**“Don’t ask where I am from, ask ‘where am I local?**‘“ (<https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local#t-787746>)

Taiye Selasi (author of [*Ghana Must Go*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana_Must_Go)*)* introduced the rephrasing/reframing of the question “where are you from?”. Instead Selasi says: “Don’t ask me where I am from; instead ask me ‘where am I a local?’” The intention behind this focuses on the idea that *all identity is experience*. When someone asks you “where are you from?” and you say for instance, Baltimore, “Baltimore” carries a concept, an identity described by humans. A bad baseball team, extreme racism, extreme disparity between rich and poor, *The Wire*, and eating crabs are all part of Baltimore’s human described identity. Although these are the experiences of some, these experiences do not create the identity of every person born in Baltimore. Thus, when you answer “Baltimore” people immediately label you with their perceptions of Baltimore. They put you into categories, label and define you, based on what they know and this is what you become to them.

The idea that others can give you your identity is flawed, although they can certainly contribute to your identity through their impact on your lived experiences. All identity is experience. Experience is where we are from. Where we are is where we are local. Where we have been, what we have been through, the souls we have touched and those that have touched our lives. This is where we are local.

“Where are you a local?” is a better question, a more humanizing question, one built on less assumptions and preconceived notions. This proposed question is built more on learning about the identity of another by learning first hand about their experiences, rather than creating someone’s identity through the *outsiders’* perception.

If asked “where are you from?” it is not your responsibility to answer the question more specifically so that the questioner’s understanding can be more accurate of you. What Selasi proposes must be changed is the intention of the question. Consider why the question is asked. What is the questioner trying to establish? Could it be about power? Power is tied to countries/places. Each country/place, is a concept humans created and defined with a power sticker labeled to it. Are they determining how they feel about a person by fixating on the perception of power that is attached to the place in which they were born? Are they learning about a person based on what they know about the place where they were born? Are they, on their own, determining the identity of a person by asking them where they are from? If they *make up their mind about a person* based on their experiences about another’s else’s lived experience, is the intention behind the question to determine power dynamic of the relationship?

Instead, Selasi proposes that we shift the intention of the question and change the way it is phrased. Let us try to find out as much about a person by what they show you instead of what you have previously assigned to them based on your own perception. Equally important, let us try to learn about our own identity through our own eyes, rather than the eyes that have the most power and influence. Rewrite the narrative of your identity through your own lived experiences, not another’s perception of them.

*Consideration/Caution: Having pride about where you were born is an amazing empowering thing. This proposal from Selasi does not discourage having pride in your birthplace. It just proposing that others ideas of your birthplace not define you. Be proud to be Guatemalan, just define it in your own terms, own the words and your definition of them.*

Selasi proposes a three category analysis to help establish our identity: *rituals, relationships* and *restrictions*.

**1. Rituals-** “ What things do you do daily, or weekly, or monthly, that help you stay healthy, that you believe in, that help shape you or that are generally habitual in your life?”

Think of your daily rituals (actions/behaviors that you do on a daily basis, or weekly basis, or monthly basis; things that you do regularly) Things like harvesting, praying, driving with mom, eating breakfast with your brother, walking home from school with your buds …. Think about the places you go to do these things. Where do people in stores know your face or what you are going to eat? Actions that are familiar, that we do regularly or habitually, these are rituals.

**2. Relationships-** “Who are people who shape your weekly emotional experience?”

**Think of your relationships and those people that shape your days. Who shapes your daily/weekly emotional experience? Mom? Bro? Friends? Partner? Dog? Nature? Self? Which of those holds the most value in your life? Which has the most impact? Which is the most uplifting or crushing?**

**3. Restrictions -**“What realities have held you back, or caused you to have to work harder than others? What things have oppressed you?”

**Think about things that have restricted your life, your growth, your happiness, or your power? Things like where are you able to live, or where you family is able to live, the passport do you hold or don’t hold, racism, sexism, political conditions….. what restricts you from feeling fully at home where you are? What restricts you from success (as measured by quality of life)?**

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|  **Rituals** | **Relationships** | **Restrictions** |
| Daily/weekly practices | Daily/weekly shapers of your emotional state | Holds you back.Limiting |
|  |  |  |

(**Power**: the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way; The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events; Political or social authority or control, especially that exercised by a government; Used in the names of movements aiming to enhance the status of a specified group- Oxford dictionary)