valuable truths from the mouths of children. In the Judeo-Christian belief system we have the statement in the Hebrew Scripture (*Psalms 8:2*) and it's reiteration in the Gospels in **Matthew 21:16**: "*And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*" In Buddhism there is the lesson of the "mind of a child." It is considered wisdom to understand that truth does not always come from the top of the hierarchy of power and privilege. Wherever you are on any social comparison scale - in terms of **age**, sex, gender, "race," wealth, education, or heritage - those on the top, those so-called "adults-in-the-room," are not always the ones who know best or those who should be followed.

It seems natural to give more weight to what adults say because we assume their age gives them more experience with the difficult decisions in life. Adults are also almost always **festooned** with the power symbols that we expect those who have "successfully"

navigated difficulties to have and wear; these special clothes, marked up pieces of identifying paper, habits of language, and other indices of social status facilitate our quick identification of the right adult and our assumption of the right subservient attitude (for younger, lesser status persons). Our cultures "lull" us into certain mental postures while it, at the same time (but mostly in wisdom stories) **signals us** to listen for the truth that is in the words of subservient children. **Which direction will your mental processes flow** - being tugged in two different directions by your cultures?

*Hold that question for a moment. Let me now play out the role of the "adult in the room" as it concerns this election. Let me warn you that the adult role slips too easily into haughtiness, condescension, disdain, and assumed superiority. However, relax. I am not going to lecture anyone on how they should vote. Neither am I going to tell anyone how I am going to vote. Just know that I am going to vote.*

As the adult in this room, though, I must tell you that **voting in the U.S. is a game**. In many ways - ways that you already know, I do not have to tell you - the voting game is bent and often fixed. Your play (**your vote**) has been severely marginalized. The original voting system upon which the current system is constructed was never intended to give us (PEONS) a voice! That the Electoral College is still the body that **really chooses** the president is just one of the remaining, almost immovable bedrocks of the original system. Such **antidemocratic** factors bend the voting system so much that the candidates focus most of their resources and their attention on a very small number of unrepresentative voters. Each of us is marginalized both as individuals and collectively in how our vote is weighted.

As the adult in the room I must tell you that campaigns are far from opportunities to give us information so that we can more knowledgeably exercise our democratic right. Rather, campaigns are opportunities for intense manipulation of our emotional "buttons," for the sowing of confusion, and for out-right lying. **Campaigns present an orgy in that otherwise most vile of things - propaganda**. It was the Nazis' use of propaganda for political purposes that gave propaganda its **bad name**. Before the Nazis it was associated with a kind of religious proselytizing; it rose to recognition as a communications practice in the tugging for European individuals' faith commitments in the 1600s during the Protestant Revolution. After the Nazis, the practice migrated to Madison Avenue and it became the chief means for 'pulling the wool over our eyes' and feeding corporations. Hitler and his people were very good at propaganda but

they could not **hold-a-candle** to the propagandist of today! A lot of earth's resources, a lot of the product of human muscle, and a lot of the ingenuity of the human mind is being wasted **to play this vile game on us** using precise pre-tested presentation-bombs that mostly manipulate our emotions to high levels of stress.

This adult says, "**know that this is a game being played on you.**" We may want to play the game. We may even believe that we have to play the game to honor those who died so that we could when they could not when they were alive. We have very few options to influence things to any degree. Almost all of us do play in some way; if you stress about the election in any way, you are playing the game even if you do not vote yourself. If you are stressed, then the propagandists are getting to you. The propagandists have succeeded with you. Know that you are in the midst of a game that is about pushing the lowest common denominator to get you to do what somebody else wants you to do. It is the height of corporate commercial manipulation: salesmanship, flimflam. Like (electoral) cattle we have been run through the maze of mental fences until we are faced with their well designed (over designed) decision forking point. For more than 90% of us they have prodded, trained, and manipulated us until they know exactly which choice we are going to make. And they are getting their last hot-licks on the less predictable few.

Children, knowing that this is a game means knowing that we are in this **but** we do not have to be of this. Propagandists target the juvenile aspect of us. No matter our age, we have a juvenile aspect to our thinking. The organic brain connections that assist adults to make "better" judgments develop in our mid 20s but they do not erase our juvenile connections. It is those more emotionally responsive pathways that propagandists target, not the deliberative faculties of our forebrains. And it is the false trappings and false festooning with the symbols of potency and power that are the most deceiving.

Many of us did not sufficiently deliberate last time, not that we would have chosen McCain. We responded emotionally to the symbolism that was Obama and now we are deeply disappointed that he is not what we put on him. That is not Obama's fault. That is us for getting swept up in the game. We will not be using our marginalized influence to choose an icon, a superhero, a king, or a mythological champion. We will have simply a minor influence on the choosing of an "American" politician who will be irretrievably stuck in an undemocratic, unjust "American" political system. Obama does not rise above the game; he is a part of it. This time know better who he is when you take your

action. Romney is clear to me...he has never failed to be who I know him to be. Regardless of whom you vote for or even whether you choose to vote, know that true democracy is not this game we play in the US. We will still have an enormous amount of work to do to **fundamentally** change our unjust systems and wake ourselves up so that we are not so easily manipulated. That is the adult lesson.

*Lastly, let's get back to the question with which we began this column. We do not have to choose between being the adult and being the child! We are not stuck in an either/or paradigm foisted on us by some aspects of Western Culture. Wisdom sayings and stories in many cultures encourage us to adopt states of wholeness and integration. Our deliberative intelligence can be integrated with our soaring emotions; we can find that place of emotional intelligence. When we hold our cultures deeply, knowing that we are inseparable from cultural channeling, and knowing how our buttons are pushed, we are less vulnerable to the manipulations of propagandists. Know thy self. We can be inspired by lofty rhetoric without being carried away by it. We can see and hear the "noise" symbolizing potency and power and know it for what it is: noise. We can speak to ourselves as adults, without being condescending or pedantic, being humble and accepting of the possibility that the child in us might be right. And the adult in us is worthy of being heard.*

*[Note: Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to "The Soul Community"]*

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