

Real English
show off = act in a way to
get people to admire you

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"I left home to find home"

The prize-winning author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discovered her true identity as a Nigerian only by moving abroad. *Interview by Carl Wilkinson*

1. _____

I went to the U.S. when I was eight. My father was a professor teaching in California, so we spent the summer with him. I imagined I was going to a snow-filled place—to me overseas meant "snow"—and I was initially disappointed how similar San Diego* was to my hometown. Still, I felt very cool to have spent a summer in San Diego and did show off to my friends. For about a week I faked a really bad American accent.

2. Do you remain rooted in Nigeria or are you keen to travel?

We don't generally have that culture of traveling and exploring in Nigeria. I don't have that wanderlust. But book tours do give me an opportunity to see other places. I was in Australia for two weeks recently, but I really just saw people at literary festivals and book readings where everyone is very nice to me.

10 Nigeria is the one place where I question myself the least. I lived in the U.S. for about seven years—it is a place that is very convenient and I am happy there, but I don't belong.

3. _____

I love the people. I love the average Nigerian. I love the sense of "can-do" in the face of all sorts of horrors. I love the languages. I love the way people walk and the way people dress traditionally.

15 There is an informality about the way people interact with each other and there's a casual acceptance and friendliness that you don't see outside Nigeria. You can walk into a shop and people will laugh and joke with you as if they knew you. I feel a real sense of connection with the country. I can go back to my ancestral village and walk the same dusty path that my great-grandfather probably walked on and that gives me a sense of being rooted.

4. _____

20 Before I went to live in the U.S. at the age of 19, I wasn't really concerned with the topic of identity. Leaving Nigeria made me much more aware of being Nigerian and what that meant. It also made me aware of race as a concept, because I didn't think of myself as black until I left Nigeria. I think you travel to search and come back home to find yourself there. In many ways travel becomes the process of finding. Travel is not the end point, it is the process. I'm not sure I would have this strong sense of being Nigerian if I had not left Nigeria.

25 5. _____

Yes, I went to South Africa** in 2002 and that trip changed me. I don't think I enjoyed it; I found it interesting. I found it a very strange and troubling country. Cape Town felt surreal: I didn't feel like I was in Africa, it feels more like a Mediterranean city. I felt I didn't believe the people in South Africa, that they were too ready to put on a happy face. Knowing quite a bit about South African history, I didn't buy this idea that what had taken years to set up had changed in a year and now everything was fine. I wanted to write about it for a long time but I couldn't because I haven't quite sorted out the mix of feelings I had being there.

6. _____

35 I still don't have that drive to travel, but what I'd really like to do is go to every country in Africa. I'd also like to go back to Australia without having to do a book tour. I'd like to go back and do my own thing. I'd like to see the Aboriginal communities. I wonder what it would be like to be an African tourist in Australia.

* San Diego: a city in Southern California where it is warm most of the year

** South Africa: an African country that was ruled by a white minority for many years, and where people of different races were separated

Real English
buy an idea = accept or
believe something