

Belonging

Nicôle Lecky

Belonging and the sense of place... I am claret and blue till I die. Though I've only ever seen one West Ham match. I still rep Stratford, even though it doesn't feel like where I grew up anymore. I drop my t's when I walk back in the ends. I become the place that feels like home. I meet a woman on the bus who tells me East London is arranged on a grid: 'You'll never get lost 'ere, you always find your way back'. It's a nice thought, a safe invisible road map that always leads you home. A click of my red Air Forces transports me wherever I want to go. I dodge bones discarded from chicken and chip shops; I grin as I put in my headphones to drown out the sound of screaming children. Children from Bangladesh, Trinidad, Pakistan and Poland. I still stop in the street when a hearse goes past, because I've been told that's what you do. I sit out in my garden to watch the fireworks from Eid and Diwali; this multicultural hub informs me. It bonds me to so many people of this city and makes me tolerant of the world. Makes me excited to learn more and share this place together with the people who teach me. This place speaks to a part of my most intricate self, carved inside of me like delicate etching on a painting. It's made me. I am East London... but I don't know why. Why I proudly declare it everywhere I go. Why I reek of London. Why I cling to London. Because Stratford. London. England. It doesn't love me back. It has a weakening heartbeat. It serves it's purpose like an ex-boyfriend, that you loved once but now you're not sure why or how or if you were crazy at the time. But you keep going back, and boy do I keep coming back. I never left, I declare. Even when I don't recognise this

place. When I don't recognize the government. Or when I don't recognise a city that sends British Jamaicans unlawfully 'home'. I still stay. Because it's what I know and what feels familiar. But it feels like it's turning. Hurling towards something much more unpleasant. It was always a bit shit to me. But I loved it. I walk through the streets and feel it's my turf, my manor. Proud of it. Of the people... even if I can't be here. What does that mean for a lost Londoner? Where do all the lost Londoners go? Where do we seek refuge? Because this remarkable city is seeping through my fingers and I don't know how much longer I can stay.

Nicôle Lecky is a writer, actor, and singer-songwriter. Her critically acclaimed stage monologue *Superhoe*, developed with Talawa and the Yard Theatre, played at the Royal Court in 2019. Her six-part television adaptation of *Superhoe*, retitled *Mood* and produced by Bonafide Films, debuted on BBC3 in spring 2022 and airs on AMC in the US in November 2022. Nicôle wrote and executive produced all six episodes of the show, in which she also plays the lead role, and co-wrote and performed the music.

Nicôle's acting credits for television include *Sense8* for Netflix, *Death in Paradise* for BBC1 and *Untold Stories* (for which Nicôle also wrote an episode) for ITV. Nicôle was a recipient of the Creative Skillset and Dancing Ledge Productions High-end Television Levy Writers' Bursary in 2018 and was listed as one of Deadline's '8 British Writers to Watch Out For in 2021'. She is developing new work for film, television and theatre.

A recording of this piece can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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