

Dear Reader,

I was born in a place called Bulawayo in 1983, it's the second largest city in Zimbabwe. I traveled to the States for about a year and a half, and I did elementary and middle school there. But most of my schooling was in Zimbabwe. Then in 2003, when I finished high school, I moved to Brisbane, Australia.

I think in Zimbabwe, most of the time, when your parents can afford for you to do university or any additional education, they send you out of the country because the University of Zimbabwe is prone to student riots and student dissatisfaction with the system – a lot of financial issues and corruption, etcetera. Because of that, a lot of the year, not a lot of education takes place. This was especially true when I had finished high school, it was even more tumultuous at that time. And a lot of the other, smaller universities or polytechnical colleges, they do not translate very well internationally.

My parents were like, “If we can afford to send you out, we'll send you out. Your brother's already in Australia, so why don't you go to Australia?” My brother was in Melbourne already; however, I opted on Brisbane because it's a lot more relaxed and it's more me than the other cities. I hadn't visited Brisbane before then, but from the description of the agent who was doing our transfer, I think I liked the chilled vibe that she described.

So this agent got commission from certain universities, Griffith being one of them. She would say, “Griffith is the best, blah blah blah,” which didn't end up being the case. It wasn't really what I was expecting. I wanted a relaxed lifestyle, but not in the middle of a forest. I don't know if I'm going to live or die because not even Africa's like this. But I really appreciated coming to Brisbane because when I visited Melbourne, I just didn't feel like that was a place that I could call home.

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A lot of the South Africans that move to Australia are running away from the trouble that “the black people have with crime and violence”, so they want to come to a place where there are no/few black people, and they want to come to Australia – it's the promised land. So when South Africans think of Australia, it's where the racists go to live.

A lot of South Africans end up in Perth, so when you speak to the South Africans in Perth – they are white South Africans, in general – they give you a very skewed perspective of what South Africa is like. Their experience and interpretation of what's happening in South Africa will be very different to possibly ours or another black South African's interpretation.

I'm also just amazed how Australia exists in a bubble; people feel like they can avoid topics. Like, how in the climate of the world do you avoid talking to your kids about race or how is it not a topic of discussion, seeing that there's so many people that are moving to Australia. My mind boggles. Like, oh, it's too hard to talk about. Let's talk about Bluey.

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When I first started nursing, I was very oblivious to a lot of accounts of racism in my youth. I was like, oh, that's nothing. I couldn't see it. Then I moved to South Africa and I met Masimba and he taught me to see how big and bad and ugly some things were.



In nursing, you see that there are a lot of international nurses. You have your Filipinos, you have a lot from Hong Kong, China, from all over. And then you start to look at the registered nurses. And then you look at the clinical nurses. They're starting to get paler in colour, less diversity. And then you look for the nurse unit managers, who manage the wards, and they're mostly white, if not all white. And then you start to look at the ones above, who are now going into nursing administration, and it's all white. So you can see that there is a hierarchy. I don't know if it's partly because if you're from a different background, all you want to do is work, support your family and go home. You don't necessarily want to keep climbing because it means more responsibility at work. It takes more time away from home and it just becomes too much to juggle. So I wonder if part of it is that. But also you just see that there's not much opportunity available to you or you just don't feel like the cards are stacked in your favour. You can see there's a lot of diversity in registered nursing, but once you start to get to management roles, there's not much diversity.

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I think there are parts of Australia where I feel like I belong. We went to a birthday party of a friend from Nigeria. She's a black African mum. And I was telling Masimba about how I felt rejuvenated and refreshed from that experience. I didn't feel like something was taken away, like energy was taken away, because I was around other people like me. So I think my belonging is dependent on who's around me. If I'm in Australia, if I'm around people who've had a very similar experience to me, I feel like I belong in this environment. When I'm at work, I feel like I belong because I'm a nurse - other nurses, we can relate in that way.

So I think my belonging is dependent on how I fit into the puzzle. But in Australia as a whole, when I say I'm Australian, it comes with, "But I came; I wasn't born here." It's like I attained my Australianness from my passport and how long I've stayed here, not because I feel a connection with the land.

I can't say that Zimbabwe feels like home either because I've been away since 2003, over 20 years. I've spent more time outside of Zimbabwe than I've spent in Zimbabwe now so it doesn't really feel like home. Even when I go to my father's house, it doesn't feel like home because he got remarried. My parents are divorced. And when I went to my grandmother's place, that used to feel like home. But my grandmother's passed away so that doesn't feel like home any more.

But the fact that there are other people that look like me, that is a big draw. And there's open spaces. The challenges of raising children are different in Zimbabwe. To have somebody look after your kids, it's not as expensive as in Australia. And family values or things that you hold dear are more similar in Zim than here. So the big draw is just the similarities in thought, but it's just not feasible to go back home. If we really wanted to, I'm sure we could make it work. But, geez, it would be a lot of hard work.

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If I was to go to another country and somebody asked me where I was from, I'd struggle. When I was in South Africa, I'd say that I was Australian because I didn't want to have to bribe the police officers if they stopped me. I'd say, "I'm Australian," put on a really thick accent. Depends on the circumstance, but most of the time I think I'll say Australia. I think there's a part of me that's a bit ashamed of coming from Zimbabwe. Just because of our former president and I just can't relate to the system that runs Zimbabwe, and I find it embarrassing. But that being said, I'm proud to be

African. I don't know if that makes sense. I'm proud to be from my tribe. I love my names, I love my language, but just not the Zimbabwe part.

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Our five-year-old now, he tells everyone that he's South African. And we have to tell him you were born there, but that's not where your mum and dad are from. Your mum and dad are from Zimbabwe, so you are Zimbabwean. But for him, he just tells everyone "I'm South African." I think for me, my biggest concern isn't about him thinking of himself as Zimbabwean. I just want him to be okay being black in a majority white Australian country and for him to be okay or to thrive in the fact that he's different.

I think if he's okay being all of that here, I also hope that he's okay not being 100 percent blackity black, like listening to the music, wearing the clothes, speaking the language. Because if he goes home, he's also going to stick out, because that's my experience. When I go home, I'm that cousin who speaks Ndebele with an accent if she speaks Ndebele at all. I'm the one who's always wearing shorts and trousers where everyone is wearing skirts. And I don't know the protocol for a lot of things. I'm that cousin, and I'm not sure if I'm 100 percent okay with being that cousin because it's awkward and you're clumsy; you don't know what you're doing. I just want him to be okay knowing that he's – I don't know if they call it third-culture kid or whatever.

I just want him to be okay to be himself, whatever the surroundings are. And if he identifies as being Zimbabwean and Australian and born in South Africa and all of those parts are in him and he's okay with that, then that's okay with me. I think there's parts of us that would really like for him to understand our home languages, and that takes a lot of effort on top of everything else. That would be great if he does. We don't speak our languages much at home because we speak different dialects, but it would be a nice add on. I just want my son to be okay being black wherever he is, a black African.

Sisi