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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 *ayeyeo* (grandmother).

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 *ayeyeo* 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.

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