

Culture in Everyday Life Podcast – Episode 9

Being an African: The Burden of Proof in Being in a Space by Bertha Yakubu, MBE

Voiceover Introduction [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Simon Gall [00:00:21] Hello and a very warm welcome to the Culture in Everyday Life podcast produced by the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen. The Elphinstone Institute is a centre for the study of ethnology, folklore and ethnomusicology with a research and public engagement remit covering the Northeast and North of Scotland through interaction with researchers and practitioners. This podcast explores cultural phenomena in everyday life.

Kaitlyn Woodruff [00:00:45] This lecture by Bertha Yakubu was recorded on the 6th of March 2023 as part of the Elphinstone Institute's Public Lecture series.

Nicolas Le Bigre [00:00:54] Tonight it's my absolute pleasure to introduce Bertha Yakubu. And Bertha and I were trying to remember how we met, and neither of us were successful, which is slightly disturbing, but it was sometime during the pandemic. I was so pleased when – it took a bit of cajoling but finally Bertha said, yes, I'll do a talk for you. So, I'm sorry for putting you under pressure, but I know it's going to be fantastic. And I just want to say. The kind of person we're talking about.

Bertha received a recognition as one of the most influential women in Aberdeen by the Aberdeen City Council in 2016. As also in 2001. And was recognised as one of the seven unsung heroines by the Scottish Government at a meeting in Edinburgh Castle in 2001. And received Aberdeen Woman of the year in 1995. [Audience: Wow!] I'm not done. I'm not done. The most amazing thing, in addition to founding, African Women's Group Scotland in 1994, which is a really important group in the Aberdeen area – and Bertha just told me this about five minutes ago – on the 31st of December, Bertha was on the Queen's honours list and got an MBE. So, well done. So, I think, Bertha, I've said more than enough, and it's up to you to come up now.

Bertha Yakubu [00:02:35] Thank you all for being here. I dreaded this talk. But as Nicolas said, he kept pushing and kept pushing. I couldn't just say no. And so, I'm here today. Thank you for coming. And thank you, Nicolas, for your hard work. It's really hard to get people to get people out in this weather. So, thank you.

I'll tell you a little bit about my background and then some of the things we're going to discuss today. I hope you are hearing. [Audience: Yeah.] Okay. All right. As you know, my name is Bertha Yakubu. I'm from Nigeria. I'm number seven out of thirteen children. Yeah. My parents have a lot of children. I have 54 grand – I mean, niece and nephew and eight sisters and four brothers. Ten all of us are still alive. Yeah.

It's hard making a decision to come to this place. Really very hard. But I'm from such a big family and my dad was a church minister. My mom was a full-time housewife and we're a very close-knit family. So, my dad put all of us in school, the girls in school. When a lot of people don't put girls in school. And we have to ask him why he put his daughters in school. And he said the missionaries that came were women. So, if they can do it, why can't my daughters do it? So, he put us in school. We are really grateful to him for that. I went to secondary school and was trained as a secondary school teacher. I had my first and second degree in science education. And my teaching subjects were biology and chemistry. I taught for a few years and then became a deputy head of a secondary school. And then after that I became the head teacher of a secondary school with over a thousand students and teachers.

[00:05:03] And then I got married. My husband was here as a student and I was in Nigeria. I love Nigeria. I'm a Nigerian and I don't regret being a Nigerian. And then the man wouldn't go to Nigeria. So, I have to come here. [Laughter] You know. It's always the woman that give up her career to follow the man. So my parents were putting pressure, friends were putting pressure.

So, I came to Scotland to meet him. You know. And when I came I had a eight-weeks-old baby. My degrees and my experiences and everything I have did not count in this place, did not count in this place. So, I'm stuck at home with a eight-weeks-old baby. Nobody to help me. Feeling lonely, terrified. Sad. I literally walked down Union Street looking for people that looked like me. Here is a career woman. Just suddenly I am just a nobody. Nobody sees me. Why in my school with all this, 800 and a 1000 students. If they see me coming. They'll start running or they'll check around and make sure that their uniform is okay, you know? But here, nobody cares which [?] I was. I was very miserable.

Very, very miserable. I didn't know who I was. I became depressed. I cried all the time. I was losing my mind. And then the last stroke was when I was pregnant. And then one night I woke up, I was bleeding, and I had to go to hospital. And I have a two-year-old child. My husband couldn't come with me. I was left alone in the hospital. I bled so much that I went to the toilet, I hit myself, I fainted, I didn't know what happened. After that experience, I said I will never allow another woman like this again. I have to look for other women like me. We will become sisters and supporting each other. That is how the African Women's Group started. [Applause]

[00:07:40] As I said when I came here, when I discovered that my experiences and my degrees did not matter, I have to retrain. We didn't know what to train ourselves in. And one day one of my friends, she's from the Cameroon and she just came to me, and she said, oh, there is this course. If you read it, you can do anything. And I said, what kind of course is that? She said, she doesn't know but they call IT. [Laughter] And so, we went to then it was College of Technology, Abertay University. We just went and register for IT. We don't know what IT is. And it is a computer science [phone rings] and we've never seen computer in our life. [Phone ringing] you start with that course. We struggled. We didn't know what it means. We didn't know any digital language. We did our best. And we passed. And then my husband got the job in Aberdeen.

So, as I was saying, we did this course, and then we have to. My husband got this job in Aberdeen, and so we moved up to Aberdeen. I was excited about the opportunity because they said it's an oil city. There'll be jobs there for me. But when we came, there was a recession. So, there was no jobs. There was no job for me. I'm stuck at homemaking. And I was getting angrier and angrier. And then, as usual, when we are here, things happen at home. Your sisters get married. You couldn't go. You didn't have money. Some of your relatives die. You couldn't go. You don't have money. So every day your world is becoming smaller and smaller, and you are getting more angry. Sad. Isolated. Frustrated. The list just go on and on. And. My mom died. I wasn't there. A woman that have thirteen children. And I didn't marry on time. So I was the one always around. And I wasn't there. It was really painful. These are some of the things I've experienced here.

[00:10:05] The story I'm going to talk to you this evening is controversial in the sense that sometimes – I say, 'must I say that?' Sometimes, say, 'Yeah, I have to say that.' So, I'm going to be honest. In what the discussion we're going to have this evening. I have to be honest. So, I've rambled around. So, let's go into the real thing. As I said, gradually I got a job with Aberdeen City Council. I worked with them for 22 years. And 2019 I took early

retirement and that's I thought I needed the rest. But since then, I've been more busy than when I was working. This has some of the phones they are just non-stop. People just call day and night and that is it.

So, today I will be speaking as an African woman living in the West in a developed country. A country that is predominantly white people. So, my talk is between black people and white people. Okay? Yeah. It doesn't matter whether you are white here or you're white in America or you're white in Australia. Anywhere. And it doesn't matter whether you are black African, this one. African. You are living in the UK or US or any other place on this planet. The talk is between the two of us. Okay?

So, my views is based on my own experience and the experience of the people that I know, those that I interact with experience or news like that I hear themes that I watch, there's so many things that I've gathered to give this talk today. And some of the things that I'm going to say is difficult. But it has to be said. It is my experience and the experience of some of the people here in this room. So, there are things that you will agree with me. There are things that you will not agree with me. It doesn't matter.

[00:12:33] As I said, it is my experience. The bad ones is still mine. The good ones are still mine. So, I just have to say it. As it was stated in the publicity leaflet, as I move around, I don't seem to fit in. I'm restless. I feel angry sometimes because the environment does not allow me to thrive. Whenever you leave Africa, you are coming here and you have lots of dreams. You have lots of dream. You think you have opportunities, but when you come, it is not. And so, you begin to say, 'Did I make a right decision coming?' That is the question. Did I make the right decision coming? Would I have been better if I had not come? Sometimes I think so. Sometimes I'm not sure. So sometimes I'm happy. Sometimes I'm not. I just don't feel connected. I don't feel included. I don't see myself in anything. In anything. Not my culture, not my values, not my religion, not my voice and the politics that goes around. Not my food. Not my clothes. You know, you just seems to be losing everything that you cherish, that make you who you are. You know, I feel like when you are here you are being stripped. Sometimes from your dignity. To your culture. To your faith. To everything. So, you are kind of a shell going about. Empty. If I go to the theatre, I don't see myself. So emotionally I feel naked. Emotionally, I feel sad. Emotionally, my soul is just restless.

[00:15:04] I cry, I laugh the same day. All these things can happen at the same time. And so, I reflected the way King David in the Bible reflected and said, 'My soul, why are you

cast down? Why are you sad? Why are you so disturbed? Why are you heavy with [?emotion]? Why can't I get rid of this sadness, this heaviness? Why am I still lonely, even in the midst of people?' I think about it. And I talk about it. I get angry about it. I go to meetings, they talk things. I'm not there. And when I open my mouth, I feel angry. So, I'm the angry black woman. Yeah. I'm the angry black woman. You are angry because you're just not there. You're just not there. And I wonder whether other Africans feel the same thing. Or is it just me? Because sometimes you may assume that this is what everybody feels. But some people say I'm okay here. There are people that are okay here and there are people that are not okay here. So, I was wondering, what is it that is making me so sad in this place? Stressed out so much in this place?

I decided to ask people and ask friends. And to my surprise, many of them feel the same way. They feel empty. They feel frustrated. They feel lost. They feel not right. Yet, people at home think that you are enjoying. You are so happy here that you've forgotten them. But actually, you're not. And I didn't know why I feel that way until one day I was watching a YouTube. And there's this Ghanaian couple. Who went to — they were American, African American. They have moved to Ghana. And the guy was talking about how he felt the first time he came to Ghana. He said. The happiest day of my life is when I woke up in Ghana.

[00:17:38] Nobody called me a black man. Nobody called me a black man. He said, here my colour does not matter. I'm just a man. I could be a [?mad] Ghanaian man, [?mad] anything less than Ghanaian man. Or, working Ghanaian man. He was just a man. There was no label attached to him. He felt free. He felt as if he belonged. He felt as if he was not different. And I say, yeah, that's the way I feel when I go to Nigeria. I don't have to look around. I don't have to. I just feel free. I feel happy. And then another African-American woman went to Rwanda. She said, 'The moment I came out of the plane, I knew that I this is the place I should be. I felt free. I felt as if I belong.' And she said, 'The next day I phoned my son in America to sell my house and send the money to me in Rwanda.' And the son did that. He bought — She bought the house, and asked the son to come and join her in Rwanda. He came. The son is an IT person. So he set up his IT business. He said, I've never been happier and I've never been [?]. And that is how we all feel. We Africans we feel. People here are saying that because Africa is poor, Africa is this. We must be lucky to be here. In one aspect, yeah. The only lucky thing is that there's not much fighting here as we do in many places. Or, some of the facilities, like light and clean water and all this. But in terms of who you are as a person there's no place like Africa for us. That is a place where nobody questions you. Why are you here? When are you going? [?] You know, that is what I'm saying, that the burden that we have to justify our presence in a, in a space. A space, in this case, it could be a street, it could

be a neighbourhood. It could be the university. It could be the church. It could be anywhere where people will just ask you this question. What are you doing here?

[00:20:02] Who are you? Why are you here? When are you going back? And all these things. So, you try hard to say I belong to this place. Especially with our children that are born here. They feel that, well, Scottish. No, you are not Scottish. Where did your parents come from? They have to dig and dig and dig and dig. It's like you never belonged. So, if you don't belong here and you've left Africa, where do you belong? So, you know why we're all very sad because we are neither there or here. So. And that's the burden that we feel. Be it in the workplace. Anywhere that you go, anywhere that you are, people will just stop you and ask you. You move into a neighbourhood, and you're supposed to be in that place. Should you be living next to me? And I have to ask, why do people do that? Why do you say that? Why did you ask that? Why is it that we can never be part of this place, even though politically we are part of this place? But culturally, and emotionally, socially and everything we don't belong to. We can deceive ourselves. We can say, I'm Scottish as anything. Wait until you want to marry a Scottish girl or marry a Scottish man, or live next to a rich Scottish guy, whether he will allow you to live near. There's always something that they have to make you prove that you're worth living in that place, you're worth getting that job, you're worth getting that promotion. You're worth sitting next to me in the bus. Or scoring this kind of grid, you know. There's so many things that is thrown at us. And there's so much negativity because one of the things that really saddens me when I came here, it was during the time, Ethiopia was going to famine and there was a lot of suffering. But I've come to learn here that Africa is 54 countries, but here, is just a country. So if Ethiopia is going through famine, the whole of Africa is going through famine.

[00:22:30] And then they are always showing this children with flies and all this and all this and everybody is looking at you. You must be happy to be here. If not, these flies would be on your head. We have problems telling our children — or taking our children back because they don't want to go. They don't want to go. They see the image of Africa on TV. They think that is what Africa is. And so, the first time I took my son, he didn't want to go. He said what am I going to do there? I just wanted to remove the stupidity out of his head. I said, 'Just go and find out for yourself.' And then you go there and you find that you have lots of friends, you have lots of relatives. You. They love you. They genuinely love you. They play with you. They can't stop playing with you. And then when the children come back, they are now African, they know who they are. But before I'm Scottish, I'm Scottish. Yeah. So, this is what we go through.

Again, why are we so sad in this place? We're almost like the children of Israel in Babylon. The Babylonian wanted them to be happy, they say, how can we be happy when Jerusalem is far away? So why are we so sad in this place? And why is this constant asking us to prove ourselves whether we deserve to be in this place or not? We don't deserve to sit in this place or do this, or go here and stay here. That we live here or sit here. The reason why people question us all the time, is because of our difference. The elephant in the room in any space that we occupy is racism and discrimination. We call it by name, racism and discrimination. Why are people racist? Why are people racist? They have to have a justification for being racist. They have to have a reason to treat you differently. If they don't have a reason. Then what is the problem? And the reason is racism. And to us, racism is the colour of our skin.

[00:25:01] We are different from other people. We look different. Our skin look different, our features look different. Our culture is different. Everything is different. So, if you're skin is dark, then you are not like us. You are not like me. My skin is like this. Yours is like this. So, you are not like me. I talk like this. You talk like that. You are not like me. We are always looking for where we differ. It always surprises me and also makes me laugh, the people that don't want to sit next to black people and yet they will be cuddling black dogs. You know, all the hair on their head is dark and they are not cutting it off. But why is it that when it is human beings, they find it difficult to be nice or to sit next to somebody, to allow somebody to be? So, it's always. There's an ulterior motive when you emphasise on racism. When you think of somebody less than you. There is some interesting thing. You want to justify your discrimination. [?I said that], but he is not as human as I am. So, I can treat the person differently. So, for us Africans or Black people. Our humanity is always questioned. Is always questioned. Are you human enough? Are you really human? Maybe real humans are white? Maybe real human have this kind of hair. Real human have this kind of nose. Real human have, whatever else that is different. So, because you don't have those, you are not real human. And because of this kind of reasoning is that bring about enslavement of black people? Because if you look at them as the same with you, you would not enslave them. You would not exploit them. You would not maltreat them. You would not discriminate against them. But you have to have a reason to do all these things that I've just mentioned. People go to another people's land, take all their minerals, colonise them, or go and ship all the human beings in that place to somewhere.

[00:27:35] If you think of them as yourself, you wouldn't do that. And so, racism gives people room to do – to maltreat others because of whatever that makes them different. And for us, that is what is always our problem. Living in the West, all we put it in the blank this thing. Since the day the black man and the white man met, the black man has

never been respected, has never been recognised as a human. I don't have to say it. As I told you from the beginning. There are things that I will say that you won't like, but it has to be said. Africans have never gone to another person's land to get their land. We've never gone to enslave anybody. Minding our own business, people come. They enslave us. They took us somewhere. They took our land. They took our resources, and they are still taking it. Even when you are here, there are people that look down on us and think that we're not good enough. We struggle to get jobs. There are a lot of people in this house that were qualified. Super qualified but can't get a job. There are doctors here that don't have jobs, and I don't know whether there are white doctors that don't get jobs too. I don't know, but there are a lot within our community. Why is that so? So, this inhuman way or say, looking at us as if we are less human gives people the right to treat us anyhow they want. Apart from the different features that we have. As we said, even our culture. Our culture. Nobody respects it. Our spirituality. Nobody respect it. Our civilisation. Nobody respect it. Actually, people say, what is African civilisation? What is African? Who are some philosophers and all this?

[00:29:51] To the point – just to illustrate the point, is always baffles me and surprise me that there will be teaching in Egyptian civilisation or to all the schools here, but they never tell them that Egypt is in Africa. That Egyptian civilisation is African civilisation. Oh they'll say, 'Those people, they are not Africans. They're skin and they are not, they are not' – they are African. Africans. They are here. And I have to ask somebody, actually just last week I was in Glasgow. Somebody said, I don't think that Egyptians built the pyramids. It was aliens who built them. Yeah. So, I said, 'So the people who built the pyramids, they draw themselves on the walls on the pyramid with that skin. You say, no, they are not Africans. So, the people that are intelligent enough to build this thing do not know how to describe themselves?' Yeah. People just find it just too difficult to believe that these 'primitive black people' can build such a sophisticated, the pyramids. They have spent 100 years studying Egypt, Egypt's pyramids. They still haven't finished discovering the marvellous things that they did. Those people on the walls of the pyramids are dark-skinned people with their hair braided. And they said they're not Africans. And the pyramids are not only in Egypt. There are more pyramids in Sudan than Egypt. And the further south you move, the darker we get. At that time, Egypt was not Egypt. It was called Kemet. Ethiopia have civilisation. The Kush are the Ethiopians. They are way, way there before anybody. Actually, the Greeks were stealing from the Egyptians to come and make the greatest civilisation. And I always ask, why is it that Greek civilisation is European civilisation, but Egyptian civilisation is not African civilisation? Can anybody tell me?

Audience member: Racism?

Bertha Yakubu: Yeah. Why is it that Greek civilisation – even – you can't dig any – I haven't seen them digging in Greek over a hundred years. Yeah, because it's European civilisation. But Egypt, no. The Egyptians, the Egyptians were Africans.

[00:32:29] But this is what I'm saying. For them to claim that, they have to reduce us as if we're not capable of doing something so sophisticated. And I wonder if you were me – for white people who are here, if you were me – everything that is mine, is being denigrated. No, it's not good. It's not true. It's not this. How will you feel? How will you feel? Every day is negativity. Your food is not good. It's too much starch. There's not enough protein. Now they tell us, the healthy food that they ask everybody to go and eat, because we eat too much protein, it's not good for us. The food that we're eating, they say it wasn't healthy. The medicine that we use. They say it's not good, but there's not a big biotech company going all over the world trying to get medicine from plants. You know? When Covid came, we were all afraid that Africa would just be wiped away. But surprisingly, maybe it's the only continent that didn't have too many people die. Because of their herbs, you know. So, these are some of these things that disturb us.

Another thing that I notice here that really upset me is lack of visibility and voice, especially in Scotland. We still don't have a black person reading the news or doing anything on the television for our children to know or see and say that they too can aspire to be news readers. Both in print and visual news we don't appear there. We don't have anybody in the Parliament. We don't have a voice. And that is the thing that I noticed when I came here because, as I said, a lot of Africans that are here are professionals who were going somewhere. Yeah. Head of department. They were bankers, they're doctors. They're all... But here, who cares? Who wants to hear what we say because they think we don't have anything to say. So, we just [?women]. And when we started the African Women's Group, we just found that especially women, we women, most of the women came through their husbands that come to study. And then so you are stuck at home or you are doing some jobs, menial jobs and,

[00:35:03] nobody knows what you are thinking, who you are, what you were, what you're not. So, we decided to call and organise a conference. And the conference. And that was 2000 – no, 1998. That was the first African Women's Conference in Scotland. And the topic was just our invisibility. If you don't see us, you will hear us. So, we just wanted to talk about why is it that we don't have a voice? We don't have a face? We don't have anything. And yet these are talented women, professional women, that have

a lot to offer. Even within ourselves as women, we bring in our differences and our experiences and share. Because unfortunately, a lot of Scotl – Scottish people have not travelled to many places. But we come here so that we can mingle and share. But then, who is listening? Who wants to know? So, we organised that conference, asked the main speaker came from Switzerland. She is Kenyan, married to a Swiss person. She too, she's never seen in Switzerland. It's even worse than here because there are fewer Africans in Switzerland. And she said, 'In Switzerland, when we are going to shop, I'll wear my African traditional clothes. Very red, you can't miss it.' She said, 'You can't miss it. It's a traditional dress. I'll go with my husband. We go to supermarket. They will be talking to him. Nobody will talk to me. In spite of my red dress, they still can't see me.' She said, 'they still can't see me.' They don't want to see her. There's a difference. They don't want to see her because, what's the point? So, she said, 'With my dress nobody sees me.' And a friend of mine here, too. She has PhD. She's married to a Welsh person. And she has a little boy. The boy was sick. She called the doctor. The doctor came and examined the boy. And was just talking to the husband, the white man and not talking to her. After a while, she couldn't take it again. She said,

[00:37:29] 'Excuse me. My husband is on his way going to work and you are busy telling him what to do with the child. What makes you think that I can't take care of my child?' You know, I don't know what the doctor was thinking. A mother is standing there, but he is busy talking to a father that has his briefcase is on his way going. It's like. She's not visible. Hmm. That is our problem. We live here, but we are invisible. You don't want to see us no matter how I dress in my traditional dress. They still can't see us. We are still invisible. And you are in a place where you have so much to give. You have so much to talk about, and they still don't see you. It's really frustrating. It's really frustrating. So, what must we do to be seen?

Again, talking about invisibility. I think it's over ten years ago. It's about this university. This, Aberdeen University. We came for a meeting. And we finished the meeting. We were going out. And then there's the brochure for the coming year. I took one and I went through it. There were Chinese there. There were Asians there. There were white people there. Not one single African there. And yet, in the campus, I see African students and lecturers. So, I went straight to the university office. I said, I want to see the vice chancellor. And somebody said, 'Why? Why do you want to see him?' And I said, 'Why are there no Africans in this year's brochure?' So, he said, 'Okay, wait here.' He went in and called somebody and a person came. 'Can I help you?' I said, 'Yes. Why are there no Africans in this place?' He said, 'Wait here.' He went back again. And brought another person. The person asked the same question. I gave him the same answer. And I told

him, 'If you don't give me an answer, I'm going to campaign against this university.' At that time, Nigerian government was sending a lot of Nigerians to come and study here.

[00:40:01] And I said, 'When you don't put Africans here, you are saying that they are not welcome. And yet you are taking money from African students and you don't put them here. So, I want somebody to tell me why they are not in that picture.' And then he went back inside and brought somebody. And the person came said, 'We are very sorry. But we take note of what you are saying. We take your details. The VC is not here, but we let him know what you are saying.' They never got back to me. But the following year, just around this corner of the office is a big blue billboard with the black girls smiling broadly. That they got the message. When you – representation matters. Yeah, representation matters. And I [don't know?]. The university recruits students from all over the world. There are some people that don't want to see their children being taught by Africans or share the classroom with Africans. And so, the university will market the university in such a way that is don't show those bigots that we are doing this. Right. I see no reason why you would have diverse students, diverse staff and yet you miss out one part of it. I said, 'If you don't see African students here, how will you solve their problems? How will you solve their problems?' You see, I got MBE. Not because I'm doing something, I'm an activist. So, you are constantly challenging the system. It's really hard. That's why I said sometimes. I said, 'Should I say something, or should I just keep quiet?' But if we keep quiet. How will things change? Things will never change.

I don't know what the rest of you are thinking. But it's a lot to think. And it's a lot of to take in. Those of us that have a job. Here.

[00:42:28] There's hardly any job satisfaction and you struggle to get the job. And when you get it, you struggle to keep the job. And when you keep it, you struggle to get promotion. And so, it's really difficult. It's hard. I visited a family. Sometimes you go. The – the husband came in from work and I greeted him. And then we started talking, and I said, 'What do you do?' He said, 'I work with an oil company.' And I say, 'What do you do in the, in the company?' He said, 'I'm the technical analyst.' And he said – and then the wife just interjected. 'Oh, his work is just proving them, proving them. Proving to his friends that he can do the job.' You know. And I said, 'How do you know?' And she said, 'Well, every time he comes here, that's all that he said today. I know my job. I know how to do it. But there are people who always don't believe that I know the job. But I'm always doing the job. They give me extra job. And yet, when promotion comes, I don't get it. The very people that keep asking me for help are the one that get the promotion.' So, I said, 'Are you not from Angola?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'What are you doing here?

Shouldn't you be in Angola and be running the oil company in Angola?' I told him, I said, 'Look, you've studied here. You've worked here. You've acquired experience, and you are not getting job satisfaction. Why don't you go home? Go and see your president and tell him that this is who I am. And I want to come back home and help in my, my country.' And he sold, he sold – He left the job. Bought the house for the family in France. And then went back to Angola. I didn't hear from him for a while. Then one day I was in B&Q and I was just coming out of the – I think he saw me when I came out of the shop. So, when I was trying to drive out, he blocked me. A car blocked me. And that tried to dodge him. He blocked me. As usual, I stopped.

[00:45:02] I was going to say, 'What is going on?' So. And he came out, he just [?]. And I said, 'Who is this man?' He put me down and he started laughing and he said, 'Thank you so much. You remember, you told me I should go home?' I said, 'Yeah. I remember you.' He said, 'I went back home, and I did exactly that. And I'm here in Aberdeen for a conference of oil executives.' If he didn't do that, he would have just stayed here and complained and complained and no job satisfaction. If the Africans here were to be honest with you, I think up to 90% have no job satisfaction. Yeah. Yeah. Just trying to survive. Yes. No job satisfaction. Because no matter how hard they work, it's never good enough. A friend of mine is a chartered accountant. She did all her studies here. Got her that accountancy here. She was with the Edinburgh City Council. She would train new people. They'd become her boss. She'd mentor them, they'd become her boss. They reach a point that she just got tired and left and went back to Malawi and became a farmer. And the stories like this continue. And you may think that it's only council workers or corporate organisations. Even in the universities. There was a piece of research that you did with female professors, black female professors. In the first place, there are not many. Yeah, very few there. And the research was just trying to find out whether it was easier for them as academicians to get promotion and all this kind of thing. But it is not. They have to wait twice to get – as long as their colleague to get the professorship. Wasn't easy, and even when they got it, they don't get the same respect. And some said they are never even invited to some meetings. And colleagues have a way of criticising them constantly. Constantly. So, they too go to the toilet and cry. And I'm sure most of the black people here, especially the females, have gone to the toilet to cry many times because you feel alone. Isolated.

[00:47:37] Kind of. Even in staff meetings, your contribution doesn't matter. Nobody listen to what you say, you know? So, they do cry. A cleaner cries, a doctor cries, a professor cries. That is our realities. That is what I'm talking tonight. Is not trying to cover it. Just being realistic. What we go through. You know, what we go through. So, anyway. And the question I want to ask. How good can we be before we are recognised? How

good can we be? My slide. Okay, yeah. [?] I told you that. The reason why we are treated badly, or that our humanity is being challenged all the time. Are we human? Are we human? And when you look at the US the way they kill black people, the way they treat black people. They don't even consider them as human. And you can imagine growing up in such an environment that is just full of negativity. So, I will just play a video of this little boy just narrating his life story.

[00:49:58] [Speaker plays video clip] I'm a young black man doing all that I can to [?]. Oh, but when I look around and I see what's being done to my kind. Everyday. I'm being hunted as prey. My people don't want no trouble. We've got enough struggle. I just wanna live. God protect me. I just wanna live. I just wanna live. [Video clip ends]

We just wanna live. We just wanna live. For a human being to say that I'm being hunted down like a prey. It's tough. It's tough. And we can't live here without being tough mentally. Because there's so much negativities around us. There's so much denigration of everything that we are, we have. Is denigrated. All that we want is just to be. Just like anyone. Is it too much to ask?

Now the next thing is this. How good can we be? To be treated the same way. How good can we be to be promoted? How good can we be? How good can we be? Okay. How good can we be? I'm just trying to bring the best of our best. How good can we be? Obama. Was he good enough? For America? For white people? This is a president that is highly educated, highly disciplined. No scandal, nothing and trying to do the best for his country.

[00:52:29] But there was so much controversy. Far right, where we see the racists. As I say, the racists, you – they will always find a reason not to like you or not to say you are good enough. They stop his agenda. For trying to give them health care. Who doesn't need health care? It is one thing that we – whatever we say about this country, the health care is one of the system that everybody cherish. But he couldn't do it the way he wanted it. The far right stopped him. They call him all manner of names. They call him all manner of names. He went to the best schools. And yet he wasn't good enough. He was not good enough. Many people like him, they welcome him. They see hope in him. And I remember. During his time, an Iraqi, black Iraqi. When I say black Iraqi, you know that Africans were taken to Middle East, too, as slaves. And this black Iraqi was saying that he was standing for a council in his ward. He said, 'We've never done that. In this place, nothing happens in our community. But when I saw Obama become the president of

US, I said, “Ah, why can’t I be the councillor of my ward?” So, he stood a councillorship. He said, ‘If Obama can do it in US, I can do it in Iraq.’ And he, he was very happy. He said it to the press and smiled broadly, ‘Yes, I can.’ And then Malaysia – young Malaysians. They were happy too. They wanted their country to be like America, where a black person is the president. You know, in Malaysia, if you are Chinese or Indian, you don’t get scholarship, you don’t get all the things that Malay people get. You don’t. But the young people wanted a country where everybody is part of it. That is what excite people about Obama. It’s not that he’s a superhero, he’s a super person.

[00:55:01] You know, but the hope he gave people. But some people just didn’t like him at all. They form a very formidable opposition to everything he did, even when he wanted to increase minimum wage. They didn’t want it. It’s coming from a black man. They would rather get the little wage than get – than to – for a black man to help them get better wage, you know. So, he appoints his health care. None of the Republican senators or people signed the healthcare. But now the latest report says that most of the red states are the people registering for the Obamacare because, because they know the benefit. Was it the health care they were hating or the man? I don’t think they hated the healthcare, but they hated the guy that was bringing the healthcare. So how good do we want a black man to be before he becomes a president? How good can he be? Maybe he’s not good enough. We try his wife. Yeah, she went to Ivy League school, prestigious school. Top lawyer working in corporate. This thing. Very articulate, beautiful. And all these. But was she beautiful enough? She couldn’t wear her hair in that White House. She could not just wear her natural hair in that it was not good enough for First Lady of America wear her kinky hair? No, it’s not good enough. So, throughout their eight years, we never saw her natural hair. And when she was asked why she didn’t wear it, she said there’s enough fire, she didn’t want to add another wood to it. [Laughter] Her hair not become the – distract the husband’s administration. That is solely how white people [?]. She couldn’t get – We have to fake it. We have to pretend. So, she wore a wig throughout. Well. The things that grow naturally in her head is not good enough for some people. So how good can we be before she’s recognised? I think she’s one of the most educated First Ladies in the whole of U.S. history.

[00:57:30] Yet she was not good enough. Is this about good, or is about the skin colour and the hair and the nose and the physique? What about this? Judge Ketanji Jackson. She is the first black woman to the U.S. Supreme Court in 232 years. Was she good enough? She went to Harvard School, beginning with Harvard Law something review the people that reviewed in the papers. She worked her way from lower court all the way to supreme court too. When she was nominated, no, she wasn’t good enough. If you watch the way she was grilled for her confirmation. Angry black woman who wouldn’t cry. She

couldn't cry. She has to hold firm and [?rid] her tears and so that they don't use any reason to disqualify her. But we, that we are watching, we were crying for her. There's no way you would have treated her the way they treated her if she were white. She wasn't good enough. And the worst thing, those who were grilling her don't even have one tenth of her experience or qualification. But just because you have the power, you can do that. And when she finished and she was confirmed as a judge, they asked her, 'What will you tell black girls?' She just said, 'They should persevere. They should persevere.' 400 years in America they are still persevering. They are still not accepted. They still persevere. They are not good enough. How long will it be before they are good enough? How long will it be before they are accepted? Why should they have to persevere instead of being just like any other child that aspire to be judge? To go to Supreme Court? But they have to persevere. And the craziest thing today is that in the US there are many states, especially Republican states, are banning books by black people. Removing them from schools.

[01:00:03] They don't want black history. Black stories in American educational system. Without black people, America have no history. Without black people, America have no history because they fought a war because of slavery at this part of their history. The civil right was fought by black people. Martin Luther King lived his life. Now everybody in the world. Children have right. Women have right. Gay have right. Martin Luther had to die to get that right for everybody. And up to today, black people are still fighting for their life. Black lives matter. People have been there 400 years. They built that country. With their sweat. With their lives. With everything. And yet some people feel that they are not good enough to be anything. So how good before we are good enough?

We also know about racism in sports. It's getting better, but there's still racism in sports. Before, when we were here in the 80s, if black people are playing, people were throwing banana peels at them. Call them names, make some noise, monkey noise and all this kind of thing. Today it hasn't been use a lot, but at the same time, when they are playing, our children don't enjoy the game. They are busy praying that black person does not make a mistake because if he does the following day, they're in trouble in school. Or on the street. Every other person can make a mistake, but the black one can't. Because they are mistake, we offend them. So, while others are enjoining the game, our children are busy praying. Praying that you don't make a mistake.

[01:02:34] There is immigration, racism in immigration policy. There are some people that come into this country. They are received with open arms. There are some people that [?]. And. Most of the black people that come from here, they are the people that

work in the care homes, they are the people that do most of the menial job, but they have to pass through the eye of a needle to come through.

I guess the people that saw the heading of the, the talk. I don't know that I'm doing justice to the talk, but you can see why living here is such a burden, which is everything we have to struggle. Everything we struggle. It doesn't matter how good you are, it doesn't matter how long you've been here. It doesn't matter what you do. It is tough. It is tough. What does the impact – what is the impact of all of this? Prove. Prove yourself. Justify yourself. Show us why we should let you do this and do that. Or all of these spaces that you occupy. As I say, there is just no space that you go that there's no racism there. There is just no space. You're in the bus. There are people that would rather stand up than sit next to you. You ask yourself, 'Am I also stinking?' Why? Okay. You are in the church. There are good preachers sitting there, especially African. They like to preach. But if they're in Church of Scotland, or anywhere, how many of them will be given the opportunity to do that? So, you go there, and you still feel alone. In the classroom, in the business world, in the boardroom. We are hardly seen there. That doesn't mean that we don't do anything.

[01:04:57] You can go there. So, the impact is that it wears us down. It wears us down. I don't mean to depress you, but I'm just. I'm just speaking the truth. If we know the truth, then we know what to do about it. Rather than we pretend that all is well when it is not well. So, I'm not here to depress you. I'm just kind of letting you into my world. To see where I'm coming from. And understand my situation. Yeah.

As I said, everything that we have, we own, is denigrated to the point that we don't see ourselves as beautiful. You know, as part of the impact of constant not validating who you are. So, we find that our skin is not good. People don't like it. Some people bleach it so that it might be a certain – Our hair is not good. So, we cover it up or we wear wig so that it will be something. We – virtually none of us can even speak our language anymore because we think is not good. So, we speak English to our children. We give English name to our children. I remember my son was in primary school. He came to me, he said, 'Mum, what is my English name?' And I said, 'Who is asking?' He said, 'Oh, my friends and my teacher.' I just told him, 'Ask them what is their African name.'

[Laughter] So our names are not good. So, we have to bear English names. Even though African names are very, very good because they have meanings. We don't just give them because we believe that if you have bad name, you will end up being bad. So, we think about names. We like you. Yeah. We don't give Africa names to our children. We don't – our children don't eat African food, they eat chips all the time. You know, that is how

much we are damaged. Our spirituality. I was people look at African spirituality, as if it's demonic, it's devilish, it's all these things.

[01:07:28] We were talking with a friend. I said, 'Should we be joining in some of this cultural thing?' He said, 'Why? Why am I asking?' I say, 'Our priests live on top of the hills.' Then he said, 'What does the Bible say? I look up to the hills. Where does my help come from?' So, when Moses goes to the hill or the mountain to talk to God, we believe him. When my own priest goes to the same hill to talk to God, we say no, that is demonic worship. That is how messed up we are. All this negativity make us not to have confidence in what is ours. In our culture. In our art. In our music. It's only now that African music is being accepted widely. Before, it's like jungle music. So, we are trying to sing Sinatra, all these kind of thing. So, it really damages us. It gives us not to have confidence in ourselves, not to believe in our values, not to do so many things. So sometimes, as I said, what I find really difficult here is that I have to give up so much of myself in order to live in this society. At the end, you hardly have anything that you can go, 'It's mine.' You know. We hardly have anything that we can hold on to and say, 'It's mine'. We have to give it up. Give it up in order to be accepted. And even that, you are still not accepted. How much should we give up? Literally. I have nothing to give. I have nothing to give again because the language is not mine. The dressing is not mine. The food is not mine. The music is not mine. The space is not mine. So, what is there to – left? Nothing. Nothing.

So, in conclusion. In conclusion. Living in the West is hard for many of us because of the negativity that we find in these spaces that we occupy. It doesn't matter what the space is. There's always something negative there. And these spaces are toxic to our minds, to our health, to our very existence.

[01:10:02] I find living here is, like strips us of our humanity, our dignity, our culture, our history, our language, our values. We feel empty because nothing of ours is valued here. It wears us down. In each place we are put in a box. In a cage or a bottle where there is no escape. There is no space I can call mine. There is nothing that is mine here. Not even what I say is mine. The clothes I wear, the food I eat, the songs I sing, the dance, I dance. The language I speak. Even the God that I worship. None is mine. I am an outsider perpetually struggling to fit into a square hole. Everything is difficult. You try, but you are not getting in. In these spaces, one is not an individual. One is a representative, a collective. One sin can affect one's kind. One man's – like last week we know the, the, the man that ran away with a girlfriend and their baby died. You see that's why a black man shows up on the TV. That scene affects all of us. It's not his individual

sin. It's black people sin. So here you are collective. You are not an individual, even though I'm an individual. But what I do affects my kind. Affect the way people think about us. Affect the way people see us. Here, I can be seen as dumb. But at the same time, I'm expected to know everything. So, there's contradiction. You know, you can't make mistakes. My option is limited.

[01:12:30] And so what I'm trying to say that when you invite me into a space and I'm not keen to go to that space, probably is because I don't have sufficient proof to tell you that I deserve to be in that space. So, I may say no. Or, some people say, 'Oh, you Africans will bunch together.' Yeah. We need support because we're empty. And you are always not keen to go to space because when you go to a space. What do you discuss? Your culture, your story. Your dance. Your food. And none of mine is recognised here. So, I really don't have anything to discuss with you. So, when you said come to my place, I say, 'No'. Understand why I say no.

So, I hope that this evening I invited you into my world. Into my people's world. Where we go from here, I don't know. But you do understand. Thank you for giving me this chance.

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