

New Ethnicities, Old Racisms?

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Old Whine, New Vassals: Are Diaspora and Hybridity Postmodern Inventions?¹

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The recent bag of re-poetics (recuperate, rewrite, transport, transform, and so forth) proffers the opportunity to confront many of the assumptions and confusions of identity I feel compelled to 'reconfigure'. The site of this poetics for me, and many other multi-racial and multi-cultural writers, is the hyphen, that marked (or unmarked) space that both binds and divides ... a crucial location for working out the ambivalences of hybridity. ... In order to actualize this hybridity ... the hybrid writer must necessarily develop instruments of disturbance, dislocation and displacement. (Wah 1996: 60)

In the past six years or so, Wah's literary summons has been answered by a virtual flourishing of North American (Canada and the United States) texts in the forms of websites, fiction, poetry, autobiographies, biographies, and academic texts by 'mixed-race' writers who are overwhelmingly middle-class and either academics or students.² On the other hand, there have been relatively few books in England during this period by 'mixed-race' writers about 'mixed-race' identity politics.³ These countries' different historical legacies *vis-à-vis* immigrant and indigenous communities might explain this discrepancy: 'While the United States is a country of immigrants where ethnic diversity is constitutive of the society, British society has aspired and continues to aspire to monoculturalism: the people of the empire have no claim on British territory' (LaForet 1996: 116). In a more profound way than in the United States and Canada, the rigidity of the class structure in Britain also limits the extent to which 'hybrid' writers are recognised, published, marketed and received (Sabu 1998). However, Friedman would argue that on both sides of the Atlantic a 'hybrid' identity is not accessible to the poor: 'The urban poor, ethnically mixed ghetto is an arena that does not immediately cater to the construction of explicitly new hybrid identities. In periods of global stability and/or expansion, the

problems of survival are more closely related to territory and to creating secure life spaces' (Friedman 1997: 84).

My fundamental contention is that as socio-cultural and political critiques, fluid contemporary *métis(se)*⁴ narratives of gendered identities engage with, challenge and yet have been muffled by two competing racialised, essentialised and oppositional dominant discourses in England. The first is the territorialised discourse of 'English' nationalism, based on indigeneity and mythical purity. That is, 'Englishness' is synonymous with 'whiteness':

something to do with an elusive but powerful sense of one's own Englishness and what that means in terms of belonging. The notion of the collective unconscious, after all, suggests the unity of those who partake of the racial memory at the same time as it defines the 'other'. The 'other' is everybody else. (Majra-Pearce 1990: 132).

The second is the deterritorialised discourse of the English African diaspora which is predicated on (mis)placement and the one-drop rule: that is, all Africans have been dispersed and one known African ancestor designates a person as 'black'. For example, Paul Gilroy's configuration of the 'Black Atlantic' is based on compulsory blackness and displacement:

The black Atlantic, my own provisional attempt to figure a deterritorialised multiplex and anti-national basis for the affinity or 'identity of passions' between diverse black populations, took shape in making sense of sentiments like these which are not always congruent with the contemporary forms assumed by black political culture. (Gilroy 1996: 18)

On the other hand, Avtar Brah's formulation of 'diaspora space' speaks to an 'entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'' (Brah 1996: 181). Although Brah's model recognises the forged dialectical relationship between settlers and indigenous communities, her conceptualisation is still both racialised and binary rather than fluid. 'Migrants and their descendants' (black) have been dispersed. The 'English' (white) are 'natives' (Brah 1996: 181). As a result, like Gilroy, Brah has not created conceptual space for *métis(se)* individuals for whom by virtue of both English and diasporic parentage, 'home' is de/territorialised (Pieterse 1995). As such, 'home' represents an ambivalent bi-racialised sense of both territorialised place – England – and de-territorialised diasporic longings. Their family histories are braided from the gendered, bi-racialised and sexualised residues of imperial domination and colonised submission (Young 1995; Lavie *et al.* 1996; Fanon 1967).

I want to illustrate the ways in which, as we hobble towards the new millennium, *métis(se)* declarations delimit and transgress bi-racialised

discourses and point the way towards a profound realignment of thinking about 'race', ethnicity and 'English' identity. This chapter engages with notions of biological and cultural hybridities as articulated in nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses on 'race' and identities. I have divided the chapter into three sections. First, I trace the origins of the term hybridity back to its problematic beginnings in nineteenth-century 'race' science, and especially evolutionary anthropology. Second, I critique contemporary cultural theorising on hybridities which reframes 'race' as difference(s). Third, the testimonies of contemporary *métisse* women provide necessary context and content for my discussions of continuities between theories predicated on so-called biological 'race' science and 'postmodernist' cultural explanations. These autobiographical examples illustrate that the older construct of hybridity as a biological 'grafting' of so-called different 'races' is continuous with its contemporary redefinition as cultural heterogeneity, fragmentation and diaspora(s).

'Hybreed': Biological Hybridities and Cultures

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and North America, the false presumption held by evolutionary theorists that 'races' existed as discrete, bounded, biological and ultimately 'pure' entities grew into the dominant imperial white European/American mythology, which attempted to proscribe any interbreeding across 'racial' borders:

If races are conceptualized as pure (with concomitant qualities of character, including the capacity to hold sway over other races), then miscegenation threatens that purity. Given the actual history of interbreeding in the imperial history of the past centuries, it is not surprising that various means have been found to deal with this threat to whiteness. ... These measures focused on blackness as a means of limiting access to the white category, which only the utterly white could inhabit. (Dyer 1997: 25)

This science fiction of 'race' and social hierarchies fuelled eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropological conceptions of human diversity in general and intergroup mating in particular (Young 1995; Stocking 1982). Nineteenth-century 'race' science in general and evolutionary anthropology in particular maintained that discrete 'races' existed, which could be differentially ranked on the basis of heredity, physical characteristics and intelligence (Rich 1986; Rogers 1952). The biological distinction between varieties and species was the intellectual precursor to the major scientific debate of the nineteenth century over whether human 'races' were of one species, monogenesis, or separate species, polygenesis:

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In eighteenth-century anthropology a distinction was made between species on the one hand and varieties on the other. Species were regarded as immutable prototypes, perfectly designed for their role in the divine economy of nature. Varieties, by contrast, were merely those members of a single species who – because of such conditioning factors as climate and geography – had changed their appearance in one way or another. (Gossett 1965: 35)

Influenced by evolutionist Herbert Spencer, Darwin silenced advocates of polygenesis (Hannaford 1996; Goodwin 1994). However, as human history has proven time and time again, designated same-species status does not guarantee access to the fruits of citizenship – humanity, equality and justice (Malik 1996; Goldberg 1993).

Prior to Darwin's important intervention, American and European scientists such as Prichard, Lawrence, White, Cuvier and Saint-Hilaire waged war over the unity or diversity of the human species (Hannaford 1996; Stocking 1992). In particular, Linnaeus suggested that successful reproduction of fertile offspring was proof positive in support of monogenesis (Gould 1994). Interestingly enough, however, for my purposes, it was the American physician and natural historian Morton who introduced the concept of biological hybridity to the separate origins position:

Among human races, he admitted that mulattoes were fertile, but his own research into crosses between whites and Negroes indicated that mulatto women bear children only with great difficulty. If these women mated only with other mulattoes, Morton argued, the descendants of this union would be even less fertile and the progeny would eventually die out. From his conviction that half-breeds cannot propagate themselves indefinitely, Morton was led to the conclusion that whites and Negroes are not varieties of a single race but entirely different species. (Gossett 1965: 59)

One of Morton's most vocal opponents was Bachman, who maintained that it was virtually impossible for 'hybrids' to be 'relatively sterile', as Morton claimed. Moreover, Bachman insisted that not only were 'mulattoes' as fertile as so-called 'pure races', but that he could provide evidence of successful intermarriage and procreation among 'mulattoes' across five generations. Finally, he adamantly opposed the idea put forward by Morton and his colleague Agassiz that there was a 'natural/moral repugnance' between so-called 'races' which functions as a social prophylactic (Stanton 1960). Whether classified as 'pure' or 'hybrid', according black African people same-species status was not equivalent to allowing them equal status, and Bachman still justified ownership of slaves on the grounds that 'We have been irresistibly brought to the conviction that in intellectual power the African is an inferior variety of our species' (Bachman 1850: 291–2).

Two additional key players in the game of origins were Nott and Gliddon (1854), who were also students of Morton. In their eight-hundred-page volume, *Types of Mankind*, they asserted that individuals without at least one white ancestor were 'uncivilized' and lacked the alleged superior mental capacity of their 'pure' white European/American counterparts. Similarly, French anthropologist Paul Broca asserted:

The union of the Negro with a white woman is frequently sterile while that of a white man with a Negress is perfectly fecund. This might tend to establish between the two races a species of hybridity analogous to that existing between goats and sheep which we termed unilateral hybridity. (Broca 1864: 28)

Accomplished by the insemination of the black female by the allegedly potent white male, this act of 'racial enhancement' justified sexual violence against enslaved black African women in the antebellum American South, pre-emancipation Brazil, and the Caribbean (De-costa-Willis 1992; Hill-Collins 1990). In *Sex and Racism in America*, African American sociologist Calvin Hernton refers to this (ir)rationalised sexual act as 'the sexualization of racism':

The sexualization of racism in the United States is a unique phenomenon in the history of mankind; it is an anomaly of the first order. In fact, there is a sexual involvement, at once real and vicarious, connecting white and black people in America that spans the history of this country from the era of slavery to the present, an involvement so immaculate and yet so perverse, so ethereal and yet so concrete, that all race relations tend to be, however subtle, *sex* relations. (Hernton 1965: 7)

The inextricable link between sex and 'race' was never stronger than in the plantation southern United States, wherein 'the one-drop rule' was instituted in order to keep the offspring of white male plantation owners born to enslaved black African women under their control for sexual and economic exploitation (Davis 1991; Omi and Winant 1986). The 'one-drop rule' of social hypodescent dictates that one known African ancestor made a person 'black' (Rogers 1944; Spickard 1989). Hence, the (il)logic of this system ensured that 'mixed-race' children of white male slaveowners became black slave labourers:

A slave was a slave because he was black. Slaves by definition could not be white. The fact that slavery was getting whiter, that in reality many slaves were more white than black, was a fact with which the proslavery argument could not cope. Either it could ignore the problem, which it did explicitly, or it could brusquely dismiss it by applying the one-drop rule to persons in slavery, which it did implicitly. (Williamson 1995: 73)

Across the United States, by 1915, the one-drop rule had become firmly entrenched in the collective American conscience (Zack 1993). Legal repercussions of this structural mechanism for the maintenance of the white/black power imbalance manifest themselves in virtually every social institution: marriage, housing, property ownership, inheritance, voting rights and privileges, education, and health (Paredes 1997; Degler 1971; Jordan 1974). My contention is that the black essentialism of the one-drop rule is as integral to our understandings of both colonial and contemporary black/white social stratification in the former British empire and the future United Kingdom respectively. Furthermore, I would argue that across historical time and global spaces different structural principles based on popular folk conceptions of 'race' and hierarchy have been generated and justified, which illustrate the ways in which ideologies of sexualities and 'racial' differences are always intertwined.

The history of meanings of the word 'commerce' includes the exchange both of merchandise and of bodies in sexual intercourse. It was therefore wholly appropriate that sexual exchange, and its missegregated product, which captures the violent, antagonistic power relations of sexual and cultural diffusion, should become the dominant paradigm through which the passionate and economic and political trafficking of colonialism was conceived. Perhaps this begins to explain why our own forms of racism remain so intimately bound up with sexuality and desire. (Young 1995: 182)

As I have already mentioned, popular folk concepts of 'race' and hierarchy began their ascendancy in Victorian anthropological discourses (Hannaford 1996; Goldberg 1993). If we take the publication of, to give its titles in full, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* by Charles Darwin in 1859 as our analytical starting point and the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics in 1900 as the pivotal end point, it becomes clear that there were historical events in both the United States and Europe which galvanised the production of so-called scientific knowledge for the purposes of legitimating white European and American racial supremacy as well as the subjugation of non-white people in the Americas, the Caribbean, and the newly formed imperial dominions in Africa and Asia (Malik 1996). In *Race, Culture and Evolution*, Stocking describes the specific focus of these supremacist scientific enquiries:

Darwinian evolution, evolutionary ethnology, and polygenist race thus interacted to support raciocultural hierarchy in terms of which civilized men, the highest products of social evolution, were large-brained white men, and only large-brained men, the highest products of organic evolution, were

fully civilized. The assumption of white superiority was certainly not original with Victorian evolutionists; yet the interrelation of the theories of cultural and organic evolution, with their implicit hierarchy of race, gave it a new rationale. (Stocking 1982: 122)

In the early twentieth century, these dangerous ideas formed the basis of the Eugenics movements (Gosset 1965). It was Darwin's cousin Francis Galton who coined the word 'eugenics' and the phrase 'nature and nurture'. The scientific mission of the Eugenics movement was the eradication of 'inferior races' and the elevation of 'superior races' based on the idea that intelligence, criminality, and other social 'traits' were in and of themselves determined exclusively by heredity:

I have never found an inter-mixed or inter-married white-negro couple where the stamp of social inferiority was not plainly traceable as the result ... Internarrriages between whites and blacks, just as much as wrongful sexual relations without marriage, are essentially anti-social tendencies and therefore opposed to the teachings of sound eugenics in the light of the best knowledge available to both races at the present time ... the conclusion would seem warranted that the crossing of the Negro race with the white has been detrimental to its progress. (Rogers 1944: 32)

In 1869, Galton looked at the distribution of intelligence within and between so-called different 'races'. Through quantitative measurements, he 'deduced' that the intelligence of 'Negroes' was, on average, two grades below that of Englishmen, while the intelligence of the 'Athenian race' of the fifth century was two grades above that of Englishmen (Galton 1870). It would follow from Galton's analysis that he would not advocate the mating of supposedly mentally inferior black Africans with supposedly mentally superior white Europeans. While diminished intelligence of the next generation was the excuse propagated by Galton for not condoning so-called mixing of the 'races', other scientists pointed to the 'weaker constitution' of 'racial hybrids'. Provine surmised that 'if these scientific proponents of racial supremacy argued that races of man differed in hereditary physical and mental characteristics then they would view crossing between distant races with suspicion or outright antagonism' (Provine 1973: 790).

This spurious campaign of selective breeding to ensure 'racial hygiene' and 'purity' culminated, of course, in the Nazi experiment and Hitler's Final Solution:

Any crossings of two beings not at exactly the same level produces a medium between the level of the two parents. This means: the offspring will probably stand higher than the racially lower parent, but not as high as the higher

one. Consequently, it will later succumb in the struggle against the higher level. Such mating is contrary to the will of Nature for a higher breeding of all life. The precondition for this does not lie in associating superior and inferior, but in the total victory of the former. The stronger must dominate and not blend with the weaker, thus sacrificing his greatness. Only the born weakling can view this as cruel, but he after all is only a weak and limited man; for if this law did not prevail, any conceivable higher development of organic living beings would be unthinkable. (Hitler 1925: 258-9)

In *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, Opitz (1986) describes forced sterilisations and abortions for German women who gave birth to 'non-Aryan' children, including Afro-Germans, who were themselves also involuntarily sterilised. In *Race and Empire in British Politics*, Paul Rich reveals the presumed 'moral problem' and the threat to 'racial hygiene' of 'half-caste' children in Britain in general and the port cities of Liverpool and Cardiff in particular (Rich 1986: 130-5).

In apartheid South Africa in the 1950s, the Immorality Act, which was 'to prohibit illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and non-Europeans', the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act were all socially engineered to enforce particular beliefs about 'racial hygiene' (Banton 1967). The prevailing view was that white South Africans were 'pure' and black South Africans were 'polluted' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Kuper 1974). The intention of such legislation was to protect the 'public health and safety' of the 'pure White Volk' who were not, as their black counterparts were, Biblical descendants of Ham.⁵ Finally, in England, from Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 to the 'political pornography' of the National Front in the 1990s, campaigns of racial hatred have, in part, encouraged acts of social exclusion and violence against anyone even mildly tinted with 'a touch of the tar brush'. British 'race' relations guru Michael Banton succinctly states: 'The metaphors of 'blood' and 'stock' have bitten deep into the English vocabulary and are unthinkingly but daily recapitulated by teachers, dramatists, journalists and politicians' (Banton 1967: 373).

Certain contemporary texts produced by black African American and white American/British academics seem to revert to a controversial 'race' science which reinforces the distorted principles of the earlier Eugenics movement (Kohn 1996). These texts include: *The Bell Curve* (Murray 1994) and *The g Factor* (Brand 1996). Murray and Brand, prospective heirs to the contentious throne held by Arthur Jensen since 1969, theorise about alleged links between 'race' and intelligence (Kohn 1996; Fraser 1995). African-centred counter-discourses are equally contentious. For example, *The Isis Papers* (Welsing 1991), advocates black supremacy based

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on the 'super-properties' of melanin (the pigment which lends colour to the skin and protects it from the harmful rays of the sun) which 'Blacks' are said to possess in greater abundance than 'Whites'. When will scholars learn that, in the words of Audre Lorde, 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde 1996: 158).

Un-Equal Under the Sun: Cultural Hybridities and Biology

The events and situations that have produced racial blending reach far back into the misty and unrecorded annals of history. Whenever and wherever peoples move about, coming into contact with others different in race and culture, amalgamation and acculturation are possible. (Gist 1972: 1)

In other words, inter-group mating and marriages were and have always been commonplace. Hybridity named these acts of social transgression (Young 1995). Hybrid, meaning 'impure', 'racially contaminated', a genetic 'deviation', was the zoological term deployed to describe the offspring of 'mixed-race crossings'. In the twentieth century, 'hybrid' and 'hybridity' have been reappropriated to signal cultural synthesis. Indirectly, Malik speaks to the dialectical tension between biological and cultural notions of hybridities: 'The biological discourse of race and the cultural discourse of difference both arise from the inability to reconcile the two' (Malik 1996: 265). The major difficulty with the concept of cultural hybridity is the way in which it has been appropriated by mainstream academic discourse without recognition of its problematic origins in nineteenth century 'race' science fiction (Fisher 1995).

The presumption is that since the nineteenth century, discourses on hybridities have shifted their intellectual focus from the homogeneous, pseudo-scientific grafting of races to the fragmented heterogeneous multi-valent fusion of cultures. For example, Minh-ha points to the universality of the contemporary culturally hybrid condition: 'In the complex reality of postcoloniality it is therefore vital to assume one's radical 'impurity' and to recognize the necessity of speaking from a hybrid place, hence of saying at least two, three things at a time' (Minh-ha 1992: 140). In *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Mercer celebrates the advent of cultural hybridity as a (postmodernist) survival strategy: 'In a world in which everyone's identity has been thrown into question, the mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities point to ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition' (Mercer 1994: 5). In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Young substantiates:

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Today the notion is often proposed of a new cultural hybridity in Britain, a transmutation of British culture into a compounded, composite mode. condition of that transformation is held out to be the preservation degree of cultural and ethnic difference. While hybridity denotes a fusion it also describes a dialectical articulation, as in Rushdie's 'mongrelization' (Young 1995: 23)

Werbner and Modood have edited an anthology entirely dedicated to, entitled, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. In the introductory chapter, 'Lectures of Cultural Hybridity', Werbner's closing remarks pinpoint major problematic of discourses which celebrate cultural hybridity: dependent of their epistemological origins in scientific racism. She states 'Hybridity as a loaded discourse of dangerous racial contaminations been transformed into one of cultural creativity: 'insults' have been turned into 'strengths' (Werbner and Modood 1997: 21). In essence, in England there has not been a culturally hybrid rupture, which would transform meanings of place and belonging for all her constituents. Rather, in attempt to delude late twentieth-century rainbow members of the global village into believing that opportunities, resources, commodities, icons even individuals are located on an imaginary gender-neutral level play field where everyone has equal access, cultural hybridities with their ported disconnection from 'race' science fiction have replaced biological hybridities.⁶

Place and 'Race': De/Territorialised Discourses of Gendered Identities

'Where you from, La?' Susie suddenly asked one lunch break on the playground fields. 'Woolwich.' 'No, silly, where are you from, y'know originally?' 'I really must know I was born in Eltham, actually.' 'My dad says you must be from Jamaica,' Susie insisted. 'I'm not Jamaican! I'm English!' 'Then are you coloured?' Lara's heart shuddered, she felt so humiliated, so alone. 'Look, my father's Nigerian, my mother's English, alright?' (Evaristo 1997: 65)

So tell me ... what part of the world does your family come from?' Ramsworth. 'Yes, you live here, but where do you come from? Which country? Either Africa, South America or the West Indies, I figured. Or even island in the Pacific.' I was definitely not a Maori. I'd gone off Maori then. I usually told people that I was from the Caribbean. That gave them a bit of a holiday. They went off for a couple of seconds under palm trees sun-bathing. I liked watching their faces when they did that. (Traister 1997: 73)

These two extracts are from novels set in England, Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Joanna Traynor's *Sister Josephine*. Each work also features a *métisse* woman as protagonist. However, in both instances, Lara and Josephine tangle with the twin torments of 'Englishness' being exclusively associated with 'whiteness' and the presumption that one's designated 'blackness' automatically afflicts one with a (mis)placed African diasporic condition. Never do 'white English' birth parentage or full-time English residence enable these characters to carve out territorialised spaces which reflect both the realities of cultural upbringing and the complexities of de-territorialised ancestries.

As I have defined it, the English African diaspora conventionally comprises African postcolonial constituents from the Caribbean, North and Latin America and continental Africa who find themselves in England for labour, schooling, political asylum or, frequently, by birth. However, scripted from a notion of 'home' as at once territorialised (English) and de-territorialised (African diasporic), *métis(se)* narratives demand a reconfiguration of the conventional (English) African diaspora. More pointedly, they map the specificities of the local, yet they also problematise the parameters and boundaries delimiting the local and the global:

the local exists nowhere in a pure state ... the local is only a fragmented set of possibilities that can be articulated into a momentary politics of time and place ... this is to take the local not as the end point but as the start. This is not to idealise the local as the real, but to look at the ways in which injustices are naturalised in the name of the immediate. In conceiving of the local as a nodal point, we can begin to deconstruct its movements and its meanings. (Probyn 1990: 187)

Their critiques also confront racialised obstructions whereby 'whiteness' is deemed the normative and naturalised signifier by which deviations of 'blackness' are determined, as well as the presumption that 'Englishness' is synonymous with 'whiteness'.

In this de/territorialised place, the idea of 'home' has, by definition, multi-layered, multi-textual and contradictory meanings for *métis(se)* cartographers. In a travel essay chronicling his rediscovery of Britain, Nigerian and English writer Adewale Maja-Pearce wages existential war with the meaning of home experienced as competing and conflicting bi-racialised nationalisms:

I had to learn as best I could to be at home, but even the word 'home' had complex connotations. Where was home? Was it Nigeria, my father's country? Or was it Britain, my mother's country? And how far did allegiance to the one involve a betrayal of the other? My inability to see was inseparable from the sense of betrayal.

If I didn't look, if I didn't admit the reality of the particular corner of the world in which I happened to be, in this case Britain – 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England' – then I couldn't properly live here. This in turn meant that I was released from the necessity of confronting the nature of my allegiance because to admit Britain, to say that I was British, was to deny Nigeria. I was like a man married to one woman but trying to remain faithful to another. If I wasn't careful I would lose both, and in the end I would be the one to suffer for it: to live like this is to condemn oneself to a half-life, which is the predicament of the outsider. (Maja-Pearce 1990: 12–13)

In lamenting the 'half-life' of the 'outsider', Maja-Pearce articulates for other transnational *métis(se)* subjects the complex nature of belonging. In addition, he conveys a broader collective African diasporic consciousness, forged from (post)colonial histories characterised by racism, sexism, class discrimination, ethnocentrism and other forms of oppression (Gilroy 1993). These transnational alliances are predicated on the profound paradoxes of citizenship (Gilroy 1996, Cohen 1994). Though daughters and sons of Africa's various diasporas are living in England, they must acknowledge the actual and significant impact of white English exclusionary practices on reconstructions of cultural and transnational local identities (Mercer 1994). Stuart Hall refers to this ongoing psycho-political project as 'Identity Politics One':

the first form of identity politics. It had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society. It had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. (Hall 1991: 41–68)

The outcome of the specification of Englishness as white is that sons and daughters of the English African diaspora, designated black, are denied full citizenship (Hall 1996). The one-drop rule means that *métis(se)* children with white English mothers or fathers are also denied access to an English identity which they can rightfully claim on the basis of parentage (Zack 1993).

As cultural critiques, the testimonies of the *métis(se)* individuals I worked with tackle these transnationalist concerns. Their stories also chart what Ang-Lygate refers to as 'the spaces of (un)location where the shifting and contextual meanings of diaspora reside – caught somewhere between, and inclusive of the more familiar experiences of (re)location and (dis)location' (Ang-Lygate 1997: 170). However, as cumulative text their individual evocations also illustrate the collective psychosocial problematics of the

angst of a wider African diaspora in its specific geopolitical manifestations. In the conclusion to their edited collection *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Keith and Pile indirectly legitimate the (English) African diaspora as a shifting political space where senses of place are (re)negotiated and identities are (re)constructed:

spatiality needs to be seen as the modality through which contradictions are normalised, naturalised and neutralised. Politics is necessarily territorial but these territories are simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic ... spatiality should simultaneously express people's experiences of, for example, displacement (feeling out of place), dislocation (relating to alienation), and fragmentation (the jarring of multiple identities). Spatialities represent both the spaces between multiple identities and the contradictions within identities. (Keith and Pile 1993: 224–5)

Shifting the Margins to the Centre

Almost all of the sixteen *métisse* women and nine *métis* men who participated in this project in Bristol were born and came of age elsewhere (London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Glasgow, Cardiff, the United States, Nigeria, Ghana, Jamaica). They had found their way to Bristol for education, work or personal reasons, and, for a two-year pregnant postmodern moment, this former slave port also functioned as a shifting political site for the individual redrawing of boundaries representing home, family and identity. Collectively, these crafted narratives of belonging drew marginalised social and political perspectives to the centre.

Although by no means definitive, photopoetic chronicles of childhood, the retelling of pivotal moments that shaped complex subjectivities, and frozen snapshots of experience reconstituted as structured anecdotes collectively recapture particular complex evolving everyday lived realities. The men and women who told me their stories all had black continental African or black African Caribbean fathers and white British or white continental European mothers. They were born between 1945 and 1975 in Britain, West Africa, and the Caribbean. A remarkable number have black Nigerian fathers and white English mothers.

I collected the original narratives in Bristol via open-ended tape-recorded interviews, between 1990 and 1992. Respondents' provided testimonies about their childhoods, gender politics, racial and ethnic identity, class background, nationalism, family, sexuality, creativity, parenting, and racism, among other topics. I acquired a separate notebook for each storyteller and recorded my responses to each of their storytelling sessions and kept track of the questions generated from each listening.

Are Diaspora and Hybridity Postmodern Inventions?

By the time the edited testimonies appeared as text, I had listened to them in full four times. The first time was immediately after each session. While their voices were still singing in my head, I formulated questions in direct response to their testimonies. These questions would serve as a guide, not as the basis, for the next storytelling session. I repeated this approach until the participants had finished testifying, at which point we had successfully reached the marrow – what is significant to each one of them in their everyday lives. I refer to this interview technique as the artichoke method. The ethnographer has to peel away many layers before the heart of the matter is revealed. Upon finishing the sessions, I listened to every single testimony again for insights and patterns. The third listening entailed laborious transcription, at times hindered by regional accents. The final listening was for clarification and verification of specific segments of testimonies.

When I began writing, I confirmed what I had suspected earlier – there was no way that I could adequately do justice to all twenty-five life stories. To include them all in the final 'polythesis', which ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall (1993) refers to as 'an interplay of voices' – and, I would add, ideas – would have been a lengthy process leading ultimately to my truncating their experiences. I tried working with fifteen, then nine, and finally six.

Selecting the final six was not easy. All twenty-five were eloquent, engaging storytellers. In order to produce a coherent final product which did not fragment or trivialise the experience of the individuals I had worked with, I needed to narrow the focus. I was particularly interested in the centrality of their white mothers in the retelling of their life stories.

In order to highlight the relationship between white mothers and one-drop-rule 'black' daughters, I decided to feature the narratives of six women – two sets of sisters and two women who had grown up in care with mother surrogates. Speaking with two sets of biological sisters enabled me to illustrate the similarities and differences in pathways to womanhood forged by two *métisse* daughters growing up with the same white mother. In the midst of the burgeoning Black Power movement, Akousa and Sarah were raised in Liverpool by a working-class white Irish mother, without their black Bajani (Barbadian) father. Yemi and Bisi were brought up in Nigeria during the turbulent postcolonial 1960s and neocolonial 1970s' by middle-class parents, a Northumbrian white English mother and a Yoruba black father. Ruby – Nigerian and English – and Simiola – Tanzanian and German – spent their formative years in care in middle-class, all-white English and Welsh children's homes outside London and Cardiff, respectively. They were each socialised by mother surrogates prior to the explosive debates about welfare policy as it pertains to transracial fosterage,

placement and adoption. To illustrate the ways in which *métisse* daughters narrate contested senses of place and identities which are both de-territorialised and bi-racialised, I have selected extracts from longer testimonies by Ruby, Akousa and Bisi.

Ruby⁸ Marie Garson, an African Caribbean social worker, introduced me to Ruby. Ruby is a 43-year-old Nigerian and English social worker. She is the only one of the original twenty-five participants with whom I spoke exclusively in my home. This deprived me of a contextualised sense of who she was. Profound sadness laced with occasional happiness is the phrase that best captures my sense of her. Like many *métis(s)e* individuals she is a survivor, a warrior on the front lines by virtue of her bloodlines.

What is black and what is white for me? In simplistic terms, it comes down to the colour of the skin as far as I'm concerned. I do distinguish between race and culture. So, I would call myself black and I would call myself British. Britishness is my culture, but because I'm black I will identify more from a racial point of view with other black people. Having said that, a lot of black people have different cultural backgrounds. Whether it's West Indian or Caribbean, African, American, there are those differences within that. I think that as black people, I would be very surprised to come across anybody who hasn't had some personal experience of racism somewhere in their life, in a way that a white person could not have. There's that shared understanding, that shared culture of racism that makes me feel closer to the black community in that respect. But, I am also British, so I guess that my values, my lifestyle and way of being are informed a lot by English culture. I used to feel uncomfortable about that at one time. But as I get older, I realise now that that is the way it is, Ruby, so why apologise for it. I can't turn myself into a black American or West Indian or something that's not who I am.

Once I came to the realisation that 'race' and culture are two different things, I found my own place in it more easy to define. Quite often people muddle the two together. If you're mixed-race, if you're not careful you can fall between two stools, where 'you're English, but you're not quite, 'cause you're black aren't you?' Or, 'you're not really black are you, because you're English? You're not one of us.' So, certainly if I'm talking to Caribbean friends or colleagues, or not even friends or colleagues, it comes up more with people I don't know. Where there's a taken for grantedness that I must be Caribbean in some way, and they're amazed when there are facets of the culture that everybody knows, and I say, 'I've never come across this before.' And it's like, 'Weehh, where do you come from?' I say, 'London.' I've found myself in life having to explain to people that I might be black, but

I'm not Caribbean. I am English. These days I don't have a problem with that.

Akousa When I first met Akousa, I remember thinking how much she sparkled – her eyes, her smile, and her presence. My responding to her sparkling smile is humorous in that until recently, Akousa had always hated her smile. Her mother is Irish, her father Bajan. She is a Rastafarian, and yet is not seen as a typical Rasta woman. She sees herself as a black woman, and yet not everyone sees her as a black woman.

At the end of the day gettin' into me late teens, I didn't think much about meself because of all these conflicts that were startin' to come up from the past. Also new ones that were comin' in from other communities – black communities – that were really shockin' me. I mean there were times when I wouldn't show me legs. I'd go through the summer wearing tights and socks, 'Cause I thought they were too light and too white-lookin'. There was a lot of pressure. I remember one day I was leavin' up somewhere and this guy said to me, 'Boy, aren't your legs white?' I just looked in horror, and felt really sick and wanted to just run away. I was thinkin', God, why didn't you make me a bit darker? Why did you make so light? It took me years to reconcile that.

Because of what happened in the seventies in terms of the Black Power movement, especially in this country, if you weren't black like ebony then you just didn't have a chance basically. It was the most difficult time of my life – trying to sort out who I was now. Whereas before, I thought I knew who I was. My family comes from the Caribbean. I never brought me Mum into question. She seemed to take thing in her stride. I kept comin' home and I'd say to her, 'I hate all white people. Tonkers', or 'honkies', or whatever. There's me Mum sittin' there, and I just didn't think about it. It's hard work, but she's me mother. I don't think of her in terms of, 'me Mum, she's white, I shouldn't be sayin' these things.' But on the other hand, me Mum never told me that I was 'half-caste' or 'half-breed' or anythin' like that. She saw me as a whole person. She told me, 'When you go out in the street, they're goin' to call you "nigger" they're not goin' to call you "light-skinned" or somethin' like that. They'll call you "black bastard".' No matter how light or how dark you are, that's the vibe.

I see myself as black. Other people see meself as bein' 'half-caste', as some like to call it. Like the Greek guy who said I should have an Irish map in one ear and an African one in the other. Therefore I should also have a Bajan one as well. and an English one, 'cause I was born in England. I could go on forever. When people bring those sorts of issues up, you sit down and you start questionin' yourself and askin' yourself, am I really who I think I

am? Who I've decided I am? All these people are tryin' to define who you are, tellin' that 'You can't be black. Look how light you are,' 'Your mother's white, so how can you be black?'

Bisi I met Bisi through an American woman in exile in Bristol, who, by virtue of our similar backgrounds in the Arts, thought we would enjoy meeting each other. However, Bristol being a very small city, Bisi had already heard about me through mutual friends. Next to Sarah, I have known Bisi the longest. Bisi and Yemi's father is Yoruba (Nigerian) and their mother is English from Northumberland. Yemi and Bisi have very different temperaments, but just listening to them for a while and looking at their faces, one knows that they are sisters. They each have four children. The father of Yemi's children is black Nigerian; the father of Bisi's children is white English. Yemi grew up Nigerian-identified, while Bisi, who was much closer to their white English mother, grew up with a more English view of the world.

The question of what race are my children? What do they think? How do they feel? It's difficult as well. I think Elizabeth said, 'I'm one-quarter Nigerian, (very specific, very precise), but I'm three-quarters English, Mummy.' Which is true. I ask my son sometimes, 'Do you think you are white?' I don't know whether he says it to please me or not but he says, 'Well, no, not really.' And they use this dreadful term 'half-caste.' 'Af caste,' they say, 'You are, aren't you Mum?' I say, 'What kind of a word is that? Half of what? How can one call oneself half of something?' I don't think that's made any impression on them basically. Because it's the basic term they use at school, and everyone knows what it means. 'I'm qua a (quarter) caste, aren't I Mum?' 'What do you mean, 'caste'? Do you know what it means?'

Of course, Julia looks completely English. What are they to feel? Julia's probably the child who'd have the least problems adjusting to a new country.¹⁰ She hasn't got this terrible sense of normal Elizabeth has. She's outgoing. Actually they are all quite shy, funny enough, apart from Emma. Julia is more sociable than Elizabeth, that's why. She would have less problems. You can't actually feed thoughts into your children. They are aware that they are not completely British. Let's put it like that. I don't know how far that goes. The words I put it in then are negative. They are aware that they are not completely English. Is that being aware of something positive or not? It's only through talking and discussing, that I know what they think.

Being aware that one's system of ideas isn't absolute. It isn't the absolute, the one above all others. There are many and they are all sort of parallel and

contradictory. If you are mixed-race, you belong in two (or more) cultural traditions, which may be mutually contradictory, you just have to find a middle space. As I said, this other woman who is Irish, her culture is something that will support her personality and at the same time oppress her. To come to terms with the ways in which it does that. The stuff about, you are never completely invisible or at home, you are always a bit of a stranger. Same status as strangers. My children are all English, and I still call myself a stranger.¹¹

Parting Thoughts: 'Keeping England Clean'

Here then were the three Englands I had seen, the Old, the Nineteenth-Century and the New; and as I looked back on my journey I saw how these three were variously and most fascinatingly mingled in every part of the country I had visited. It would be possible, though not easy, to make a coloured map of them. There was one already in my mind, bewilderingly coloured and crowded with living people. (Priestley 1987: 380)

Priestley concludes his 1933 sojourn with the profound realisation that the meaning of Englishness is in the proverbial eye of the beholder. I now wish to end my intellectual journey with a critique of two examples from the media, which illustrate the ways in which deep-seated yet unspoken white English anxiety concerning racial infiltration by black 'alien settlers' still pervades popular discourse on nationalism and citizenship. It is 4 June 1998, one week before the start of the football World Cup in France. On 21 June 1998 occurs the fiftieth anniversary of the docking in Tilbury of the ship the *Empire Windrush*. Having travelled five thousand miles, 492 Anglicised Jamaicans, including Second World War veterans, began a new life in a different, less inviting 'Mother England' than they had imagined in the Caribbean. The neofascist slogan 'Keep Britain White' became an all too familiar refrain during this period of economic restructuring and social adjustment (Ware 1997).

Fifty year commemorative *Windrush* celebrations and radio and television documentaries abound alongside endless pre-World Cup programming and advertising, the former celebrating a multicultural Britain with a black population that is 'here to stay'; the latter, in subtle forms, holding on to a mythical notion of Englishness predicated on 'white purity'. Two of the most blatant suggestions of a spurious 'white Englishness' are adverts for two commodities which are synonymous with cleanliness and hygiene: soap and water. Both advertisements use representations of young children.

The first is a television advertisement for 'Ariel' soap-powder. A young white English male football enthusiast rushes home distraught, having

'dirtyed' his football kit. His mother says: 'Don't worry, we will get your shirt white again'. She then demonstrates the special 'purifying' powers of Ariel, at which point the advertisement ends with the slogan: 'Ariel: keeping England clean'. The second is a billboard advertisement for Buxton water. In multicultural and multiracial Stratford, East London, just past the bus depot, looms larger than life a billboard depicting in the foreground three young white English boys with their faces painted with the Union flag. In the background, one can faintly discern a football crowd. To the left of the first young white English boy sits a visibly *métisse* young girl. The slogan is: 'Buxton: Found Purely in Britain'. There is another Buxton water billboard nearby, round the corner from Forest Gate railway station, on the side wall of an African Caribbean restaurant/café. On this version, the slogan is the same, as are the photographs of the three white English boys with the Union-Jack-embazoned faces. This time, however, the *métisse* girl has disappeared.

As they say, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Notes

Eternal gratitude to Ruby, Simiola, Sarah, Akousa, Yemi and Bisi, without whose powerful testimonies my ideas would have existed as mere theoretical abstractions. My thanks also to the other ten women and nine men who participated in the original research project. Finally, thanks to Phil Cohen for his shrewd editorial assistance.

1. This chapter is an edited, updated version of the first chapter, 'Cracking the Coconut: Resisting Popular Folk Discourses on 'Race', 'Mixed Race' and Social Hierarchies', in Ilekunigwe 1999.
2. For examples, see Root (1992): 'No Press Collective, *Voices of Identity, Rage and Deliverance: An Anthology of Writings by People of Mixed Descent*, Berkeley: No Press, 1992; Zack (1993); Lise Funderburg, *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity*, New York: William and Morrow, 1994; Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White*, London: Simon and Schuster, 1994; Camper (1994); Root (1996); Zack (1995); Marsha Hunt, *Repossessing Ernestine*, London: Flamingo, 1996; *Absinthe, HypeNation: A Mixed Race Issue*, 9 (2), 1996. Also see *Inter-racial Voice*, the largest website edited by and about 'mixed race' people, founded by Charles Byrd: <http://www.webcom.com/intvoice/>
3. Although much has been written in the UK on 'hybridities', I am specifically referring to the paucity of recent social-science literature and fiction by 'mixed-race' writers about 'mixed-race' identity issues. However, two counter-examples are: Evaristo (1997) and Traynor (1997), by 'mixed-race' novelists with 'mixed-race' females as protagonists. Also see *New Mixed Culture*, a website founded and maintained by Sabu, the first artist in Britain to put his work on the web: <http://www.1love.com>
4. The term *métisse* is a 'French African', in particular Senegalese, re-appropriation of the continental French *métis(e)*. In continental French, *métis(e)* is synonymous with the derogatory English 'half-caste' and 'half-bred'; see Henri-Cousin (1994: 160). However, redeploying this term demonstrates the portability and mutability of language as well as its potential reinterpretation across national borders. My linguistic informants,

comparative literature Professor Samba Diop and cultural critic and ethnomusicologist Henri-Pierre Koubaka, are Senegalese and Senegalese-Congolese, respectively – that is, black continental African. They suggest that alternative translations of *métisse* both include and can extend beyond bi-racialised (black/white) discourses to encompass diasporic convergences across ethnicities, cultures, religions and nationalities.

In an English context, I offer *métisse* in part as a specific shorthand stand-in response to what I believe are the inadequacies of previous terms. In other publications (Ilekunigwe 1997; Ilekunigwe 1999), I have discussed the shortcomings of extant terms such as 'mixed race', 'mixed parentage', 'bi-racial', 'dual heritage', and so on. However, the primary reason for installing *métisse* as a lexical intervention is to free me momentarily from the tangle of terminology so that I may address more pressing and in fact derivative concerns such as racism and bi-racialisation. Perhaps from this we may imagine a future entirely free of the reinscribing badges of bi-racialised differences.

In short, for purposes of analysis, in the English African Diaspora, *métisse* (feminine) and *métis* (masculine) refer to individuals who, according to popular folk concepts of 'race' and by known birth parentage, embody two or more world views or, in genealogical terms, descent groups. These individuals may have physical characteristics which reflect some sort of intermediate status *vis-à-vis* their birth parents. More than likely, at some stage they will have to reconcile multiple cultural influences.

5. 'The sons of Noah were three in number: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ... That Shem was of the same complexion as Noah his father and mother – the Adamic complexion – there is no doubt in our mind. And that Ham the second son was swarthy in complexion, we have little doubt. Indeed, we believe it is generally conceded by scholars, though disputed by some, that the word Ham means "dark", "swarthy", "sable". And it has always been conceded, and never as we know of seriously disputed, that Japheth was white' (Delany 1879: 18).

6. In a footnote to the introduction to Lavie *et al.*, 1996: 24, Lavie reminds us that 'much of the work on "hybridities" is gender-neutral (for instance Paul Gilroy's). As a possible intervention, she advocates Donna Haraway's notion of a 'cyborg' wherein gender is necessarily marked: 'A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction', Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women in the Reinvention of Women*, London: Free Association Books, 1991 p. 149.

7. Since gaining independence from Britain on 1 October 1960, Nigeria has been plagued by tribal and economic conflict, including the Biafran civil war, a series of military coups, corruption at all levels of government and failed bids for democracy, which have resulted in severe abuses of human rights, most notably the assassination of Ken Saro Wiwa and nine other dissenters. In the words of the Igbo novelist and essayist Chinua Achebe, 'The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership'. See Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1983, p. 1.

8. Unless otherwise specified, to protect anonymity, names and places have been changed.

9. This is a perfect example of the ways in which *métisse* people are forced to negotiate public and private spheres which negate and acknowledge, respectively, their white English parentage.

10. Bisi's observation that her one child who looks completely 'white' English is the one who would have the least difficulty adjusting to another cultural context is consistent

with Ruby's ruminations about her children. Obviously, in a world that still glorifies 'whiteness', those who are closer to 'it', or even embody 'it', are going to have an easier time in life.

11. Running like parallel lines throughout the testimonies are the twin themes of empowerment, which locates *métis(s)* people as cultural bridges and political agents, and of hopelessness, which highlights the intermingled psychosocial sensations of not belonging, being marginal, and being (in)visible. Without either putting words into their mouths or ignoring their cumulative and collective pain, my challenge was to create a socio-cultural context and a safe space for them to reframe the negativity that usually dominates most depictions of the lived experiences of *métis(s)* people in England.

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11

It's Your World: Discrepant M/multiculturalisms

Barnor Hesse

Multiculturalism does not lead us very far if it remains a question of difference only between one culture and another. Differences should also be understood within the same culture, just as multiculturalism as an explicit condition of our times exists within every self. Intercultural, intersubjective, interdisciplinary. These are some of the key words that keep on circulating in artistic and educational as well as political milieux.

Tinh T. Minh-ha¹

It's your world (and yours and yours and yours)

Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson²

There is a brief but remarkable scene in Robert Wise's 1959 film noir, *Odds Against Tomorrow*, where a hustler character, played by Harry Belafonte, makes an impromptu visit to his former marital home and interrupts a social gathering there. Perplexed by his ex-wife's attempts to live a conventional upwardly mobile life with their young daughter in the atmosphere of 1950s white America, he both reminds and warns her: 'it's their world and we're just living in it!'. Whether or not she agreed, she did not reply. Instead she returned uneasily to a discussion with her white liberal friends that had begun to unravel, while he went back to planning a robbery in a difficult pragmatic alliance with a white southern racist whom he despised.

Why begin a discussion of the politics of multiculturalism with an old black and white American film that I saw by chance late one Friday night on British television? The answer lies in the particular dramaturgical representation of national differences that the scene evokes. If we reflect on this it becomes possible to specify distinctive political characteristics of Western multiculturalism. First, it demonstrates that the same entanglement of 'race', gender and class can be lived, read and politicised in intensely different registers of the nation. Second, it illustrates how the proliferation of and interaction between cultural differences produce the recurrence of familiar and unfamiliar encounters, oscillating between