WHY ARE AFRICANS SUCH "BAD" DRIVERS?

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Categories: Africa, Observations

I realise that the title of this post is a little controversial, to say the least. However, any European or North American who visits a major African city is likely to be amazed at the way that people drive. This worst driving tends to occur when there are traffic jams. Surprisingly, traffic jams are very common in Africa because most countries don't have enough capital to updgrad their roads to deal with the volumes of traffic. In Nairobi last week, the route to the house where I was staying led out of a small road onto a very busy road at a T junction. When the traffic started to move, just about everyone would try to squeeze out of the T junction at once, and though the road only had room for one lane of traffic in each direction, it was not unusual to see five lanes form as people tried to get past each other squeezing out of the main road. As a result, no traffic could turn into the small road because both carriageways were used by traffic going in one direction and the main road would get completely blocked too with five lines of traffic all trying to filter into one lane. Ugh!

Now, I'm not saying British drivers are perfect, but that sort of chaos would never happen here, so what's going on?

Western societies are 'rule based' and we follow the rules whatever else is going on. This means in traffic, things tend to flow quite smoothly here. African societies on the other hand, are 'relationship based', people base their actions on a web of relationships with other people. Now a car is a device which cuts you off from other people, it isolates you. If you don't believe me, just look at the way that people scratch themselves and such when they are waiting in a queue of traffic - they are in public view, but they act as if they are isolated. This isoloating effect of the car means that the social basis for African life and decision making is completely undermined and all of a sudden, it is everyone for himself.

The Western rule based society can be rather cold and uncaring at times, but it makes for very smooth traffic flow. African societies on the other hand are much warmer and people friendly, but when people are cut off from their contact with others, it makes for dreadful traffic problems!