

FAMILY MATTERS

CHICKENS IN THE BUS



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Chickens in the bus? Yes, in rural Africa, you might find chickens in the bus. Is that funny? Perhaps. Is it embarrassing? I don't think so. In my

book, *Africans and Americans: Embracing Cultural Differences*, I tell Americans that if they visit my village, they will be well received. When they leave, they will get a live chicken, a very significant gift for a guest. That is part of our culture. You go into the bus with your live chicken under your arm. I know Americans find this funny, and many Africans find it embarrassing. However, I talk about such things with confidence, knowing that the Africans are not dumb.

There is nothing wrong with carrying chickens in the bus. I tell Africans and Americans that I often see Americans carrying dogs in their cars. The Americans are comfortable with that. I have not seen them trying to explain their practices to the

Africans. So, why are some Africans embarrassed to acknowledge that Africans carry chickens in the bus?

Such embarrassment is a result and a sign of colonial and neo-colonial miseducation, which gave the Africans the notion that African ways are backward and European or Western ways are the best. Consequently, many Africans will adopt anything Westerners do, believing that to imitate Western ways means to be modern. Some day, while embarrassed about chickens in the bus, these Africans will start carrying dogs in their cars.

There is nothing wrong in adopting foreign cultural practices, if there is equality and mutual respect among

all involved. In the present world, however, some cultures see and present themselves as superior to others and have imposed their perspective on others. There is cultural imperialism and cultural dependency. As victims of this situation, the Africans need to take corrective measures, including thinking for themselves, cultivating self-respect, and respect for their culture.

— Joseph L Mbele, who teaches in the English Department at St. Olaf College, is the author of the book, *Africans and Americans: Embracing Cultural Differences*, available online at:

<http://www.lulu.com/content/105001>
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