

My definition of African Identity

What is African identity? The answer to that question seems quite obvious but with the diversity of cultures and the current global village frenzy, it becomes more difficult to answer. Geographically, those who identify as African are those who live on the African continent but then come the issue of roots, some may live in Africa but have ancestral roots in Europe, Asia America or Australia. Perhaps skin colour also has a role in African identity; black people who were born and raised in America are known as African American. Most of them have never been to Africa but because of the colour of their skin, they are identified with Africa. According to Achille Mbembe, in his article *Afropolitanism*: "For many, to be 'African' is to be 'black' and therefore 'not white', with a degree of authenticity being measured on the scale of raw racial difference." (2005). What we glean from this is that people who don't understand what being an African is, think physical appearance automatically makes you African which we think is wrong. African identity is not defined by race, gender, religion, geo-political boundaries or ethnicity but by philosophies and ideologies rich in morals, ethics and an African culture; in essence, African identity is a state of mind (Botha). African identity, for me, is being able to call Africa home. So, regardless of colour, roots or geography, African-ness is the ability to call Africa home.

Reading summary on African Identity

In the book, *Beautiful Ugly; African diaspora and Aesthetics*, the issues of African identity are discussed in-depth. It would seem that the African identity is often misunderstood because of how the history of Africa has evolved. During colonialism, a policy known as assimilation was implemented. According to Senghor, "the 'Negro African', in contrast with the European, approached his surroundings in such a way that the dividing line between himself and the object completely disappeared. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis" The identity of the African may have been distorted with this process of assimilation. Gamal Nkrumah however argues on just how much of who one is can be taken out of them, is it possible really to forget one's own language and culture? Under all that oppression, did Africans conform to the assimilation and forgot their own identity? That can't be possible because Africa still exists and there is an African culture of sorts that still exists.

Looking at post-colonial Africa, the continent has been re-built and the people independent, however, the effects of assimilation may still be visible on the African culture. Gatherings which were afro-centric have changed drastically. The African lifestyle has changed but then comes the question of modernity, where is the line between loss of a culture and evolution.

In conclusion, the identity of the African is a state of mind. There are qualifiers and categories for the identity of what is African. In essence, Africa has been called the cradle of mankind so everything could be African but some things have been qualified more than others, thus African-ness is really a state of mind.

Nuttall, S.(Ed) 2006. *Beautiful Ugly; African diaspora and Aesthetics*. Cape Town: Kwela