

Column

Black and white

Loes Magnin

If you've ever travelled through Africa, you must have come across different names for white people. *Mzungu give me money!* (East Africa) *Obruni, marry me!* (Ghana) *Toubab* (Mali), *Malungu* (Mozambique)... *hey, white person!*

It is a complicated thing, the African black-and-white relationship. Yes, it often marks the inequality between races, and yes it does generally mean that I – a white person – have more money. And that my education is better. As are my nutrition, my health, my house and my safety. But the dilemma of inequality, the historical meanings of black and white relationships like colonialism and apartheid are themselves not that black and white.

Along the coastline of Ghana, West-Africa, a lot of the old slave's forts from our colonial days are still preserved. In the summer of 2005 I visited Cape Coast Castle, an English slave fort. Life outside of the fort had its normal African buzz. Colourful people, street sellers, some traffic and familiar smells of food, charcoal and sweat. But once inside, there was no African colourful warmth to be found. The tour guide gave us – white tourists - a detailed and horrible description of life in these forts. He told us about the serial rapes of the women and the unbelievable way slaves were bought and auctioned on the markets as if they were cattle. He showed us the slaves dungeons, with no space, no water, no air... nothing. On top of all this, the tour guide kept talking of *your ancestors* when he was referring to the colonialists performing their horrible slavery. Thanks for reminding me.



Just outside of Cape Coast Castle hawkers tried to sell souvenirs to the many - mostly white - tourists who visited the castle. I had just stepped outside the Castles grounds. Even though it was hot outside, I had goose-pimples from the stories. One of the hawkers, his hair in dreadlocks, several souvenirs in his hands, came up to me and started yelling at me: *Hey, obruni, baby, buy a necklace from me!* I said *no thank you. Obruni, obruni, hey, look here, a nice bangle!* He kept following me, I kept saying no thank you. I didn't want a necklace.

But then Mr. Hawker stopped dead and started screaming, going completely beserk, yelling: *You f-ing racist! You don't want anything to do with blacks! You don't want to buy from me because I'm black, you are a racist!* Never in my life had I felt so hurt. I yelled back at him, asking him whether he thought I had enjoyed myself inside the Castle. Why would I be travelling through Africa if I didn't like black people?

And then it struck me. It was the white-peoples guilt he was playing at. He knew the state people -white people - were in when they came out of the castle, after hearing the stories of *our ancestors*. And his selling tactics were based on the black-and-white dilemma. Knowing how sensitive most white people are - or have become - for insinuations of colonialist mentality he guilt-tripped tourists into buying his souvenirs.

Like I said; the black and white thing isn't that black and white.

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