

My dark skin: A blessing or a curse?

by Omega Bula

I am black, all my life
I have been black
But really I am brown
A beautiful natural tan
A blessing from my creator.

I have learned to accept my 'darkness'
My sensibility derives from my being 'black'
When I step into the world
I am acutely aware
I am a 'black' woman
With a black consciousness.

Why do you hesitate
To call me a black woman
To stereotype me
To racially profile me
To give me more attention than I deserve
Except under your breath.

You speak of things
In black and white
Not entirely bad or entirely good
To clarify difference
To emphasize opposites
To compare me and them
Created in the image of the one God.

You speak of a black hole
To explain a scary space
Darkness, danger
A bottomless pit, hopelessness
In darkness as in light,
God you are there.

You speak of black ice,
To describe that silvery grey
Clear glassy patch over the road
It is deadly, invisible
To be avoided, be careful God
If you care to live.

You speak of being in the dark
When you do not know enough
Enough about any situation
So please why don't you throw me some light
So I shall be enlightened
In God's ways that are pure and right.

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Then I will understand the
Black list, black mail, black eye, black out
Black out look, black sheep, black mark
And see the black lies and the symbolism
Of black as 'without any moral light, goodness
Evil wicked and indicating disgrace and sinful'
White as 'morally pure, spotless
Free from evil intent'
And understand the racism of language.

That poverty is black
HIV/AIDS is black
Africa is one big dark country
Still the white man's burden
Everyday is a black day
Somalia, Darfur, Zimbabwe, Congo
Oppression suffering helplessness hopelessness
Struggling in the sunshine
To break the chains of injustice
A long inheritance of freedom fighters.

I am an African woman,
A Zambian, a Social worker, a Sociologist,
A Christian, and Executive in a faith based organization,
An ecumenist, an advocate, activist
I am a mother, Grandmother, mother in law.
A Sister, an Aunt, a friend,
A wise woman
God you know we are in millions
Struggling to keep our dreams alive.

Blessed with this dark skin
We are black and proud
Of our cultural identity
Resisting racism, assimilation, social domination
Resisting stereotypical constructions
Resisting caricatures
Which are socially constructed
Products of racist systems of knowledge and discourse.

We are struggling to transform the world
To influence people's imagination,
Thinking and cultural construction of us
What they think they know about black and darkness
God it is hard work
Enable us to carry on.

Omega Bula is a first-generation Zambian Canadian currently working with The United Church of Canada as Executive Minister of the Partners in Mission Unit. This article was originally printed in *Making Waves*.