

I could be watching football in my local, sat on a quiet train or doing my weekly shopping. You can sense the intrigue you arouse in a stranger, and are able to predict the words they are poised to utter before they've left their lips: 'Where are you (*really*) from?' Almost in an instant, the fragile, leaking glasshouse that we have painstakingly built for ourselves and called home shatters, and the shards of glass pierce our skin. That incessant question rings in the ears of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of people who have travelled to this Kingdom and epitomises our experience here.

I use brackets around the word 'really' because it's not always spoken, but it is seldom absent from their minds. If I were to respond 'Stockport' – it being the place I've spent most of my life – they would not be satisfied. Had I misunderstood their question? they would wonder. Some might persist with, 'I mean, where are you *really* from, like originally?' while slapping their cheek, laying bare their true meaning: 'Where did you get that "funny tinge" from?'

I might sometimes meet their ignorance with silent pity. I could explain that one half of my family have lived in Britain for generations, but it wouldn't matter, and why should it? I could tell them that my maternal ancestors dwelled in shining cities under the sun, until we were forced into the shadows of bottomless ships in shackles, and sailed thousands of miles to a place they called 'Jamaica'; where our lives were spent like cheap coin to harvest that bittersweet crop which fattened and rotted their Kingdom. Even on that island, the Scot, rich with bloodstained money, penetrated my heritage, leaving nothing but a red-haired freckled pickney and a surname to remember.

'Oh, so you're from Jamaica? I love rum, reggae and jerk chicken', they might say with a friendly smile, oblivious to my torment.

And yet we still got back on those boats to go thousands of miles to fight for and rebuild the 'Mother Country' in her time of need, even though she spat at us and told us to go back where we came from. Yet we persevered, sewed seeds and watched them grow in a Kingdom that we hoped would become better. Only for us to still be asked, 'Where are you (*really*) from?' As though this land is white, and our dark skin doesn't belong.

Perhaps I'm being unfair. Forever not knowing where I belong may have left me weary and cynical. How many come armed with the intent to cause harm? They could ask out of innocent curiosity, or the desire to spark a conversation, even a friendship, when other questions escape them. Must we now police and censor every conversation we have? Am I myself not guilty of being interested in someone's origin because of the colour of their skin or their accent? Don't white people ask that same question of each other? I'm sure they do, but they would be satisfied with Stockport as a response.

My sadness isn't directed at the individual in front of me posing the question. My sadness resides in what the question represents. That this Kingdom, like an octopus, had spread its tentacles around the globe; taking and drawing people of all colours to her bosom, while leaving deadly seeds wherever she went, and yet we still live in a country where only one group of people are permitted to truly belong, and the rest must forever wonder where we are from.