

**“Broken Circle” by Emilia A. Ottoo**

Here I stand, in this new moment  
Alone in a village, ripped out of the papoose  
Sharing in African American traditions from African roots  
It is through love and education my spirit has not decayed  
Uganda where I was born  
Harlem where I was raised  
In the complex of identity so began the maze  
Like the “broken circle” which Kwanzaa embodies  
I’m sorry, if you thought this was going to be a  
Generic quinti-Afro-centric Kwanzaa poem—NO.  
This is a celebration, a weapon of the cultural haves and have-nots  
In the battle of 2013, this village shouting **call-n-response (all active w/ audience)** saying

**This is a circle.**

**A beautiful circle.**

**A colorful circle.**

**A circle of people.**

And for the people I’ll be a steeple for what’s broken I choose to empower  
40 million worldwide in deep fascination  
We face the question is Kwanzaa a *fact* or an *aspiration*? Or both?  
To mend the broken circle of poor lands that are rich  
From America to Africa going back on Freedom ships  
Crying out like they did December 26, 1966 declaring

**This is a circle.**

**A beautiful circle.**

**A colorful circle.**

**A circle of people.**

And like the people I’ve had to embrace *Kuumba* (creativity) and *Imani* (faith)  
In hopes to one day be happy  
Because I had heard so many “you so black” and “your hair’s so nappy” snaps and  
So many women asking me if I wanted my hair braided back  
That by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was embarrassed to walk down 125<sup>th</sup> street  
To reflect my people from oral traditions using oral prescriptions  
With stereotypical ‘blah blahs’  
You must understand that youth, no matter the color  
Are stripped of their *Kujichagulia* (self-determination)  
So imagine living in a Mecca with these invalid forms of ID within  
No one discussing how a few blocks down on 116<sup>th</sup> was Harlem land being  
Controlled, patrolled, and consoled by Africans  
Who understood that

**This is a circle.**

See this is big

Our *Nia* (purpose) is our *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility) and *Ujama* (cooperative economics)

So negative commentary on Africans or African Americans stings like

All the ‘warnings’ from both rings about becoming “like them”

Well the ghetto is who loved me for who I was and who I was yet to be

And the continent for my legacy and walking poetry

But how can I believe “Black is Beautiful” when

Half the beauty supplies the sale of lightening creams

And all the blacks I see on screen wear weaves and things

And all the guys want to be like the European conquerors

And all the girls obsess over European queens

And the message it screams for *Umoja!* (unity)

For where are the leaves from humanity’s family tree

And was I shaken off or am I a natural dream still blowing in the breeze

Cause I understand that

**This is a circle.**

So I celebrate the conflict

But how can we reconcile African culture in American ruptures

When I ask “what kind of African dance is that?” and all you can tell me is “western”

Look Africa is not just a place its 53 countries

And black and poor, impoverished and African, is it related or a sundry?

And its probably easy to explain the blues and jazz to our African grannies

But look, this is not culture shock its all culture squeeze like

White holidays are biblical, black holidays political, and Hip Hop too is cyclical so

Why don’t we celebrate Kwanzaa in the streets with all our people?

So that presidents and rappers can speak *Kwanzaa* (first) as equals so we see

**This is a circle.**

Well look we all know when the circle was broken

When the ‘first’ ship sailed and the ‘first’ spiritual was spoken

Out of grief, disbelief

I can not imagine being that slave

But I can imagine what will happen with

That, raps, snaps, Kwanzaa, *and* Mandela in my veins

So we celebrate today, its not just one occasion

Because Kwanzaa IS a fact, and an aspiration

And as I step back to give Impact this stage and this virtue

Enjoy the show, and when you leave here remember

**This is a circle.**

[Draft/Banter] Ladies and gentleman, we’re gathered here today to celebrate and to learn not what

Kwanzaa is, but the Kwanzaa that’s already in all of us. OBA-PADER, and I have prepared the stage for the mending of our human circle, by first up, Impact Repertory Theatre. You ready? Clap it up!