



I focus

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TikTok, the clock is ticking down

TikTok is a popular video-sharing social media platform owned by a Chinese based company. It is just 9 years old and intended to create short videos which are either made up of fleeting dances, lip-synching or an opportunity for people to show-off an idea, a move or a moment.

It is probably one of the fastest growing social media platforms we have locally and possibly around the world. The feeling that you can express yourself and do so with liberty is a special sentiment that most of us long for. What is good is that social media is giving us this opportunity to find ways how to connect. In reality it is what people want most, what they value most and what they cannot do without. This is also a stark reminder that 'we' do not want to remain anonymous, but have a strong desire to make part of a community.

Notwithstanding, we seem to be failing miserably when it comes to connectivity. The more platforms we develop, the worse we seem to be getting at connecting and at keeping close to each other. The more we realise how important it is to keep close to each other, the more we seem to drift away.

It is intriguing that this and other platforms are gaining traction at a time when our communities are seeing an increase in anonymity. We no longer have 'a name to a face'. We are numbers, we are commodities and we are the object for the satisfaction of others. Somehow, we seem to ignore that our economic affluence and prosperity is really and truly an alienation of what is happening behind closed doors.

True, there exists a privileged category in our population which appears to be doing well; those who subscribe to the *Maltese Dream* and have the resources to go about spending on holidays, calling in for food-de-



Photo: Clément Falize @ Unsplash

livery, going on weekend breaks, purchasing designer clothes and going out to restaurants regularly. On the other hand there is another reality behind the corner, that many have a different social reality which is eating us up and, without even knowing, we are getting alienated by our own

personal gladness.

As we glance out of our comfort zone for even a moment, we soon realise that there are many who are in a dark place.

The irony is that as a society we seem to find comfort in celebrating the opening of a number of soup kitchens. A number of organizations like the Millen-

ium Chapel and government entities are having to provide food packages. People all over are struggling with making ends meet and those in danger of poverty are still significant in number. The working poor seems to be growing. Homelessness also appears to be gaining toehold. Some days ago,

I spoke with a social worker who is trying to help a family find alternative housing and she told me that she has been to most services and cannot find space for them. It seems that in certain social issues we are not keeping up, albeit the extent of money we put into social welfare.

Loneliness also remains a scourge. The amount of people I know who struggle day-in day-out is staggering. Facebook is one way of gauging the plea for attention and you can't help but see so many suffer the curse of loneliness. In a research study the Faculty for Social Wellbeing conducted two years ago (prior to the pandemic), there was already around 44% of the population who claimed they are lonely. This is more than serious. This is dramatic. With that comes mental health issues and physical health issues. I cannot remember a time when so many people have struggled with depression, people ending up without friends, family and colleagues with whom to share their plight. We could go on to mention violence, criminality, misogyny and hate crime galore especially directed at minorities. You could add to this the fall out post-pandemic, social exclusion, climate change and pollution, racism, child abuse and molestation, obesity, animal abuse, prostitution, female genital mutilation, traffic congestion, eating disorders, political corruption, and addictions of all sorts.

I could go on forever.

We are not in a good place. Our moral decline and the way we have been alienated is a major risk to resolving the issues that have encapsulated us. We have replaced morality and ethics, goodness and decency, probity and honesty with nothing. I believe that the way secularization has eaten into our moral soundness is sad. We feel that the only direction we can get lies in economic well-being and we seem to forget that there is more to life than that.

TikTok reminds us that the clock is ticking and that with every moment that passes we have a society that has more casualties. People want to, sorry, need to, connect with each other. If you had to ask me, *TikTok* for some or many is another plea for attention and help and an opportunity for people to reach out asking to be seen, heard and validated. The society we live in is in dire need to sit, think, reflect and locate one another. We find solace in each other - take that away and we are in deep trouble.