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Tanzanian Heritage

von Muya

I'm black and I know I'm light-skinned.

I know my reality is very different from the one lived by other Black people. It comes with privileges, which I acknowledge and try to use for the benefit of the Black community.

This text is about how being biracial and growing up in a white society led me to forget my African roots and made me try to fit in with a white society. Do not forget to read texts from dark skinned people and to read up about colorism. If you don't know what I am talking about maybe it's time for you to educate yourself before reading my text.

I still face racism every day.

I grew up with a mother from Tanzania and a Swiss dad. I spent more time living with my mother. As a kid I felt a strong connection to my roots.

At least once a year we visited or were visited by close relatives. I always missed them a lot. I love them all. My cousins, my *ndugies* (siblings), my aunties and especially my ayeeyo (grand-mother).

How much you must have missed them, Mami. Leaving home at only 14 years old.

I just looked through our pictures, back when it was just you and me.

Every summer we visited either ayeeyo in Tanzania or aunty in Canada or they came to visit us. One summer there were 13 of us in our apartment. I remember how much fun we had and how happy we were to be together.

What makes me most sad when looking at those pictures is seeing how I was able to embrace my African heritage back then while now I struggle to do so.

32

In these pictures me and my *ndugies* often have our hair braided in different hairstyles. We often dressed in clothes from back home. And when our family was here I felt good and comfortable in them.

The older I got, the more I lost touch and connection.

I wanted blue eyes like my father and my grandmother and the kids from school. I wanted long blond straight hair like the girls in my school and the women I saw on TV.

I started to straighten my hair. I tried to fit in.

There is one picture from school when a photographer came to our class to take the class photo. Another girl in my class, also with African roots, and I had both straightened our hair. Back then I thought for me to look beautiful, I had to do so. I struggled with my appearance. I still do.

People trying to flirt with me. Calling me exotic. Exotic? I am not a pineapple.

Do not describe people as if they were food.

To white Switzerland I am only attractive because of your exoticism. Otherwise I do not conform to your white beauty standards.

So until two years ago I was not comfortable wearing cornrows or nice clothes with typical Tanzanian prints on them.

I would love them when I was in Tanzania, be comfortable and confident when I was with my family but not when I was walking through the streets of Switzerland by myself. Even if it was just for coffee with my friends.

So when I look at those old pictures I get very sad. And then I get mad.

This society has made me ashamed of truly being myself.

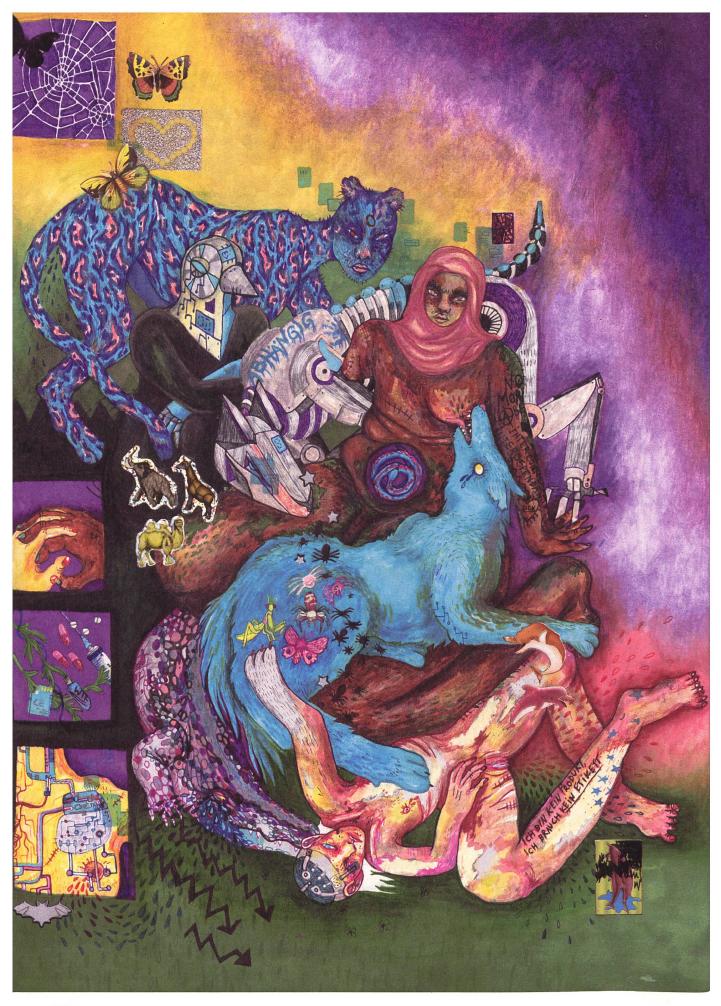
I long for the time when structural racism had not yet made me hate my appearance, had not yet made me hate showing my Tanzanian heritage.

Even though I now know and understand where these feelings come from and know that none of this is my fault.

I still struggle.

All of this is only one aspect of my life.

I have not looked at other aspects of racism, sexism, sexual assault, sexuality, queerness and the pressure that comes with being the daughter of an immigrant.



von Ra