

# On Being an African: Mary-Ann Damons

## AFRICA, MY HERITAGE!

It is said that I am not black;  
It is said that I am not white;

They classified me as coloured because, according to them, the PENCIL<sup>1</sup> used to define me; did not slide through my ancestors' hair – easy enough to be classified as white and also not difficult enough to be classified as black; yet my crown reflects the beauty of my diverse heritage ...

It is said that I don't have a culture,  
It is said that I don't speak an African language;  
And therefore, it is said that I am not an African.

So, what does it mean to be African then?  
So, what is my heritage then?

Who am I then?  
When my heart beats Africa?

Who am I?  
When my soul whispers the secrets of Africa, the Africa it longs for ...?

## Who am I?

### When, as Thabo Mbeki said:

"In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East.  
[When] Their proud dignity informs my bearing, their culture a part of my essence.  
[When] The stripes they bore on their bodies from the lash of the slave master are a reminder embossed on my consciousness of what should not be done"?<sup>2</sup>

### Most importantly, who am I?

### When, just as Thabo Mbeki, I assert that:

"I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape – they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result"?<sup>3</sup>

## WHO AM I THEN?

## I AM AFRICA AND AFRICA IS I, therefore

"I AM AN AFRICAN!" and ...

## AFRICA IS MY HERITAGE!

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<sup>1</sup> The Pencil Test. Cultural Studies Fall 2017 <https://blogs.stlawu.edu>

<sup>2</sup> The words of President Thabo Mbeki's 'I am an African' speech and the 'Winds of Change' CD [https://soweto.co.za/html/i\\_iamafican.htm](https://soweto.co.za/html/i_iamafican.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The words to President Thabo Mbeki's 'I am an African' speech and the 'Winds of Change' CD [https://soweto.co.za/html/i\\_iamafican.htm](https://soweto.co.za/html/i_iamafican.htm)