

Chidimma: A Reflection on Nationality, Globalisation and Pageantry

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Over the last few weeks, 23-year-old model Chidimma Vanessa Onwe Adetshina, has found herself at the centre of a debate concerning her nationality. This controversy has sparked discussion going beyond her identity. The discussion touches on deeper issues of globalisation, migration, national identity and what the true essence and relevance of pageantry in a world that is continuously evolving is. It's important to look at how South Africans could have approached this matter with empathy and inclusivity.

Adetshina is said to have a Nigerian father and a Mozambican mother. It is not clear if she has any citizenship of South Africa, Mozambique and Nigeria which raised questions and provoked a heated debate on social media about her eligibility to represent South Africa in the 2024 Miss South Africa pageant.

The scrutiny surrounding Adetshina's nationality revealed a gap in our collective approach and understanding of people's identity in this globalised world. In an era where borders are becoming increasingly irrelevant, the strict attachment to nationality as a symbol of belonging seems outdated. The South African government has failed to deliver what they promised to their citizens, citizens are targeting innocent people, subjecting them to public humiliation and social media sadistic treatment.

Adetshina's mixed cultural backgrounds should be seen as a celebration of the interconnected world we live in, rather than a cause for exclusion, national scrutiny and a spectacle of public rejection. South Africans could have handled this situation by embracing the idea that we are all part of a global community. The focus could have been on her achievements and the values she embodies.

The world is globalising quickly. Economic opportunities, cultural exchanges and technological advancements have made borders that once separated nations slightly irrelevant. More and more people are moving to other countries in search of better lives, often mirroring the patterns of capital to find opportunities for education, employment or personal growth. Migration has become a way of life for many. In this context, Adetshina's journey is part of a broader trend.

Pageants are not 'just another beauty contest' anymore. They are platforms for empowerment, diversity and intelligence. It plays an important role in shaping society's perception of issues faced by communities and real people at the grassroots level. Pageants have evolved and have the potential to be spaces of inclusion, where participants highlight their active role in their communities and at school. This platform can potentially unite women of all ages, backgrounds and races by encouraging them to embrace one another rather than compete. In so doing, the focus may prevent the exclusion of women who do not fit the convention, as well as harmful behaviour such as bullying.

Beauty pageants, historically driven by intense competition based on physical beauty, have normalised public scrutiny of women's bodies and set beauty standards leading to many social issues such as body shaming, enabling public opinions on women's appearances.

It is within this competitive and beauty-driven environment that Chidimma's experience becomes all too familiar. The questions about her nationality made her an easy target for criticism. Social media bullying is not uncommon, people are often criticised and judged according to strict standards, where differences are often highlighted as bad rather than celebrated.

The debate surrounding Adetshina's nationality offers an opportunity to reflect on broader issues affecting our world today. Globalisation is reshaping our identities, and migration is a natural response in the search for better opportunities. As we embrace these changes, it's important to ensure that platforms like pageantries are truly inclusive and empowering for all women.

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