

Dear Hackney,

I do not have a lot to tell you because I believe that you still have so much to show me. I've only been exposed to parts of you. Well, I've only been exposed to parts of London as a whole.

I had one of the most eventful weekends in this new city in your streets. I could feel your energy from miles away. There was adrenaline rushing through me as I rode on the overground toward Hackney Wick.

I have heard much about you. I have heard that you carry the bright and vibrant district of Shoreditch but also harvest a blandness or blaring normalcy much like many other boroughs in London. I was given the impression that you had the calmer residential areas, a high street and then an area that would be your selling point, that being Shoreditch.

I attended a show right outside Hackney Wick Overground station at a club called Colour Factory. What I did not expect at the show was to hear a statement from another foreigner. A foreigner just like me. A young, female, Black American artist named Yaya Bey challenged British society in such an unapologetic and relentless way on a stage in front of mostly White Brits. Yaya Bey essentially said that Britain was gaslighting the Black people who live here. That Britain is a much more racist place than we are led to believe. As she said that, something lit up inside of me. Another outsider of British society was able to sense what I had felt after only a short few days of being in this new country.

After spending time in homogenous and/or European colonizer countries, I have picked up the habit of examining race relations wherever I go. In 2021, I created a multimedia project called *Diverge*. This project was inspired by own travels around the world as a Black woman since a young age and was also inspired by the book *Afropean* by Johny Pitts. The project aimed to set light on the dilemma of being Black while traveling or just overall existing as Black person in lands with anti-Black history. It was interesting to me that in the brave words of another Black American woman on a random Saturday night in Hackney was able to make me feel seen in that way. It was as if I were seeing my multimedia project personified.

As I spend these next few years in London, I would love to get to know you, Hackney. You've made a wonderful first impression. Even outside of Yaya Bey's words I could tell from the energy of the lamp lit streets that you have so much to offer. I could tell that those from Hackney have pride. I could tell that those who visit Hackney for the weekend are proud to say that they did, as the name of the borough mentioned during weekend plans is already an implied "good time".

I hope that you will welcome me back to Hackney. I long to feel your warmth, openness and understanding once again.

Yanel Kette-Seka

