

BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM? (published by SPCK, 2020) by Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, (CEO Christian Aid)

I heard about this book, as I did *The Stray Cats of Homs*, on the BBC Radio4 programme, *Sunday* (7am). That set me thinking: Where do I come from? Sheffield (the rough end); Chorlton-cum-Hardy; Chester; Wallasey; Birkenhead; Glossop; Hadfield; Kirkwall and Stromness in Orkney (with various stops in the remote islands); Louth. In each of those places I learned different things about myself and other people. So where do I come from?

Then I listened to Nick Adams' talk on 'Homelessness Sunday'. Then I thought about Christopher Robin singing "Halfway up the Stairs, isn't up or isn't down ... it isn't really anywhere, it's somewhere else instead." Then I remembered I had spent time in Malawi, USA, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Germany. Then I realised I am not from anywhere — I am from everywhere I have ever been and everything I have ever done.

THEN I READ THIS BOOK, and it is powerful!

She describes this question as sometimes "mildly irritating, very frustrating and even insulting", and sometimes she sees it as a subtle or unconscious attempt to make her feel insecure and inferior. She describes this book as her 'story of stories' and shows how they created her. She demonstrates the importance of her family history to who she is. Even though she was "born and [is] currently living in the UK" she is *from* these stories, not from any place. The stories go back many years, even before she was born and before the African continent was taken over by the Europeans. These stories explain that she is from everything that has affected her life: ancestry, people, homeland and traditions are where she is from. An important part of her story is traditions, both ancient and 'modern' revisions; she does still *live* these. But more than living the past and the present she recognises her future goals as part of where she comes from. But the most important source of her life is God's demand for Justice and Righteousness. As she relates her stories it becomes clear why the objectives of Christian Aid are so important to her.

Her experience of living through the fight for independence throughout southern Africa led her to comment: "politics should never be allowed to be king. It is made by the people and should be managed by people." She demonstrates how the current, European-decided, national boundaries throughout southern Africa are "a political gimmick" which smothered tribal identities. (*Similar to what happened in and around the Middle East etc earlier in the twentieth century! European politics has much to answer for.*)

I have been asked this question in Louth. I answered, "Stromness in Orkney". "Yes, but you don't have a Scottish accent, so where do you really come from?" (Orcadians do not have "Scottish" accents!) I spent 19 years in Orkney, and only 24 in my birthplace. Those 19 years gave me most of what I am now. I am from Orkney.

David Fidler