

## I am from

I am from Leicester. Right in the middle, as far from the sea as its possible to be. I am from a place people come to, settle down in, and hold lightly<sup>1</sup>.

I am from opinions. From boarding schools and public service and family tragedy told and untold. I am from New Labour. From a long future of reasonable action and things that would get better. I am from easy comfort and cold draughts, from hosting and providing and holding at distance<sup>2</sup>.

I am from the smell of grass. And cheese and pickle sandwiches. From laughter and the land in all of its quiet promise.

I am from commitment and interest and bloody hard work. I am from we remember when the map was pink and women didn't have the vote. I am from Thatcher and Pat Butcher and Germaine Greer. I am from My So Called Life and Skunk Anansie and Sylvia Plath<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I was born in Leicester, and lived there until I moved to Bristol aged 21. Neither of my parents are from Leicester, they both moved around a lot as children. Leicester is one of the first cities in the UK where people from the Global Majority are also the local majority. The 2021 census data shows the population as made up of 42.4% people identifying as Asian, 40.9% White, 7.8% Black, 3.8% Mixed and 4.1% Other. This was reflected in my (local, state) secondary school where I was in the minority as a White student, among many second generation Indian, Pakistani and Ugandan immigrants in particular. Where I lived, I was much more likely to hear people speaking Gujarati than meet a White person with a Leicester accent. I grew up feeling that this was something to be proud of, that we were a city that proved that multi-culturalism worked. It is hard to characterise the complex racial dynamics of my friendship groups, classrooms, neighbourhoods – in some ways we talked about race all the time, and in others we didn't at all.

<sup>2</sup> My family are very middle class. My mum's dad was in the Royal Air Force and she went to boarding school as a child which she hated. My dad's dad was an academic, from an aristocratic background that he (in some ways) rejected after an awful violence in his family. His dad, my great-grandad, looms large in our history. The women in this family tree were vital supporting characters – housewives, mothers, [ghosts](#). My mum worked in child protection, for social services. My dad did a PhD in anthropology and went on to run an agricultural business. We are a family enmeshed in institutions that have both protected us and hurt us. Structures that ask people to enter into a strange kind of pact; become a bit less yourself and I will look after you, contain your emotions and I will keep things calm, buy into our way of doing things and you won't have to think too hard.

<sup>3</sup> My parents were children in the 1950s, I was born in 1982. In that time the British Empire changed from ruling over around 700 million people outside of the UK, to around 5 million. Countries forming part of the British Empire were coloured pink on many maps. This changes as country after country established independence as people fought and liberated themselves from this particular form of White Supremacist colonialism. These places include Aden, Bahrain, Barbados, the Bahamas, Belize, Cyprus (where my mum spent her summer holidays around an Air Force base), Egypt, Fiji, Gambia, Guyana, the Gold Coast, India (where my best friend's family was from), Jamaica (where so much of my son's family is from), Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, the Maldives, Nigeria (where my parents lived after their marriage), Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, South Africa, Sierra Leone (where my dad wrote his PhD thesis), Sri Lanka, Sudan, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Trinidad, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe, Meanwhile proclaimed second wave feminism that the [personal was the political](#), the UK had its first female Prime Minister and I spent my weekends helping my mum to canvas for the Labour Party.

I am from CND and quicksand and toxic shock syndrome. From marches against the war and from recycling. I am from the channel tunnel and Greenpeace and the end of history. From baby boomers, Bloomsbury, land girls and the pub. From a knowledge that things need to change and from high functioning disorder<sup>4</sup>.

I am from more than all this. I am from babies and Bristol, from friends I understood with ease and those that changed my mind. I am from wide open spaces. From an owl flying low across the land. From many places and none at all, from walking and from falling in love<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1992 when I was 10, Francis Fukuyama argued in [The End of History and the Last Man](#) that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the establishment of Western liberal democracy as the dominant way of organising society – the form of government which we all either already had or were inevitably heading towards. I studied Politics at both A level and for my degree, it was the language of the house I grew up in. If politics was the lens through which I was taught to see the world, the end of history was view I was shown. In a way I knew it was nonsense, the world is rich with cultural, political and civic forms that were missing from my Western focussed curriculum – and the analysis I did have access to made the deep inequities within social democracy abundantly clear. But it still felt true because life for me was pretty good. This was the final state of our evolution, it was better than what had come before or existed elsewhere, and I was at its heart.

<sup>5</sup> When I was younger, I thought that as we grew up we changed, and then when we were grown up we stayed the same. The end of my own history. And then I had a baby, unplanned, just as I was leaving home to go to University. It was a love earthquake and some parts of me had to become very adult very quickly. I had a blue print for this in my parents so I got on with trying to be as like them as I could in very different circumstances. Other parts of my journey towards finding out what makes me, me, stalled as I moved in and out of important relationships and environments. My extraordinary daughter changed me all over again. My family now doesn't fit any blueprint really, we are a murmur of difference and connection.