

## **Belonging and a sense of place**

Linda Brogan

The other day in John Lewis, I had taken the time to dress nicely yet cool. I was wearing a truly stylish floor length Laura Ashley denim dress. I was looking forward to it: changing a towel my daughter had bought me for a Xmas present. I was gonna buy two towels. Expensive towels. Towels I really want. Jewel-coloured towels. My daughter went off with her niece because I was taking ages, imagining how these towels would look in my bathroom with all the jugs and plants I had collected over the years. Then a woman, not particularly a posh woman, but one most definitely not born in Moss Side, looked at me. I knew why she was looking at me. She was pushing a woman in a wheelchair, probably her mother. 'No, you're not', she said, 'are you?' I didn't answer. I knew she meant was I staff. I knew she wanted me to help her. I wasn't being silent because I was being difficult. I was trying to gauge if she was being unwittingly racist, or if I had a chip on my shoulder. She said to the woman next to her, probably her sister, 'You just can't please some people. Some people just don't want to be happy.' I carried on looking at them, thinking: you can't say that out loud. You don't have the right to say that out loud. If I was a posh white woman that looked like you, you wouldn't dare say that out loud. But at the same time I had to think, am I being unreasonable? I said, I didn't shout, I said, 'Why don't you just shut up?' I can't remember what she said next. Something about me being unreasonable. She began to push her mother away. I said, 'You are racist.' She said, 'There isn't a racist bone in my body.' I didn't tell my daughter. Because I'm not sure: I am never sure. I then asked the staff if they had more of the golden towels. They said 'no' amicably, with their depressed,

slightly sunken department store manner. I took the towels I had chosen to the counter. They took the money in their depressed, slightly sunken department store manner. I thought what the fuck am I doing in here? But also where the fuck would I get good soft towels from a firm that I know would uphold their end of the bargain should something be wrong with them? I certainly wouldn't be able to buy them in Moss Side. I've always hated crap towels. Ours were scratchy, striped, and thin when I was little in a bathroom that felt like no one lived there. I've always hated poverty. I've always loved beautiful things. The jugs and ceramics in my bathroom, I've been collecting for years. My quest to own, to learn how to curate the nice things I've seen in the big house of posh white women who have taken me under their wing over the years. That shopper's actions reminded me I have the entitlement of a slave.

### **Linda Brogan**

Linda Brogan is a multi-award-winning playwright. She has been Writer in Residence at the National Theatre, Contact Theatre, Askham Grange Prison, and the Whitworth Art Gallery. Her recent work has concentrated on the Reno, a legendary 1970s funk and soul club in Moss Side Manchester, predominantly populated by 'half-caste' people born into the 1950s of 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs', and stigmatized by the 1930s Fletcher Report – 'offspring of interracial relationships are born with mental and physical defects'. As a recipient of three consecutive Arts Council England grants, in 2016 Linda collected Reno memoirs; 2017 she excavated the Reno; and in 2018 *Excavating the Reno* was a finalist in eight national awards.

In 2019/2020, as The Reno @The Whitworth, Linda exhibited the Reno memoirs, artefacts, and teen photo montage in the Whitworth Art Gallery, and was awarded Manchester City Council's Outstanding Contribution to Manchester Culture Award. Currently she is working on The Reno @Manchester International Festival for 2022.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

**[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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