**Why we should think before indorsing the term “African-Australian”**

There is no doubt in my mind that if you ask anyone in Australia who was born in Africa what they would want to be referred to as, they will tell you proudly “African-Australian”. I have in the past agreed with this term. However, I have grown to look at this term more carefully.

The images of Africa that the media project on the Australian public are those of poverty, famine, war, displaced people and refugees. Some of these images are projected on the public most of the time with the best intentions. For example, the World Vision TV advertisements often show images of African children starving, African people with HIV/AIDS, sick African children, etc to mobilise the Australian public to donate money to enable the World Vision help these African people. These donations go far in terms of building schools, hospitals, clean water, etc that are beneficial to the African communities that are left out.

Images of war and refugees could be shown in order to mobilise public opinion and justify spending public money on aid to Africa or for a diplomatic push to make something happen. For example, when Australia was thinking of sending troops to Darfur a few years ago, there was a bit of coverage of the situation in Darfur. This is done with the best intention in mind.

However, all these images leave very negative stereotype in the mind of the public.

The African American situation doesn’t make things any easier. Through the media, images of violence and drug abuse by the African Americans are the norm. Everybody knows that African Americans are the under class in America. This reinforces the stereotype that has already been created in the Australian society about Africans. When I look at “African Australian” the first thing that comes in my mind is African American and all the negative things that come with that.

When African refugees come to Australia and go through all the settlement problems that any other groups of migrants have gone through, the image is further reinforced.

Some academics have argued that it was a mistake that Africans are brought to Australia since that is going to reduce the social capital that Australia has been building on.

Add on top of all that a senior public official in the person of the former Immigration Minister with the support of a government publically confirming all the stereotypes and actually agreeing that it was a bad idea to bring African refugees to Australia. Well, you can’t blame those Africa young people who deny that they are African. It just that they can’t do anything about their skin colour that gives it away.

The other problem is that once you have a distinct group call “African Australian”, you create a situation where such a group is vulnerable. Take the NT intervention for example. In my opinion, it was easy for the Howard government to point a finger at the Aboriginal people because that is a distinct group whose image has been presented over a long time as a problem that the state needs to deal with. It was not a problem for the government to suspend the Racial Discrimination Act and to move in with the military. The public didn’t care because “these Aboriginal people” needed to be fixed.

A consensus by Africans in Australia that they are referred to as “African Australians” doesn’t mean that that is the best term to use. I would rather use the term ‘Australians of African Heritage’.