

Turin's Pan-African Festival 2015

At the end of May 2015 I attended the meeting "[Promoting Africa and the relevance of young people being part of the Diaspora](#)", based in Turin and organized on the occasion of the [Pan-African Festival](#). We could not miss out this festival, which is of greatest interest to us, taking into account what it has in common with the purposes of our research. One of our main goals is to understand what the term "Europe" may mean, today as well as in the near future, for those people who choose to stay in Europe, wherever they were born. Although all the opinions emerged during this event were sometimes different from ours, it is this plurality of voices that we are interested in. This festival was created in 2014 by a group of African natives, with the purpose of promoting solidarity and cultural initiatives shared by all the African communities in Turin. The event takes place once a year to celebrate the birth of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established on May 25, 1963 in Addis Ababa, with 32 signatory governments. Almost half of the African countries, represented by the various associations based in Turin, participate in this festival, which is not seen as a political event, but it is rather perceived as a moment of social aggregation. It is also very important to point out that all the speakers at this festival have chosen to define themselves as Pan-African men and women, without specifying their nationality. Among the major representatives were Viciane Wessitcheu, the Festival Director; Cheick Tidiane Gaye, writer; and a group of students or freshly graduate, representing "the young Diaspora". According to the Festival Director, it is true that the soul of Pan-Africanism is "a belief that African people, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny", as Minkah Makalani usually says. However, he argued, this conception has been evolving and paving new routes, especially for what concerns the youngest generations. Viciane Wessitcheu also said that putting "Africa" together is not an easy task, and pointed out that people frequently make two opposite mistakes: on the one hand considering Africa as just one big country, and on the other hand underlining the differences without making efforts in the direction of a dialogue. She expressed the hope that the "young Diaspora" can find their new personal way to become African and Italian at the same time for those who wish so. According to the most prevailing perception, the term Pan-African is nowadays associated with the idea that black people in every country of the world are firstly citizens of Africa. However, a very interesting reinterpretation of Pan-Africanism was shared during this festival. In particular the "young Diaspora" have reconsidered the concept of Pan-Africanism combining it with the one of integration or even better interaction within the Italian society. These young people want to feel and have the right to be both African and Italian. The writer [Cheikh Tidiane Gaye](#), who does not want to be defined a Senegalese writer but simply a writer, then went deeper into the major points of the meeting, which were to raise awareness within the young migrant generations and to employ their skills to the best. In his opinion, the most important thing that the second and third generations, belonging to the Diaspora story, need to do is to resume pride to be African and especially the "beauty" of it, which colonialism has ripped off. Since 1963, after Addis Ababa, new identities, new energies and ways to do even better than their ancestors - among others Boubacar Diallo Telli and Kwame Nkrumah - can be discovered.

For instance, according to the writer, this kind of Diaspora is able to not merely find migrants a job, but, in addition, to create cultural and economic strategies in order for them to give a personal contribution to Italy's resurgence as well. He believes that it is not correct to talk about social integration; he prefers to call it "interaction" because "Europe cannot become a cultural cemetery". The main part of the conference was dedicated to a young migrant group, composed of Simon Juste Nguessan, engineer; Nesua Tsimba, student; Kaba Mamoudou, lawyer; and Sabah Irza, disability social operator. Nesua Simba reminded us that festivals like this one are not just important occasions for meeting and dialogue, but fundamental moments to "build an identity", mostly for those born in Italy or arrived here as children. She also said that each young migrant has to find his/her personal equilibrium between building and re-building an identity, and not segregating him/herself. They have "to be the best of all the parties they belong to". The engineer Simon Juste Nguessan shared with us the memory of his first school essay, which began with the sentence: "A sunny day I left my country, and I found so much cold". He said that it took a long time for him to start feeling all right in Italy and things changed only when he modified his way of thinking, from "What can Africa offer?" and "What can Italy offer?", into "What do you have to offer to Africa and Italy?". According to him, often we forget that inclusion is firstly an economic factor and, in order to be amalgamated, people must in the first place become indispensable, not to be someone asking but someone being asked for. Finally, Sebah Irza stressed the importance of avoiding the dichotomy between being young and being a young foreigner. From her point of view, the whole young population ask of Italy to make an investment in them, and the migrant generations especially wish to contribute and stimulate Italian culture and economy. As a conclusion I would point out that setting up tools to the aim at giving migrants and communities a perspective of social inclusion and human development, is definitely one of these years' biggest challenges, and innumerable global organizations have been working specifically in this direction.