

#wordsmatter

"Where are you really from"?

Genuine curiosity or gaslighting? Well, here are some things to consider...

**Migrants'
Rights
Network**



In a conversation between two racialised or postcolonial people, asking someone where they are from can be a very beautiful source of solidarity. It can open up discussions around our differences, but also around shared stories or experiences of migration and belonging.



**Migrants'
Rights
Network**



#wordsmatter

However, power dynamics can become unbalanced. This can apply where the interrogator is White, and the other person is of Colour.

This can even apply with two People of Colour, where one person has a far greater proximity to Whiteness over the other person.



**Migrants'
Rights
Network**



#wordsmatter

“Where are you really from?” insinuates that the first answer wasn’t good enough, and shows the interrogator becoming defensive because they didn’t get the answer they wanted.

Defensiveness is a form of gaslighting, and can be incredibly upsetting for the migratised person.



**Migrants’
Rights
Network**



#wordsmatter

Interrogations of this nature stem from ingrained ideas of what it is to be British, usually equating to Whiteness. The act of probing singles someone out as "Other", regardless of where they were born, despite migration being a crucial part of the UK's colonial history.



**Migrants'
Rights
Network**



#wordsmatter

Does the question flow naturally in conversation?
Has rapport/familiarity/comfort been established?
We must pay attention to social dynamics with humility and sensitivity.
The ethics of subjecting someone to the trauma/pain of remembering their story must also be considered.



**Migrants'
Rights
Network**



#wordsmatter