



Where I Come From (Life Writing)

Vijay Agnew

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“Where do you come from?”

When Vijay Agnew first immigrated to Canada people would often ask her “Where do you come from?” She thought it a simple, straightforward question, and would answer in the same simple, straightforward manner, by telling them where she had been born and where she grew up.

But over the years she learned that many so-called third-world people resent being asked this question, because it implies that having a different skin colour (which is what usually prompts the question) makes a person an outsider and not *really* Canadian. This realization inspired her to look more closely at the question ? and the answer. The result is this book.

Where I Come From is a reflective memoir of an immigrant professor’s life in a Canadian university. It covers the period from 1967, when Canada was opened up to third-world immigrants, to the present. The book illustrates the ways in which identity is socially constructed by tracing some of the labels that were applied to the author at various stages during her thirty years in Canada ? “foreign student,” “Indian woman,” “immigrant,” “Indian feminist,” and “third-world woman.” She shows how each of these names has affected her relationships with other people and contributed to making her the woman she is now perceived to be: a feminist, anti-racist, activist professor. This multilayered story reveals the complex ways in which race, class, and gender intersect in an immigrant woman’s life, and engages readers in a conversation that narrows the distance between them, showing not only what is different, but what is shared.

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