Straddling the Lines of Whiteness: Exploring Mixedness in a Binary World

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Abstract:

This paper explores the complex lived experiences of individuals of mixed heritage within the context of racial binaries, with a particular focus on the UK. This is done utilising critical reflection to bridge the gap between theory and experience. It examines how societal constructs of race, rooted in historical power dynamics, often force mixed heritage individuals into a state of 'racialised limbo,' where they are simultaneously identified as Black yet can be excluded from Black cultural spaces. Drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, the paper discusses the implications of this duality and highlights the psychological and social challenges faced by mixed heritage individuals as they navigate their identities in a world that seeks to categorise them. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary examples, including the impact of the one-drop rule and the dynamics of conditional whiteness, the paper argues for the necessity of 'border thinking' to dismantle binary racial classifications and embrace a more fluid understanding of identity. Ultimately, it calls for greater recognition of the unique experiences of the mixed heritage community and the need for more inclusive narratives that reflect their diverse identities.

Keywords: Race, racial identity, racial discrimination, Du Bois, colonialism

Introduction

A lot has been said about people of mixed heritage yet far less has been written.[1] Often, the perspective of writing has taken the positionality of racialising people of mixed heritage as Black and not taking into account the fluidity of identity. In a society where the binary signifier of race equates to Black and White, how does this play out in the lived experience of people of mixed heritage?[2]

Over the past centuries, many countries across the world have been segregated by the arbitrary binary of skin colour; a classification that Fryer, Dyer, and Saini agree is not rooted in science but in power.[3] Whilst some countries enforced their segregation through law (for example, the Jim Crow laws of the USA and apartheid in South Africa) others such as the United Kingdom made use of unwritten societal codes in an attempt to maintain a divide between those racialised as White British and those racialised as 'non-White' or 'Other'.[4] In the decades post the Second World War in Britain, institutional racism existed in the most overt and intentional forms with regard to discrimination in the labour market, the housing market, in pubs, clubs, dance-halls, and the education system.[5] Through these institutions, a clear distinction between 'Black' and 'White' was being drawn up.

With the increase in immigration came the growth in the number of children of mixed heritage. Many of these children found themselves being racialised as Black whilst simultaneously being rejected from the Black culture, providing a precursor to a feeling of double consciousness or of a racialised limbo; a feeling which appears to have extended into

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[1] Stephen Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin and the Politics of Identity," in *Black Identity in the 20th Century: Expressions of the US and UK African Diaspora*, ed. Mark Christian (London: Hansib Publications, 2002), 167–194.

[2] Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction,* 3rd ed., (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 94.

[3] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 165-190; Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, new ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 66; Richard Dyer, *White*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 18-30; Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

[4] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2019 [1978]), 206-207; Mike Cole, "'Brutal and stinking' and 'difficult to handle': The historical and contemporary manifestations of racialisation, institutional racism, and schooling in Britain," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 7, no. 1 (March 2004): 35–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332042000187298.

[5] Mike Cole and Satnam Virdee, "'Race', Racism and Resistance," in *Education, Equality and Human Rights*, ed. Mike Cole (London: Routledge, 2022), 42–46; Mike Cole, "Racism, history and educational policy: from the origins of the welfare state to the rise of the radical right," (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Essex, 1992), 146-147; Mike Cole, "'Racism and education," in *Education, Equality and Human Rights: Issues of Gender, 'Race', Sexuality, Disability and Social Class*, ed. Mike Cole (London: Routledge, 2022), 83-108.

twenty-first-century Britain.[6] Over the past two decades, the mixed heritage community has grown rapidly, with the empirical evidence showing that the mixed heritage population of England and Wales increased from 168,900 in 2003 to 388,868 in 2017 – a growth rate of 130%.[7] Yet, with an increased amount of multi-cultural unity, darkness underlies these figures. With some 30% of adults that have parents of different ethnicities identifying as mixed heritage, why are so many reluctant to occupy the realm of mixedness?

When straddling the lines of whiteness in the context of the UK, the act of inconsistent segregation, racialised categorisation and, at times, utilisation as a colour swatch to establish how closely the melanin in their skin positions them with regard to whiteness.[8] This suggests that an embedded and deep-seated colour consciousness separates the coloniser and colonised and that the epidermal schema means that assimilating into the neutrality of whiteness becomes the implied desire.[9] Trying to find one's place in a world socially and politically constructed as White is challenging enough. However, when you are being pushed and pulled to and from whiteness, cast into racialised limbo, thrust into a perpetual state of transition, the notions of ethnic borders cease to exist. We will discuss how it is in border thinking that the mixed heritage community can destroy the antiquated notion of binaries to explore a new consciousness.[10] Whilst straddling the lines of whiteness may suggest a life of double consciousness, this paper explores the social impact for those that don't tick the binary box of Black or White.[11]

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[6] Karis Campion, "You Think You're Black? Exploring Black Mixed-Race Experiences of Black Rejection," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 16 (June 2019): 196–213, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1642503.

[7] Feyisa Demie and Andrew Hau, *Mixed Race Pupils' Educational Achievement in England: An Empirical Analysis* (London: Lambeth Council, 2017), 2; Kirstin Lewis and Feyisa Demie, "The school experiences of mixed-race white and black Caribbean children in England," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 12 (August 2018): 2065-2083, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1519586; Lucinda Platt, "Royal wedding: The UK's rapidly changing mixed-race population," *BBC News,* May 15, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44040766.

[8] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]), 2-3.

[9] Dyer, *White*, 19.

[10] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25th anniversary ed., 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 99, 104-105; Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017).

[11] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Norton Critical Ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 184; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 52; Nasar Meer, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Double Consciousness and the 'Spirit' of Recognition," *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (April 2018): 47-62, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118765370.

Sitting Here in Limbo

Check the dilly many years ago

A man who looked just like my father
Came and took a man who looked just my mother

From his home
Put him shackled in a boat, made him row
Made him work for Jim Crow[12]

To be neither here nor there; to peer into cultures at once exotic and home; to straddle the lines of whiteness has been a challenge faced by many mixed heritage people globally. In 1999, W.E.B Du Bois introduced the world to the concept of double consciousness in the context of the African American experience.[13] Du Bois explored the conflict of simultaneously being oppressed and seeking to fit into the oppressor's world. As a result, the self-image of African Americans was at risk of damage as the constant pressure to conform to White American standards implied the erasure of their own cultural roots. This internal conflict is played out in the daily lives of many people of the mixed heritage community across the twenty-first century world, living at once with the blood of the oppressor and the oppressed coursing through their veins.

Within a lived culture characterised by difference, blackness is made visible simply by not looking White.[14] Therefore, on the epidermal level, people are metaphorically categorised as being either one or the other, White or non-White. Herein lies the crux of conflict for anyone of mixed heritage. Modern British society seeks to place its citizens into ethnically specified boxes regardless of how someone identifies.[15] Official figures indicate that the mixed heritage community has been growing quickly, with a growth rate of 130% between 2003 and 2017.[16] With approximately 30% of people with parents from different ethnic groups identifying as the one which aligns most to them, a different narrative becomes evident – one of choice and

[12] "Burn Down This Place," track 7 on Natty, *Man Like I*, 2008, Warner Music UK Limited, Spotify.
[13] See Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
[14] Dyer, *White*, 42-45; Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 1-2.
[15] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 167-194.
[16] Demie and Hau, *Mixed Race Pupil's Educational Achievement in England*, 2; Lewis and Demie, "The school experiences," 2065-2083.

agency.[17] However, it is estimated that approximately a third of the figures are missing, thus the 'unique and specific aspects of mixedness' are essentially rendered invisible.[18]

Invisibility recurs in the lived experience of many mixed heritage people and appears to be closely coupled with the contradiction of social exclusion and seemingly universal acceptance. By attempting to occupy various racialised spheres, a fine psychological balance must be struck; an internal tightrope traversed in which one must fall neither here nor there for fear of betraying one ancestral line or the other, particularly if 'you're told to hate yourself and those who look like you'.[19] Such balancing acts further muddy the waters of identity, especially if one line or the other has the potential for rejection. What ensues is a 'dual or multiple personality […] plagued by psychic restlessness'.[20] This restlessness can manifest in the use of language and behaviours. Take, for instance, the Caribbean community in the UK – a community known for mixedness/creolisation – where pressures exist to be both British and to embody the spirit of the Caribbean, such as wearing dreadlocks and speaking a creole language.[21] However, by embracing these very features associated with many Caribbean communities, the age-old stereotypes of laziness, a lack of applicable intelligence and a 'no worries' attitude can become prominent. The conflict this produces for modern British Caribbean children manifests in them facing an obstacle course of barriers throughout their time in education, such as placement in lower ability groups and a disproportionate level of school exclusions, whilst their comportment is heavily scrutinised alongside their ability to assimilate into the dominant White culture of Britain's classrooms.[22] The scrutinisation of the Caribbean community and the behaviour of Caribbean children appears to have created an

[17] Platt, "Royal Wedding"; Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 174-175.
[18] Remi Joseph-Salisbury, "Black Mixed-race Male Experiences of the UK Secondary School Curriculum," *The Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 450, https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.4.0449.
[19] Natty, "Burn Down This Place."
[20] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.
[21] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville, VA: Caraf Books, 1989), 105.
[22] Zahra Bei and Helen Knowler, "Disrupting unlawful exclusion from school of minoritised children and young people racialized as black: Using critical race theory composite counter-storytelling," *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* 27, no. 3 (2022): 231–242, https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2022.2146225; Demie and Hau, *Mixed Race Pupil's Educational Achievement in England*; Lewis and Demie, "The school experiences," 2065-2083; "Ethnicity facts and figures: Permanent exclusions," Gov.uk, last modified December 11, 2024, https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/permanent-exclusions/latest/; Joseph-Salisbury, "Black Mixed-race Male Experiences," 449-462; Jessica Perera, *How Black Working-Class Youth Are Criminalised and Excluded in the English School System: A London Case Study* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2020); Derron O. Wallace, *The Culture Trap: Ethnic Expectations and Unequal Schooling for Black Youth* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Campion, "You Think You're Black?" 196; Kirstin Lewis, "Helping Mixed Heritage Children Develop 'Character and Resilience' in Schools," *Improving Schools* 19, no. 3 (May 2016): 197-211, https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480216650311.

environment of hypervisibility in which they face the highest rates of fixed and permanent exclusion; with only children from the Roma community facing comparable exclusions.[23]

So how can the mixed heritage community be at once invisible and hyper visible? Their proximity to the whiteness of the nation may play a large part.[24] For when a person of mixed heritage displays behaviours in which their 'blackness' is rejected, marginalised or demonised, their 'whiteness' credentials are seemingly augmented.[25] Yet this is plagued by a caveat in itself; one in which the Black body remains out of place in the White space it has entered thus this 'whiteness' becomes conditional.[26] The position of being a buffer between whiteness and blackness foments a psychological conundrum of occupying two or more worlds; conflicting realities in which the narratives of ancestral lines oppressing one another are played out like a morbid re-run. This places the mixed heritage psyche as carrying the historical weight of both the oppressor and oppressed; bound in an ethnic and social limbo in a world still suffering from the racialised binaries of Black and White.

This oscillation between invisibility and hypervisibility is framed through a lens of dominance in modern society.[27] Historically, in imperial Britain and other European colonisers, this has been a white lens which has overlayed the impression of blackness over racialised bodies informed by a stereotype created as a means to strengthen whiteness.[28] This gaze has been utilised to permit or deny humanity to groups classified as 'non-White'. In the context of the mixed heritage community, the directionality of white gazing can be dependent upon which

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[23] Gov.uk, "Ethnicity facts and figures: Permanent exclusions"; Bei and Knowler, "Disrupting Unlawful Exclusion", 231; Perera, *How Black Working-Class Youth Are Criminalised*; Derron O. Wallace and Remi Joseph-Salisbury, "How, Still, Is the Black Caribbean Child Made Educationally Subnormal in the English School System?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 8 (October 2021): 1426–1452, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1981969; Marguerite Anne Fillion Wilson, Denise Gray Yull, and Sean G. Massey, "Race and the Politics of Educational Exclusion: Explaining the Persistence of Disproportionate Disciplinary Practices in an Urban School District," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 23, no. 1 (2020): 134–157, https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1511535.

[24] Dyer, *White*, 18-19; Ghasson Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, 1st ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 52; Virginia Lam and Gordon Smith, "African and Caribbean Adolescents in Britain: Ethnic Identity and Britishness," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 7 (July 2009): 1248-1270, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802298421.

[25] Campion, "You Think You're Black?" 196.

[26] Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), 8.

[27] Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Political-Economy and Postcolonial Studies: Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 80 (March 2008): 115-147; Mere Skerrett, "Countering the dominance of a global north in early childhood education through an Indigenous lens in the global south," *Global Studies of Childhood* 7, no. 2 (June 2017): 84-98, https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610617703830.

[28] Sara Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 149-168, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92; George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 243-245.

side they choose. That is not to say that this choice is voluntary in all cases, as it can also come from a combination of being categorised by a person with some degree of authority and societal pressures, or even through physical proximity.[29] In my own experience, the difference between entering a space with my friends who have lighter or darker skin than me defines who will be subjected to surveillance. If we observe the classroom, teachers, senior leaders and even other children may place a child of mixed heritage where they themselves want mixed heritage children to be without regard for how they self-identify.[30] What does this say to a mixed heritage child? It says that any agency over one's identity is beyond the control of the person occupying their particular skin and that you will be placed in one box, or another based on where others wish you to be, ultimately being racialised by the tint of your skin. Of course, this applies outside of the mixed community as the racialised binary system strangles progressive movement in society.[31] However, with more and more communities mixing and breaking down the barriers of binary thinking, border thinking then takes priority in the twenty-first century. By destroying the binary borders of Black and White, a new consciousness forms, one in which multiplicity – whereby gender, class and ethnicity are interactive rather than summative[32] – is normalised and incorporated as the way of seeing the world.[33] When we look realistically at societies such as the one in Britain, we can see multiplicity at work. A short walk down many high streets in major towns or cities will reveal not only a mix of people but also cuisine, highlighting that 'we are all just coloured souls in these black and white towns we roam'.[34] The nation's supermarkets are filled with imported food, football teams contain players and managers from all over the world. David Olusoga perfectly breaks down the national drink of tea to its constituent multicultural parts and finds the only thing inherently 'British' about it is the use of the heritage of their colonial power to control the production and distribution of it.[35] With the borders torn down, 'blackness' no longer becomes a burden for 'non-White' people

[29] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 182.
[30] Lewis, "Helping Mixed Heritage Children," 3.
[31] Winnifred Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness? The Bleached Body in Contemporary Jamaica," *Small Axe* 11, no. 3 (October 2007): 34-51; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 40.
[32] Bart Landry, *Race, Gender, and Class: Theory and Methods of Analysis* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 4-5.
[33] Alexandra J. Rankin-Wright, Kevin Hylton, and Leanne Norman, "Critical race theory and black feminist insights into "race" and gender equality," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 7 (July 2019): 1111-1129, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1640374.
[34] "Coloured Souls," track 11 on Natty, *Man Like I*, 2008, Warner Music UK Limited, Spotify.
[35] Afua Hirsch and David Olusoga, "In Conversation with… Afua Hirsch & David Olusoga: London's BIG READ," March 13, 2018, posted April 18, 2018 by Library London, YouTube, https://youtu.be/dIYfWsFRGyA?si=Y6Qgh1NuL80lJuAo.

to carry until they can prove they are fully assimilated 'good immigrants' as the entire idea of national purity is challenged.

Fanon suggests that an embedded and deep-seated colour consciousness separated the coloniser and colonised and that the epidermal schema ensured that 'the more the colonized […] assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he […] escaped the bush [therefore] the whiter he will become'.[36] Thus, assimilating into the neutrality of whiteness becomes the implied desire.[37] However, for people of mixed heritage, this racial threshold comes with the erection of borders and becomes a distinct world to try and inhabit.[38] As Tim Ingold states, 'The problem with borders is that they are lines of domination, lines of occupation that divide people, restrict their movement and disrupt their lives'.[39] To combat this, border thinking acts as a means of epistemic and disciplinary disobedience which includes disobedience against any form of policing thought and practice, irrespective of its intention.[40] It emerges from the very necessity for a world which is ever expanding as many more mixed heritage families grow and the absurdity of choosing 'one side of the epistemological divide' or the other becomes ever clearer.[41] Mignolo argues that 'there are no *original origins*'[42] – be these epistemic, cultural, political or biological – to revive or to which to return', thus we are all mixed or, as Éduard Glissant said, creoles.[43] Therefore, navigating these borders requires a conscious bending and breaking of hegemonic knowledge while continuing to establish one's own place in society. However, this potentially still leaves the mixed heritage community in a racialised limbo. Gloria Anzaldúa described this ambivalent position as one 'plagued by psychic restlessness', and a 'state of perpetual transition'.[44]

Contributing to the state of perpetual transition is the conflict of oppressor and oppressed vying for dominance within the self. In the context of Du Bois's America, the creation and struggles of the 'black spirit' which emerged from the 'cultural and political strivings' and which was consistently and continuously 'exposed to antiblack American "racial" politics' was the spirit which was seen to be a threat to the racialised status quo of

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[36] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2-3.
[37] Dyer, *White*, 80, 102.
[38] Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 25.
[39] Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 81-84.
[40] Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 25.
[41] Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 17.
[42] Original emphasis.
[43] Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 26.
[44] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.

north America.[45] This imbalance of domination fomented 'conditions of impaired civic status' for African Americans.[46] Du Bois stated in *The Souls of White Folks:*

> […] the Negro is […] born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields to him [sic] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.[47]

The duality evident in the lives of the African Americans Du Bois was describing can be seen in the lived experiences of the mixed heritage communities in the UK, as evidenced through the Caribbean community's struggle to evade racialised stereotypes. For the notion of seeing oneself through the lens of another, of having no true self-consciousness renders people of mixed heritage in a racialised limbo. Du Bois spoke of the gift of second sight, a gift in which the marginalised view the world from the other side of the veil.[48] The veil which for those on the side of whiteness reflects that in society they wish to see, distorts the image of people of the global majority to the extent that their humanity becomes unrecognisable to others.[49] For those racialised as being in opposition to whiteness, they see themselves cut off and imprisoned in the dominant world of Whites.[50] With this duality prevalent in the racial binary of many countries across the world, in the context of being of mixed heritage and living in the UK, this duality, this 'twoness' manifests as 'two warring ideals in one dark body'.[51] Ideals which can create a schism within the self, can manifest as feelings of betrayal for one part of self or the other. The mirror can thus become a cruel place to look; reflections of oppression carried around like manacles. For, to carry at once the histories of oppressor and oppressed, of ruin and riches, is to shoulder the burden of the global narrative.

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[45] Ronald R. Sundstrom, "The Prophetic & Pragmatic Philosophy of 'Race' in W.E.B. Du Bois' 'The Comet'," *Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 99, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 5.
[46] Meer, "W.E.B. Du Bois," 51.
[47] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10.
[48] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10-11.
[49] José Itzigsohn and Karida Brown, "Sociology and the Theory of Double Consciousness: W.E.B. Du Bois's Phenomenology of Racialized Subjectivity," *Du Bois Review* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 231-248, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X15000107.
[50] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 36; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90; Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, 19.
[51] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

Feel it in the 'One-Drop'.

> My poor, un-white thing! Weep not nor rage. I know, too well, the curse of God lies heavy on you […] [d]o your work in your lowly sphere, praying to the good lord that into heaven, where all is love, you may, one day, be born – white![52]

The concept of 'race' is pre-scientific and pseudo-scientific.[53] Yet, the pervasiveness of 'racial science' has and continues to plague modern society.[54] In the 1920s, the United States of America brought forth the 'one-drop rule' which essentially racialised anyone with at least one ancestor from the global majority as Black, thus positioning them as subaltern; that is, of a lower status than the dominant racialised group.[55] Ultimately, the rule was a means to further justify, in the eyes of oppressive lawmakers, the subjugation of the African American community. Known as hypodescent, the automatic assignment of children of mixed heritage to the group with the lowest social status, regardless of proportion of ancestry, effectively perpetuated acts of white dominance. With the notion that 'race' is a social construction in mind, the basis of the one-drop rule to categorise a person as being removed from one lineage of descendants and solely placed into another can be viewed as both farcical and offensive.[56] The concept of mixture has historically spurred arguments of 'racial purity' which, in the late 1920s in Liverpool, gave rise to an investigation into what Muriel Fletcher called 'hybrid children'.[57] Fletcher's argument related to the social and psychological pathology of 'half-castes' in Liverpool, and she convinced the University of Liverpool's social sciences committee of the need to 'scientifically' research the plight of those 'wretched' beings.[58] Through the study, Fletcher reported that children of mixed heritage (specifically a Black father and White mother) were more likely to be consistently ill. This claim was attributed to the evidence she provided, although scant, based on the inferior sexual health of Black seamen as opposed to White seamen. Essentially, the Fletcher report appears to be a pamphlet supporting

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[52] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xiii.
[53] Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, 65.
[54] Saini, *Superior*, 44-61.
[55] See Nikki Khanna, "Ethnicity and race as 'symbolic': The use of ethnic and racial symbols in asserting a biracial identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 6 (February 2011): 1052-1054, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2010.538421.
[56] Dyer, *White*, 22.
[57] See Muriel Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports* (Liverpool: Association of Half-Caste Children, 1930).
[58] Muriel Fletcher quoted in Mark Christian, "The Fletcher Report 1930: A Historical Case Study of Contested Black Mixed Heritage Britishness," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, no. 2/3 (June/September 2008): 218, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2008.00336.x.

eugenics.[59] The report contained measurements of eyes, noses, and comments of either 'negroid' or 'English' features. Such use of eugenics, in early twentieth century Britain, it could be argued, was no different to that in use in America, in central Africa or in Nazi Germany during the Second World War.[60]

Eugenics and the unfounded 'science of race' are only part of the grander use of 'racial purity' to categorise people of mixed heritage.[61] The influences of 'choosing a side' are at times too much to bear. There is, of course, not one singular identity, as we are all creoles that are mixed in some way. Identity is, also, not monolithic.[62] The whole idea of 'Black' and 'White' are in themselves examples of racialised identities and not 'racial' identities. What this suggests is that identity cannot be defined as 'racial', that is, biological. Instead, a 'racialised' identity implies that the colour of someone's skin is being used as a marker of their identity but that colour may not be the most important element. However, when thinking about people of African descent, the 'fact of Blackness' is the overarching factor in how people of mixed heritage are instantly categorised.[63] What Fanon describes is the ways in which Black bodies are made to be Black under the gaze of whiteness 'for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man'.[64] This racialises the Black body and brings into existence the positionality of blackness through whiteness.[65] For someone of mixed heritage, this assumption can be both disturbing and dehumanising in much the same way as it is for a Black person (presumed to be unmixed).[66] Alongside this, the context of the location of the racialised body is a considerable factor. For example, generally in the United Kingdom, the mixed heritage body is racialised as Black. In the context of many Caribbean nations, specifically Jamaica and Antigua, the mixed body is often racialised as White. What is the relevance of this contextual categorisation? It illustrates conditional whiteness in action.

Conditional whiteness for people of mixed heritage is both fabled and lived. Nobody can be truly sure of the ways that the plantation owners and enslaved people treated mixed heritage people during the times of transatlantic slavery. There are only anecdotal

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[59] Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, expanded ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 19-22.
[60] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 84-87.
[61] Saini, *Superior*, 76-78; Wilkerson, *Caste*, 279-280.
[62] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 178-179.
[63] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89-90.
[64] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.
[65] Dyer, *White*, 52; Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, 243-245.
[66] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 168-189.

representations through modern media. For example, novels such as *Roots* (1976)[67] and films such as *Sankofa* (1993). Looking to Jamaica specifically and the racialised hierarchy of the country, Brown-Glaude asserts that, in modern times, privileges are afforded to some Jamaicans based on the lightness of their skin.[68] This appears to demonstrate a sliding scale of blackness with the darkest skinned citizens most often found in the lowest paid positions and the lightest skinned citizens sitting in positions of economic power. However, the binary is not simply positioned in the extremes of Black and White, instead there is an elevated status for lighter skinned[69] people of mixed heritage as their White European lineage is given such salience that opportunities for their social mobility face fewer barriers. That is not to say that their lives are easy, it is to say, however, that there are more doors open as they are afforded some degree of white privilege, so much so that the controversial practice of skin bleaching in Jamaica has become less about whitening the skin, and more about 'browning' the skin.[70] This 'browning' comes with the belief that for mixed heritage people it is easier to claim European heritage and thus access to higher paying positions within the labour market. However, it has also been shown that, at times, when the political tide of nations turns, one's proximity to whiteness and the melanin their skin contains will be what pulls them from whiteness to be racialised by people other than themselves as anything other than White; thus, the conditions that come with their proximity to whiteness.

Frantz Fanon coined the phrase 'epidermalisation' to describe how the blackness of his body was inscribed unto him 'like a dye' and 'fixed' him in relation to whiteness via a colonial construction.[71] This posited the Black body as inferior and thus blackness as inferior when related to whiteness. How could this epidermalisation of blackness manifest in the mixed heritage community? Considering the value proffered to lighter skinned Jamaican's due to their proximity to whiteness, and the benefits this provides, we can see that the racialised positionality of the mixed heritage community is fluid and completely reliant upon context.[72] In the United Kingdom, location also contributes to how a mixed heritage person is racialised, and the influences of the communities in which they live can determine how they identify

[67] Alex Hayley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Doubleday, 1976). Hayley's novel was later turned into television miniseries *Roots* (1977) and *Roots: The Next Generations* (1979), both originally aired on ABC.
[68] Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness?", 40, 45-49.
[69] Some island nations such as Antigua and Jamaica would refer to mixed heritage people as being of 'high colour' and instantly ascribe them to the middle class.
[70] Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness?" 39-40.
[71] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88-90.
[72] Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness?" 48.

themselves.[73] Therefore, for those that live outside of Black communities, less identification with 'blackness' and the Black community can be expected, and the reverse can also be expected although this is not a fixed outcome. Yet, within these conditions comes the weight of African ancestry and the hangover of the one-drop rule continuing to constrict racialised options.[74] In the context of twenty-first-century Britain, when there are arguments around immigration, the melanation of the skin becomes a considerable factor in how a mixed heritage person is posited. This was evident for not just Britain to see but also the rest of Europe during the Brexit referendum during which immigration and immigrants became synonymous with 'brownness' as a 'wave of racist hate unleashed against migrants as well as the long-established black and brown British'.[75] Whilst the racialised element of the campaign was in full swing, Caribbean migrants from the Windrush Generation were being deported despite being British commonwealth subjects and British citizens for decades.[76] The deported Caribbean citizens had found that their proximity to whiteness was predicated on the condition that they were filling niches in the labour market, thus the privileges of whiteness afforded to them were revoked once that time had passed. So, for the mixed heritage community, particularly those of Caribbean heritage, Britain became more of a hostile environment than it had been in the past and the notion of racialised limbo, the double consciousness of being everyone and no-one at once, came to the fore on a personal level but not on a public one.

Dialogic of mixedness

> Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot exist between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming [..] [t]hose who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanising practice.[77]

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[73] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 183-184; Stephen Small, *Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1994), 22.
[74] Khanna, "Ethnicity and race as 'symbolic'," 1049-1050.
[75] Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever, "Racism, Crisis, Brexit," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 10 (August 2017): 1808, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1361544.
[76] See Mike Slaven, "The Windrush Scandal and the individualization of postcolonial immigration control in Britain," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 16 (November 2021): 49-71, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.2001555.
[77] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, London: Continuum, 2005), 88.

Édouard Glissant (1989) spoke of the mixed heritage community as a creolisation of cultures and that this creolisation is evident all around us.[78] Glissant's notion of creolisation asserts that the world is 'permanently changing and creolising itself' and that as a contact of cultures does not produce a simple *métissage*.[79] Rather, creolisation is a poetics of relation, which, as an ongoing process, is impossible to stop, has no morality, eludes capture, and produces unexpected results.[80] This cultural contact connects with his discourse of 'world-chaos' in which creolisation cannot be predicted in contrast with *métissage* therefore, contesting the creolisation of society would be to challenge the very fabric of modernity. According to Glissant, the Caribbean is composite by nature due to its birth under colonisation.[81] As creolisation diffracts the binaries of the epidermal racial schema, the purist definitions of racial identities must be necessarily replaced by 'rhizome identities' whereby 'certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time'.[82] The coming together of these identities crosses over into the use of language, particularly in the Caribbean context. The Caribbean community, which has often been homogenised in the political West, is commonly identified by its most obvious symbol, the Creole language.[83] Whilst many of these creolised languages are recognised as languages in their own right, a shadow has hung over them as being inferior to the 'official' languages; that is to say, the European languages of domination that subjugated indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa. Creolisation, then, embodies the adventure of 'multilingualism [and] the incredible explosion of cultures'.[84] However, this explosion of cultures does not mean that the communities have found themselves scattered or diluted. The *métissage* which ties the threads of the communities together is a sign of their consensual, not imposed, sharing.[85] The creolisation of the world is occurring every day as more and more children are being born into mixed families. The languages they speak within the home are not always singular. Neither are the ways in which people of mixed heritage have been spoken about. John Agard famously penned the poem *Half-caste*, in which the use of language to describe people of mixed heritage can be extremely offensive and to highlight that, as a person

[78] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, xxviii, 140.
[79] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, xlv, xxviii; French word for 'mixed' translates into the pejorative 'mongrel'.
[80] Édouard Glissant in Mickaella L. Perina, "Beyond Négritude and Créolite: The Ongoing Creolization of Identities," *The CLR James Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 71-72.
[81] Édouard Glissant in Perina, "Beyond Négritude and Créolite," 72.
[82] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010 [1997]), 34
[83] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.
[84] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.
[85] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

of mixed heritage, you are not 'half' anything.[86] Pejorative phraseologies such as 'half-caste', 'quarter-caste' and 'mixed-race' are terms which are as archaic as the notion of racial binary. Their only purpose has been to serve the power of the White community to define racial identities and to impose inferiority onto those that can't be racialised as purely White.[87] This, essentially, reproduces the pseudoscientific messages of genetic inferiority which formed the spine of Muriel Fletcher's report.[88]

Aggression can often manifest in the suppression of language. Whether the use of patois in the Caribbean, indigenous languages in the Americas, Arabic in Britain or any other tongue, the emphasis on the use of language and the 'correct' language to use can be viewed as a violent act or even a form of epistemicide against the speaker. For language is more than communication; it is history, culture, identity, spirituality, and sentimentality. We exist in unique spaces in each language and multilingualism should be celebrated as a means of traversing the racialised borders of society and utilised to take advantage of the fluidity of multiple ethnic identities. The suppression of language can often find itself locked to nationalism, for if one wants to occupy space (i.e., invade), they must obey the language rules of that space.[89] This could be referred to as conditional tolerance, much like the kind that appears to haunt one of the fundamental British values which hangs over the nation's educational institutions. With the suppression of language, an entire part of the self is suppressed with it. Whilst this is not a situation unique to the mixed heritage community, ethnically speaking, it affects all creolised people that call Britain their home and that speak another language either as their mother tongue or as part of a duality, for example, children born in the UK to parents who were born elsewhere that wish for their children to know the language of their heritage. Living in two languages already creates a sense of double consciousness in which the speaker can inhabit two cultural worlds which may differ greatly in customs and traditions and, symbolically, the diminution of one's mother tongue is in effect a means by which to gag, to silence, to marginalise, and erode a person's cultural identity; thus, causing a constant transition between the coloniser and the colonised.[90]

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[86] John Agard, *Half-caste* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2019).
[87] Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 182.
[88] Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People*, 19-22.
[89] Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 111-112.
[90] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 1957), 107; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 12, 16-27.

Fanon undertook a significant effort to make his readers aware of the socio-historical and psychological impact that language has on the colonial subject. He asserted that language is akin to assimilation in that the more the language of the coloniser is assimilated, 'the whiter he [sic] gets'.[91] Furthermore, he highlighted a phrase which ascribed language to whiteness: 'in France they say "to speak like a book", [i]n Martinique they say "to speak like a white man"'.[92] Fanon further explains that the possession of language implies empowerment as it confirms peoples' cultural adequacy referring to the citizens of Martinique 'bettering themselves' by learning the French of France which elevated them above the creole speaking islanders.[93] In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon explained how language becomes a weapon used by the oppressor to dehumanise the oppressed in that the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms: 'when the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.'[94] Here, Fanon makes a point of asserting the real-life implications that language has for the oppressed and the impact that this can have on one's self-image. Even after Fanon's research, the politics of language in the Caribbean are seldom evaluated outside of a purely literary context.[95] Literature was often employed to deflect attention away from the importance of language in influencing perceptions of cultural identity whilst simultaneously serving to suppress criticism from those opposed to the way it restricted viewpoints.[96] For many scholars in the Caribbean, language became a matter of form and fiction, taking a positionality similar to that of Glissant in looking at the creolisation of language and culture rather than meaning and truth. To this day, language remains a site of cultural struggle in the Caribbean.

Ultimately, it would appear that a sacrifice of one's core identity is the criteria for assimilating into 'Western' culture. This can manifest as an internal battle between the languages of the coloniser and the colonised; a double consciousness of the soul plagued by the panopticon of the white gaze, deeply entrenched in the epidermal racial schema. Therefore, by having command of the language of the colonial power, the more respected you are likely to be in that particular society. Thus, you're still not considered an equal, but you are more respected.[97] For example, when viewed in the context of native languages in communities

[91] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2.
[92] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 4-5.
[93] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 21.
[94] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 42.
[95] Daynalí Flores-Rodríguez, "Language, Power and Resistance: Re-Reading Fanon in a Trans-Caribbean Context," *The Black Scholar* 42, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2012): 28.
[96] Flores-Rodríguez, "Language, Power and Resistance," 28.
[97] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 96.

across the world, particularly the ways in which European languages have been used as tools to colonise the tongue, the conflict of being neither here nor there becomes even more salient. As persons move from one location to another, this language-based oppression can manifest in multiple ways. In the context of colonial bilingualism, Albert Memmi stated that: 'the colonised is saved from illiteracy only to fall into linguistic dualism [although,] many of the colonised will never have the good fortune to suffer the tortures of colonial bilingualism.'[98] This colonial bilingualism creates a cultural paradox in that the possession of two languages simply provided two tongues in conflict: a double consciousness of communication. Furthermore, the tongue in which the colonised expressed their feelings, emotions, wishes and desires, the very things which make us human, was the same tongue which was valued the least.[99] Thus, many people may never learn their ancestral language. With language holding such power in societies, occasionally the difference between life and death, the use of language as a means to build as opposed to destroy could be a way to understand the fluidity of identity.[100] The progressive evolution of identity through the continued vilification of blackness in British media and that of many other countries, shows that people of mixed heritage have needed to adapt to the fluid positionality of mixedness in place of a singular racialised identity.

Conclusion

Precious little literature exists on the mixed heritage community, partly due to the vastness of what it means to be of mixed heritage and partly due to a lack of voices being out in the academic sphere. It would be remiss to form sweeping statements as more research needs to be conducted on the psychosocial impact of mixedness. Being of mixed heritage is just as complex as trying to unravel the intricate network of genealogy; after all, 'we are all just coloured souls in these black and white towns we roam'.[101] In order to move forward as a society on both a local and global level, the binary thinking which erects borders must be deconstructed.

The enforced categorisation of people of mixed heritage is not only degrading, but also offensive to assume the identity of another in much the same way as making assumptions

[98] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 106.
[99] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 107.
[100] See Flores-Rodríguez's discussion on "The Parsley Massacre" in "Language, Power and Resistance," 29. Also see Jamie Gladstone, host, *Coloured Souls*, season 1, episode 4, "Do we Subjugate Ourselves with Language," Capoeira Angola Sheffield, January 8, 2022, 27 min., 45 sec., https://capoeiraangolasheffield.co.uk/podcast.
[101] Natty, "Coloured Souls."

regarding sexuality and gender. Identity is a combination of behaviours and associations to not only one's ancestry but also to their community. There is a fluidity in the ways that we as humans can identify ourselves. Our sense of being resonates at distinct frequencies and identity can be influenced by countless internal and external factors. What identity is not, is based on scientific fact; such notions have been debunked over many years.[102] When discussing people of mixed heritage, what should be at the forefront of the mind is the internal conflict many endure. The constant battle between oppressor and oppressed, each vying for space, attempting to become the singular consciousness. However, even this internal conflict can too easily be reduced to a binary of 'good' verses 'evil' 'black' verses 'white' and neither the mind nor the world is so simplistic; within every society, there exists a spectrum relative to the morals and ethics to which they align. The positionality of people of mixed heritage has historically been dependent upon their proximity to whiteness and how much value they have been given from the societies in which they dwell. Sliding up and down this scale may seem like a way of coasting through modern society with ease, almost blending in like a chameleon, 'passing' as White where necessary.[103] The reality is, when political thought changes, as seen in the context of immigration in the Brexit debate, the 'blackness' of the mixed heritage community becomes far more salient as racialised borders are once again erected and fortified. The dialogue and the precariousness of straddling the lines of whiteness means that every step becomes weighted by the importance of how much one is tolerated, that is, how closely can one assimilate into the dominance of whiteness.

[102] For example, see Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People*; Saini, *Superior*; Wilkerson, *Caste*.
[103] Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness?" 23.

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