

Cultural Navigation

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Cultural navigation,
something I have struggled with my entire life.
Spending most of my days lost
in my own hair,
my own style,
my jewelry,
my language.

From the sports we play to the food we eat,
cautious in the way we greet our elders,
our aunties.
Anxious about how I will be judged
for what I do,
for what I wear,
for who I am allowed to be,
as if every action of mine
reflects an entire ethnicity.

So when you tell me to be calm,
to just sit in silence and pause,
I cannot meditate in an
atmosphere of peace.

For those of us whose skin carries more melanin,

the only choice is to open our eyes
and realize
we were born into never ending protests,
in the midst of a war my people were called to.

We helped you flee,
we helped you fight,
yet through it all, you planned our demise.

So forgive me if I question your intentions
when you interrogate me,
asking where I am from,
putting me under a scientific telescope,
studying me as if I do not belong.

So when you fiddle with my hair
like it is a toy on your shelf,
forcing me to wonder,
why am I a joke in your book?

You cause me to lie, to procrastinate.
Tomorrow I will state my truth.
Tomorrow I will be myself.
Tomorrow I will build a nation far greater.
Always lost and never found,

being born in Africa, the home of civilization.

It taught me everything, but maybe nothing.

Every night I dream of
the eternal motherland,
its beauty and wonder everlasting and enriching.

But since that doomsday,
I have been unable to grasp the warmth my country once provided,
the beautiful scenery,
the food and languages,
an intelligent community we all loved as a family,
the rich, ravishing gold and oil flowing through our land.

How culture is a marvelous thing.

It is not what makes us unique.

It is what makes us different.

But in a world where we are told to just be ourselves,
as long as we fit into society's unreal standards,
I have had no choice but to search and search,
from the English Channel to the Mediterranean Sea,
endless days,
restless nights.

Yet I cannot find the space left

for you and me to be different.

Maybe you can tell me where this passage is,
where I can journey to the motherland my Oni Onome described every night,
so I could sleep and dream
without falling prey to a land that refuses to say my name,
asking me to shorten it or change it
before even attempting to pronounce it.

Order in the court, my name will not be part of your justification.

Cultural navigation,
something I am forced to face every single day.

If only I could journey to
a land that holds barrels of history,
a land full of unseen creativity.

Till this day, still recovering from empty sailor words
that meant we were stripped of our rights in 1448,
colonized by Britain,
colonized by Germany,
colonized by Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

And you wonder why our people are tired.

You wonder why our government is corrupt.

So when I stick up for my human rights,

do not call me an angry Black woman.

Do not sit there and play judge.

Leave me out of your venn diagrams

that states I must act in a certain way.

So I agree.

No justice, no peace.

A phrase I have always known.

Your words cause no affliction anymore.

Your empty promises to build a nation

only bear foreshadowing and hindrance,

for I have been hurt by much more.

So when I look for the cause of why

my sisters and I feel we have to compete with one another,

do not turn a blind eye

as you have all my life.

We blame society,

but we are society.

But maybe, if I could journey back
and learn more than Migwo and Vrendo,
the only two words and four syllables
you graciously allowed me to flee with.
Cultural navigation.