



So where are you from?

INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Naomi Sepiso
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Introduction

Most people might chalk up the question “Where are you from?” as innocent small-talk. But 17-year-old Naomi Sepiso senses that for people whose appearance causes them to feel like an outsider, the question’s meaning can cut much deeper. In this essay, Sepiso explains why being asked about her origin is a line in the sand between her and the asker. The question, in Sepiso’s eyes, immediately ostracizes her as “the other”—someone who is from somewhere else. She describes having a “pre-rehearsed answer” she often uses, keeping her truer feelings buried beneath the many layers and complexities of her own identity.

“She was not someone from a place. She made a home of kind words and warm feelings.”

NOTES

 Skill:
Central or Main
Idea

I think the main idea is about belonging. “Always” shows she gets this question a lot. “Originally” sounds like someone’s not Australian if they were born elsewhere. The author uses third-person like she’s distancing herself from others.

- 1 ‘So where are you from?’ They always asked that question; a **subtle** reminder that she was not one of them.
- 2 ‘What do you mean?’ she asked. They only asked that question when they were afraid of placing her into a box. As though they were giving her the option of which box she wanted to climb into.
- 3 ‘Well... you’re obviously not from here... I mean... you live here, but where are you from... like, originally?’
- 4 There it was. *Originally*. The word suggesting that she cannot **validate** her sense of belonging to this place. The **implication** being that her ‘exotic’ genetic makeup excludes her from her right to belong to this land.
- 5 She gave the long pre-rehearsed answer they often dug for. They love a good story. She told them where her mother came from, where her father came from. She told them how her parents met in a land far from their own where she was born. She told them of how they moved around from town to town and across the ocean to a place that sometimes felt like ‘home’. They smiled. Happy endings always leave a crowd feeling good.
- 6 What she doesn’t tell them is how she feels her pre-rehearsed response drag up her throat, as though she didn’t pick the right words from those that whirl at the bottom of her stomach in response. She doesn’t tell them that being born out of her mother’s country makes her a foreigner to a land she could have called home. Or that her official documents are marked with the Coat of Arms of a land she never felt safe in. That she cannot have conversations with the grandparents she has not seen in years because her tongue will always stumble over the **nuances** of languages that never fit quite right.
- 7 Sometimes she felt tired of being watered down to belonging to a foreign location on a map. To being a friend that made someone else a little more ‘cultured’ by simple association. As though everything else she had to offer became lacking in value every time someone asked her the question.

NOTES

8 She was not someone from a place. She made a home of kind words and warm feelings. Her soul became a safe nest deep inside the **confines** of her body.



“Her soul became a safe nest deep inside the confines of her body.”

9 ‘What is the value of a land I come from. We are all of this land. We came the same way and we leave the same way.’ By the time the words fought their way out of her mouth everyone else had moved on.

10 One day they would come to understand, she thought. She was not the land of her mother and father. She was her own country, with her own history of civil wars, revolutions, healing and growth. One day they would learn to keep their boxes away from her. One day they would see that she will never, ever, fit.

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