

Caribbean, African Or Black British? What Do You Call Yourself?

So, where are you really from?

By Habiba Katsha

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JIANAN LIU/HUFFPOST UK

You're reading [Gen:Blxck](#), a series exploring Black culture, history, family and identity through the generations.

Anyone who is a part of the Black diaspora has thought about their identity and belonging. So much so, that when someone asks you where you're from, you have to pause, because your answer depends on several factors. Were you born back home or in the UK? Do you speak your language? Do you go home often?

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Caribbean, African Or Black British? What Do You Call Yourself?

~~I am from East London, London, not in Congo. I am not from~~
a Black person, I'd say: "I'm Congolese but I live in East London/Essex."

I pretty much said the same thing, but I phrased it differently. Why? Because identity is complex. I was born in Kenya but moved to the UK when I was a few months old and come from a Congolese family. On paper, I'm as British as can be, but I haven't always felt like that.

Up until the age of around 17, I identified as Congolese because I felt I was. I ate Congolese food, had a good grasp of Congolese culture and history and that was enough. In recent years, though, I've started realising how much I don't know about Congo and that I relate way more to British culture – specifically, *Black British* culture – than I thought I did.

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HABIBA KATSHA

I lean towards identifying as Black British, but my mother says she's firmly Congolese.

My aversions to calling myself British lied in the role Britain played in colonisation and slavery. Could I truly be proud of being British knowing what this country has done to Black people? And even today, the treatment of Black people in the UK needs a lot of work.

Though I love being Congolese, I still haven't been there, can't fully speak or understand Swahili ([my mother's mother tongue](#)). So yes, I'm Congolese, but today I tend to identify more with the term Black British.

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To me, Black British acknowledges that yes, I am British, but I'm also Black. This is my home, but I also have a part of my identity from a different country that is equally as important.

My mum on the other hand would still say she's Congolese, despite her being in this country for more than 26 years.

As I said, identity is complex and evolving – both individually and within one family.

“I feel both Black and British at exactly the same time.”

- LYNDA ANENO-ACIRO

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Lynda Aneno-Aciro, who is a 26-year old podcaster and receptionist from London, says she feels Black British like me and is proud of what that means.

“It’s the diverse melting pot of Jamaican and Nigerian cultures, seasoned with an abundant amount the cultures of the immigrants that came beyond the first waves,” Aneno-Aciro says.

“We have a solid sense of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. And from what I can see, we are going beyond the moon.”

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LYNDA ANENO-ACIRO

Aneno-Aciro was born and raised in London but her roots lie in northern Uganda. She tells HuffPost UK she feels so close to her culture, it often feels like she grew up over there. “I know my maternal and paternal villages and frequent there a lot,” she says.

“There are aspects of my culture that I love, the traditional dancing, the story-telling, the pride that we have, carrying our Nilotic stories on our back that predate all of us. The food, the land, the language and way, way more.”

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But during her secondary school years throughout the 2010s, she started to feel confused about her identity.

“The zeitgeist [then] was that if you weren’t from Nigeria, Ghana, or Jamaica, your country basically didn’t exist,” she says.

“I was told I was too ‘dark’ and [had] several reminders about my appearance that only came from fellow Black people. It left me confused about my identity, and quite frankly, I didn’t feel ‘Black enough.’”

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Aneno-Aciro says that this experience was compounded by the area that her family lived in.

“If you didn’t grow up in a ‘Black area’, speak the colloquial stuff, your blackness was called into question,” she says. “Fast forward a good few years and I learnt that my experience is just as valid, we’re not a monolith. I feel both Black and British at exactly the same time.”

“When people ask me where I’m from I always say Nigeria first.”

- IYOBOSA IDUBOR-WILLIAMS

Iyobosa Idubor-Williams, who is a 23-year-old government affairs intern based in Reading, shares that he feels more Nigerian than anything, but relates to the phrase [‘Black in Britain’](#) – a term people use to describe a feeling of being Black in the UK, but not necessarily a part of British culture.

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Idubor-Williams was born in East London but moved back to Lagos between the ages of two and 16. However, he spent term time in a British boarding school before he moved back here permanently.

“When people ask me where I’m from, I always say Nigeria first, because that’s what I identify more with and despite the awfully corrupt country that it is, that’s the country that has my heart,” he says.

“During my teens, this identity did slip away having spent my adolescent years in a British boarding school – and being one out of only four Black

people in school at one point – I don't think you can expect anything else.”

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He believes the way he sees himself has a lot to do with his parents. “The fact that they decided to move us back to Nigeria young so that we were in touch with where we are from makes me feel very privileged and grateful,” he adds.

His parents would identify with being ‘authentically Nigerian’, he says. “As soon as I graduated from uni, they told me there’s nothing left here for them, sold the house, packed up their bags and moved home, they

barely ever spent winters here, and took the earliest opportunities to go back home. ”

“If speaking to a non-person of colour, ‘I’m from here.’”

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Jaja Muhammad, a 31-year-old audio-producer from London, also says her answer to ‘where are you from’ is dependant on who’s asking. “I typically say, if speaking to a non-person of colour, ‘I’m from here, London, England,’” she says.

“When speaking to Black people I’ll instantly say my grandparents are Jamaican. I feel when talking to non-black people they try to do everything to invalidate your right to be in this country, so I do my best to antagonise them. I’ll even say both my parents are born here and so was I. Then I ask about their heritage if they go steps further.”



JAJA MUHAMMED

Muhammad identifies more with being Black British than Black Caribbean. “I grew up in a family which had discarded many aspects of Caribbean heritage, we were vegetarians so we didn’t eat much of the cultural food, we didn’t celebrate many of the cultural celebrations due to former religious beliefs and I also haven’t visited the country very many times, so where was home?” she asks.

“It’s certainly not here, but it has to be here. The way I speak is critiqued, but I’ve unfortunately had to adapt, so [code-switching is still a thing](#). We were reset to a default culturally, so I’ve picked up many typically British traits.”

Now she’s met a few more Caribbean counterparts, she’s realised how her DNA and growing up around her grandmother truly makes her “so very Caribbean”.

“It’s undeniable,” she says. “There are things I thought were just normal standards of life, and then I realise it’s literally a Jamaican / Caribbean thing. So I’m in this weird limbo, I am Black British with Jamaican Heritage.”

Like many of us, Muhammad is still figuring out how she identifies.

Identity is complicated, but it also changes. Are we proud to be Black? Yes I think we all are, but this doesn’t negate from the fact that we grew up in the UK and have adopted British values and norms.

To be Black and British is to [read books by Malorie Blackman](#) but also Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Listen to Stormzy but also Wizkid, Burna Boy and Beenie Man. It’s having rice and peas, or mac and cheese, with a Sunday roast.

We can be proud to be both.

What does it mean to be Black and British? Well, it depends which generation you ask. This Black History Month,

HuffPost UK has teamed up with BuzzFeed's [Seasoned](#) and [Tasty UK](#) to find out. Read more from [Gen:Blxck](#) here.



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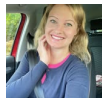
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