

All the same

Maame Blue

I don't do Facebook. It's a thing I've avoided for years; but desperate times and all that. I'm lonely in a way that hasn't visited me since I was a teenager. Back then, I was surrounded by that ilk of youth I never understood, in which I was always a fixture, out of place but kept around for the rarity value. A raisin in the milk sort of thing. So it's no surprise I feel the same here – having chosen to place myself in the predominantly white arms of Australia, its youthfulness a dangerous cocktail of hubris and ignorance should you be in the wrong place at the wrong time, with brown skin.

I joined an online Facebook group because to feel part of something has been a lifelong quest. But it was mostly made up of white women, so I pounced embarrassingly quickly when I saw a black woman had commented on a post. A Kenyan native who wasn't new to Melbourne by any stretch but was new to the area. I suggested we meet up, explore the neighbourhood together. She said yes and I breathed a sigh of relief. The prospect of being rejected by a stranger was still a desperate fear of mine, despite all the ways I was trying to be more socially available.

I was excited about meeting someone new, one on one, with the bonus that she was also of African heritage. I was acutely aware of being part of a new minority, and I was intrigued by the term 'African Australian' that I kept hearing, used colloquially for anyone with potential ties to one of the 54 countries on the continent. I suspected it meant 'other' in a lazy way, materialising into news reports about 'African gangs' that were just young black kids hanging out in their neighbourhood.

Some things are the same wherever you go.

I had never really thought of myself as African-anything before. But after three months of living in Australia, I realised how Ghanaian my version of London had been; how much of Ghanaian London I had unwittingly taken for granted, and how I missed it, feeling the ache whenever another black person nodded at me on the street in Melbourne.

I met my online appointment at a Senegalese bar, a place where white hipsters went to dance, and West Africans went to congregate. Perhaps I hoped that by uniting us, east and west Africa in one place, I would feel more whole. And I did. My Kenyan friend was pleasantly surprised by the venue, and we were both happy to discover neither of us had serial-killer vibes. She knew Melbourne like the back of her hand, and Kenya like the front of her heart. She stood comfortably between both places and told me that it kept her flexible and open. She had found love in the southern hemisphere, and so chose to stay where her heart was now. A friendship blossomed between us amongst pots of cab sav, the friendly humour of the bar owner, and the relief at having found something that felt a little like kin.

This was the first of many moments during my time in Australia, where I would rediscover who I was outside of being a Londoner, separate to the parts of myself I had become used to. And there is something to be said for a place that invites and nurtures visitors from far away, whilst its native inhabitants continue to grapple with the country's own identity, cultural heritage and too-recent colonial history.

Yet still, I found a place that felt like home, all the same.

Maame Blue

Maame Blue is a Ghanaian writer and co-host of *Headscarves and Carry-ons* – a podcast about black women living abroad – who splits her time between London and Melbourne. Her work has appeared in various places including *Black Ballad*, *The Independent*, *AFREADA*, *Litro Magazine*, *Storm Cellar Quarterly* (USA) and *The Good Journal*; and in 2020 she joined a scriptwriting team to remix a telenovela for African broadcast. Her short story 'Howl' was also published in the *New Australian Fiction 2020* anthology, and her debut novel *Bad Love* was long-listed for the *Guardian* Not The Booker Prize and chosen by Cheltenham Literature Festival as one of their top three debuts of 2020. She has works forthcoming in 2021 and is cautiously working on her second novel.

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

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