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## MIXED RACE POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the possibilities and pitfalls of a specific mixed race politics in the UK. The paper considers the ways in which critics have discussed the development of 'the mixed race movement' in the US and asks why such a movement has not developed in the UK. It suggests that while the politics of recognition has been important to the development of mixedness in both countries, there is a need for a more rigorous account of historical specificities and social contingencies in the constructions of racialisation and racism in both sites. However, the paper argues for the importance of transnational thinking in order to develop a situated politics of mixedness.*

**Key words:** race politics, multiethnicity, mixed race, multiculturalism, United Kingdom

## LA POLITICA DELLA RAZZA MISTA

*SINTESI*

*L'articolo esplora le possibilità e le insidie di una specifica politica della razza mista nel Regno Unito. Il contributo considera i modi in cui i critici hanno discusso dello sviluppo del 'movimento della razza mista' negli Stati Uniti, e si domanda come mai un movimento di questo tipo non sia emerso anche nel Regno Unito. L'articolo suggerisce che mentre la politica di riconoscimento sia stata importante per lo sviluppo della mescolanza in entrambi i paesi, vi è la necessità di una più rigorosa spiegazione di specificità storiche e delle contingenze sociali nelle costruzioni delle identità razziali e razzismo in ambedue le parti. Ciononostante, l'articolo sostiene l'importanza di adottare una prospettiva transnazionale al fine di sviluppare una determinata politica di mescolanza.*

**Parole chiave:** politica razziale, multiethnicità, multiculturalismo, Regno Unito

## INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the UK introduced what has come to be known as ‘the mixed category’ to the Census. This move came after some consultation with interest groups and others, about the problems of the existing ‘monoracial’ or ‘monoethnic’ categories which left individuals who claimed some kind of multiple heritage with no option but to tick the box ‘Other’. The results, coupled with other demographic trends, have shown that what is being called ‘the mixed race population’ is one of the fastest growing ‘ethnic groups’. This growth has generated a great deal of attention within the national context, and this has noticeably intensified during the last decade. Interested parties include academics and activists, policy makers and practitioners working in fields such as social care, education, criminal justice and health provision to name but a few. Alongside the more academic concerns about understanding the theoretical and empirical particularities of mixedness and mixing, there have been numerous groups and individuals keen to put mixed race issues and experiences onto the UK’s racial map. While the US has for many years been debating about the potentials of a ‘mixed race movement’, in the UK the term has not really taken off. This paper will briefly explore the developments of the mixed race politics in the US and contrast these with the UK. It will ask what might a ‘mixed race politics’ be, what purpose does it serve, and who might be involved in it? Such questions inevitably invoke issues such as group and individual identities, of affiliation, of collective and individual struggles for recognition, and rights to (self) representation. The article suggests – rather than beginning by assuming that there can and should be a single form of mixed race politics, that we need to be attentive to the situated politics of mixedness. The most important aspect to these politics needs to be an awareness of the ongoing problems of racialisation and cultural and ethnic absolutism which take place within complex social relations of unequal and discriminatory differentiation.

It has always been the case that the ‘modern’ concern with racialisation has been expressed most clearly through the production of racial typologies. While the term race has a history, it is the way in which the meanings attaching to the term have both consolidated and shifted, and taken different forms in different locations, that are of interest to contemporary sociological research. In what has become something of a ‘sound-bite’ of contemporary studies in race and ethnicity, W.E.B. Du Bois (1995, 41) suggested that ‘The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line’. While these words are of course powerful and in many ways prescient, they are most pertinent to particular understand-

ings of race and community in which ‘lines’ are drawn and re-drawn in a public, political sphere. Du Bois ends his sentence ‘– the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea’ (Du Bois, 1995, 41). Despite a global sensibility and a reference to gradations of racial schema, as an African American writing in the US in 1903, the ‘color’ issue for Du Bois and his contemporaries was often more immediately focused upon struggles between white and black. The US was a country whose racial imaginary was then dominated by the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and the ‘one drop rule’ which deemed anyone with any kind of Black heritage to be unequivocally Black, and the complete decimation of indigenous peoples through genocide and social containment.

Despite huge changes in the way in which race operates as a marker of social difference in the US and elsewhere, the metaphor of a line was and remains extremely powerful. The line evokes segregation, order, boundaries and territories, warfare and protection, trespass and containment. The line invokes the formation of a nation through borders both internal and external, and therefore invites transnational analysis. It is however, crucial to remember is that *the line* itself is what produces ‘color’. In du Bois’ work that color is non-white, as white is or becomes ‘colorless’, the protection of whiteness by the line not only produces color, but also renders whiteness unremarked and un-noticed. In the UK the ‘line’ was never drawn as clearly or precisely as in the US, primarily because it was not indelibly marked upon the social fabric by legislation. The line was indefinite and thus provided the space itself from which to contend race. Michael Banton suggests that it is more appropriate to speak of a ‘colour scale’ in Britain.

From Victorian times there was indeed a colour line in Britain, yet, because of the empire, it was weaker than the colour scale. Where there is a colour line, individuals are divided into distinct social categories. Where there is a colour scale, individuals are ranked by socio-economic status with complexion as one of the constituent elements that is taken into account. In the USA the colour scale was weak. In Britain it was much stronger. (Banton, 2008, 42).

Regardless of how far one agrees with this conceptualisation, Banton’s main point is important; that is, the power of class identities, the organisation of labour and the political implications of imperialism and colonialism make for different understandings of the meanings and implications of race in the UK and the US.<sup>1</sup> This difference reveals the biggest limitation to understanding (mixed) race politics within imported transnational,

1 My approach to these issues is one of a feminist postcolonial perspective, which sees postcolonial theories and investigations of post-coloniality as useful ways to consider thinking about contemporary issues such as multiculturalism or racialisation (see e.g. Hall, 1996; Rattansi, 1997; McClintock, Shohat, Mufti, 1997).

Anglo-American frameworks. This does not mean that we should retreat into parochial domestic analyses, but suggests that a *critical* transnational approach is needed, one that problematises what Mac an Ghaill (1999) has called the 'Americanisation' of British studies of race and ethnicity.

In the US, as noted above, the discussions of the 'racial formations' of the nation have been dominated by the history of slavery and segregation and the near genocide of the Native American peoples (Omi, Winant, 1987; Todorov, 1992; Goldberg, 2002; Smith, 2005; Hoxie, 2008). As a former British colony, the significance of slavery to the foundation of the modern US state has been dominant in structuring the politics of race in the US which have included formal segregation in all social spheres, and a legal prohibition on inter-racial marriage. Necessarily, political resistance to slavery, oppression and disenfranchisement have been both highly organised and collectivised. The new social movements of the 1960s including the civil rights and black power movements became instrumental in the changes to the rights and responsibilities of minority groups in the US. In addition, the American constitution resulted in the development of complex national, ethnic and racial formations which took diverse geographic, socio-cultural and political forms. For example, racially segregated urban areas developed in the larger cities which led to the need to understand the form and impact of spatial segregation and its relation to broader social and cultural segregation and inequality. Descendants of slaves honoured their ancestors' part in the development of the nation by refuting terms like 'negro' and 'colored', to become advocates of 'Black pride' who became African Americans. The concept of whiteness has been unstable within the formation of the collective and hyphenated 'American' identification. For example, the transformation of European migrants into 'white' Americans such as Polish, Italian and Irish American has been achieved through a process of social and economic assimilation (often at the expense of other racialised minorities), whereas Asian Americans were first considered 'white' and then 'de-naturalised' (see e.g. Roediger, 1994; 1990; Chan, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

British race politics developed along different lines, with patterns of settlement and integration being more diffuse, and issues of prejudice and discrimination based in more opaque and unregulated social and political practices. In addition, the 'racial landscape' was significantly altered by the end of empire and the mass migration of peoples from the former commonwealth countries encouraged by the British government who needed cheap labour in the post-world war II period.<sup>3</sup> Despite

this seemingly liberal approach to subjects from the former colonies, it was not until the 1960s that it became unlawful to discriminate against someone on the basis of their race in housing, employment and other services. The early legislation was significantly strengthened with the 1976 Race Relations Act which tackled the issue of both indirect as well as direct discrimination. The lack of constitutional claims to ethno-national identification has led to a different kind of diverse multicultural Britishness, one that is currently under much scrutiny and pressure. The use of hyphens and listed identities is much less prevalent than in the US, and today the concept of multiplicity encompasses race, culture and religion, and contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia which now often engage with 'Islamophobia' and hostility to 'new migrants' from Eastern Europe (see e.g. Alexander, 2002). However, it is clear that the common thread of these histories is now woven into the fabric of racialised societies which are dominated by the possibilities and failures of multiculturalism. In the US these are further inflected by the election of Barak Obama as the first Black president. In the UK, debates are focused on issues of community cohesion and of citizenship and national identity and the need to manage what is increasingly called, 'hyper-diversity'. In both instances, multiculturalism moves us on from earlier versions of race relations to incorporate concerns with the ways in which heterogeneous communities (and individuals) interact with each other, and how to promote social harmony. These questions of community building and nation building as they relate to mixedness are explored further below.

### COMMUNITIES OF MIXEDNESS

It is important to note that while there may have been what people perceive of as an intensification of mobilities, and a speed of change that is unprecedented, migration and movement are not new, and managing racial and ethnic interactions have been ongoing concerns for empires, nations and states. Inter-marriage and race mixing have been recorded in Britain since at least the 1500s (see e.g. Tizard, Phoenix, 1993; Alibhai-Brown, Montagu, 1992; Olumide, 1996), and in 1614 in the US, while Virginia enacted the first law prohibiting interracial marriage in 1662 (Zack, 1993, 78). The reasons for the rise of interest in mixedness in the UK is of course not simply academic. It is in part driven by significant demographic changes during the last sixty years. In the period from 1945 in the UK, many people were recruited to fill shortfalls in labour. But as John Solomos notes:

2 As with most racial terminology, the term Asian American is contested. However, it is most commonly used to refer to what are collectively termed East Asian and South East Asian people such as Chinese Americans and Korean Americans. In the UK the term Asian has been used more commonly to denote people from the Indian sub-continent who are now referred to as South Asian.

3 See for example Solomos (2003) for an overview of race and racism in Britain that links historical and conceptual developments to the present day.

[However] the vast majority of British subjects in the colonies and dominions had the legal right to enter and settle in Britain. This right was confirmed by the British Nationality Act of 1948 which, in response to the granting of independence to India, made formal distinction between British subjects who were citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies and those who were Commonwealth citizens, although both categories of people had the right to enter, settle and work in Britain (Solomos 2003, 51).

This complex colonial and imperial history which impacted on migration and settlement dominated immigration policy and race relations. However, during the last two decades of the twentieth century this was supplemented by what might loosely be termed an intensification in globalising processes which saw an increase in 'flows' of people, politics and capital across national borders. It therefore may seem inevitable that with increasing racial and ethnic diversity, more people would claim mixed heritage or identity. However, there remains an issue about whether this is 'real' change as opposed to categorical, linguistic and political change and this will be explored further below. Whatever the reasons, there are now significant numbers of people claiming the label 'mixed race' and setting up organisations that are specifically about, amongst other things, their mixed-race identities and which also often aim to develop a sense of 'community' and solidarity amongst mixed race people. These sentiments undoubtedly arise in part arisen from the lack of resources for thinking about mixedness many people have experienced as part of their formative years. But they must also be shaped by the recent UK politics of race which, in the 1980s, insisted that political solidarities often based on 'monoracial' positions were the best way to challenge racism. 'Black' became a political category that had initially referred to Caribbean and Black African people, and expanded to include South Asians and, briefly but notably, Irish settlers in Britain (see e.g. Back, Solomos, 2000). As a student in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was clear to me that mixed race was simply not on the 'racial agenda'. To talk about mixedness was seen as undermining to anti-racist struggle, and a mobilisation of racial privilege that pushed those who could 'pass' as white up the social ladder, which at the same time meant pushing those who were black and brown back down it. As noted above, the upheavals in the political climate were reflected in and by a period of changing race thinking.

The politics of solidarity that split the category of Black resulted in settled groups identifying as Afro-Caribbean, and latterly Black British, whilst other collective identities of the children of migrants have expanded to include British Asians (the wide variety of ethnic, cultural and national groups from South Asia) and British-

-born Chinese to name but three. Alongside this shift and proliferation in forms of identification, the growth of the mixed-race population led to an increase in people claiming mixed identities – however not necessarily at the expense of a political solidarity to blackness and a strong anti-racist politics.

The development of a mixed race movement is tied into of the idea of a mixed race community. In the US the mixed race movement has been subject to intense scrutiny. Scholars and activists have debated the relative merits and disadvantages to such a collective. Academics have focused both on the challenges to theories of race that multiraciality offer, as well as on the ways in which multiracial identities need to be understood as distinct from those of monoracial identities (see e.g. Ifekwunigwe, 2003; Zack, 1993, Root, 1992; 1996; Dalmeida, 2004).<sup>4</sup> Yet as British anthropologist Peter Wade has so persuasively argued, '... to see mixture and hybridisation as inherently opposed to racial absolutism and essentialism is quite wrong' (Wade, 2004, 356). Wade looks at the way in which Latin American *mestizaje* is often held up as an antidote to the binaried racial politics of the United States, and an exemplar of racial democracy. He argues that despite the seeming democracy of mixedness as the dominant identity in many Latin American countries, racism and colorism that privileges pale or whiter skins is rife. For Wade, the use of the term *mestizaje* must always reinforce race as it presupposes origin and racial absolutes. Yet this is not the only way of thinking about the way that the term is used either in theory or practice. Maria Root for example states that

multi/biracial/ised identity] provides us with a vehicle for examining ideologies surrounding race, race relations and the role of the social sciences in the deconstruction of race [...] the answers are not to be found in a new system of classification, but in deconstruction, synthesis and evolution (Root 1992, 10–11).

Root is a scholar noted for her work on multiraciality in the US. In her approach, deconstruction of the particularities of the pluralized racial identities allows us to challenge ideas (ideologies) of race more effectively. However, my concern would be that the same kinds of analyses can and should be brought to bear on so-called monoracial positions, and there is nothing then particular to the multiracial here.

In the political movements and communities of mixedness in the US similar conflicts occur as amongst theoretical positions. For many people, the everydayness of their experience as mixed is predicated on understandings of race that are quite simply 'biological'. Jon Spencer's somewhat controversial take on the 'multiracialists' in the US is that they are at best misguided and at worst, racist. He acknowledges that the racial

4 These books contrast with work by writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work on her Latina identity as *mestiza*.



politics of the US has throughout the twentieth century been informed by the 'one drop rule' which states that any one with one drop of black blood was forced to either claim black identity or try to pass as white. This has meant that, paradoxically, many of the black population of the US are 'in fact' multiracial in the first place.<sup>5</sup> He begrudgingly notes that for many, the impetus to claim mixed identity is not as a refutation of blackness but an often more profound sense that the label 'Black' given its 'monoracial' overtone, simply does not describe the genealogical account of themselves. Of course, what this means is exactly as Wade has argued in relation to *mestizaje*, that such discourses reify an understanding of original races that are mixed. No less interesting to the contemporary climate in the US is the idea which suggests:

'Demographically the nation is becoming less white and the dominant black/white paradigm of race relations is challenged by the dramatic growth of and increasing visibility of Hispanics and Asians' (Omi 2001, 245).

Yet this is not the whole picture. It is true that the estimated Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2005 was 42,687,224 million. This makes those of Hispanic origin the nation's largest minority group in the US at 14.4% above those classified as 'Black or African American' at 12.8% (Source: US Census cited at Information Please 2008). This particular source notes that Hispanics/Latinos may also appear under 'race' categories as well.<sup>6</sup> In his work on the changing categorisations of whiteness, Charles Gallagher (2004) has noted that paradoxically 'whiteness' as a category is expanding. And studies of the US census show that while Hispanics may claim this name as an 'ethnic category' many of this heterogeneous group chose 'white' as racial category. Even more interestingly while 48% of these respondents identified as white, only 2% claimed a Black identity. Despite 'Hispanic' being seen by many as a category that is founded upon mixedness, it appears that up to 50% of this group might now be claiming it as both a singular ethnic and racial identity.<sup>7</sup> It is in such a climate that perhaps racial politics is increasingly rather than less polarised, with an acceptable mid-range of Hapa,<sup>8</sup> Asian, South Asian and Latino identifications to name just a few moving closer to whiteness with African Americans and other black people from Africa and the Caribbean disproportionately occupying the lower rungs of

social and economic achievement. We should be cautious as ever about such statistics, as they tell us nothing about how or why respondents identify in such ways, or whether they keep these identifications (see Song and Hashem 2010), but such changes in formal response are interesting in and of themselves.

Some of this difficult racial politics was evident in discussions about the then Democratic presidential nominee, Barack Obama. Deborah Dickerson wrote a scathing piece entitled 'Colorblind', which is subtitled 'Why Obama is not Black'.

She says

[Also, and more subtly,] when the handsome Obama doesn't look eastern (versus western) African, he looks like his white mother; not so subliminally, that's partially why whites can embrace him but blacks fear that one day he'll go Tiger Woods on us and get all race transcendent (he might well have never been in the running without a traditionally black spouse and kids).

The point about Obama's mixedness is that it is a further privilege. He steps into the benefits that have been borne out of black struggle through the civil rights movement without having paid his dues, thus he cannot ever be black regardless of his mixedness.

»Black,« in our political and social reality, means those descended from West African slaves. Voluntary immigrants of African descent (even those descended from West Indian slaves) are just that, voluntary immigrants of African descent with markedly different outlooks on the role of race in their lives and in politics. At a minimum, it can't be assumed that a Nigerian cabdriver and a third-generation Harlemitte have more in common than the fact a cop won't bother to make the distinction. They're both »black« as a matter of skin color and DNA, but only the Harlemitte, for better or worse, is politically and culturally black, as we use the term. (Dickerson, 2007).

Here Dickerson makes clear links between Obama's non-authentic blackness and his mixedness, particularly difficult as it is a black/white mixedness rather than 'minority' mix. The (self-evident) 'problem' of his white mother is compounded by his not-black-like-us father who absented himself both from his family and his adoptive country. Dickerson is not simply challenging

5 Of course the reverse is also true- that many 'multiracial' people claim to be e.g. Black.

6 I am aware that there is debate and dissent about the use of the terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino/a' and I use the differing versions in accordance with the materials in which they arise.

7 For an insightful reading of 'Latino/a identities see Alcott (2006) and on the racial identifications of Latino/a people Golash-Boza and Darity Jr (2008) and the special issue of the American journal Race and Society on the 'Latin Americanization' of Race Relations in the US edited by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2002).

8 In the Hawaiian language hapa literally means half or part. It is also most likely to indicate a mixed racial background of which one part is white. However it is now used in the USA to indicate mixed or multiracial Asian heritage (see e.g. Williams-Léon and Nakashima 2001)

Obama. The purpose of her piece is to point out how it is that white guilt can be assuaged by embracing Obama, whilst not having to seriously engage the ongoing trauma of slavery. Despite this, she sees his mere presence as progress of a kind.

The highly public discussions about race (and politics in this particular U.S. election) were extremely complex. While debates raged about Obama's appeal as a Black man (or not) to Black voters, Hillary Clinton won more of the Latina vote. This was 'evidence' for some of the complexity of US multiculturalism, of the limits to ambiguous and vague terms like 'people of color' and most seriously, of Latino 'antipathy to African Americans' (*ibid.*). Again the certainty of the group 'African American' rather than the wider groups of Black migrants is important. Moreover, Clinton almost never had her whiteness questioned as strongly as her gender. Speculation about her success with Latinas was that she was identified with on the basis of gender over and above 'racial' identity (Dickerson, 2007).

Despite strong input from the Hapa voices it is easy to see how the political movement to recognise mixed people in the US remains riven with tensions that have not abated with the political and social recognition of multiplicity in the 2000 Census. The addition of the possibility to 'mark one or more' racial or ethnic identification has produced a disputed set of statistics as to how many people ticked 'two or more' 'races' but the US Census site suggests it was only 2.4% in 2000 and was down to 1.5% in 2005. In May 2009, estimated figures showed a rise from 3.4% of the minority population in the previous year to 5% in this year, bringing the number of mixed race people to 5.2 million. Despite these fluctuating but still comparatively low numbers for the multiracial, interest and controversy on the ideas about bi/multi racial politics continue, the overall trend is of growth and the 'mixed race population' in the US is, as with the UK, a young one.

The political impetus behind the move to gain recognition for mixed-race individuals may not strictly fulfil some academics' criteria for being termed a 'movement' *per se*, but it is a term used in a more quotidian fashion. What is clear is that 'Political activism is the major factor that distinguishes the contemporary [1990s] multiracialist groups from the groups that existed in the earlier part of the [twentieth] century' (Spencer, 1997, 20). In charting the development of the groups that were then politically active, Spencer notes that the range of groups that were interested in political change in the US were campaigning for recognition in the Census of 2000. He compares the multiracial movement in the US to the developments in South Africa that led to the category of 'Coloured' being instituted. Not surprisingly, his basis for comparison has been criticised. But his assertion about political engagement being a key shift is per-

haps valid. Many of the groups that had campaigned for change were only loosely connected, if at all, and might more accurately be described as interest groups. The members of groups who argued for self-definition that incorporated complex affiliations often expressed these in quite personalised ways on the micro-level. Objections to multiracialists ranged from arguments that African Americans have always been mixed and therefore to claim increases in numbers or a biracial baby boom are erroneous (R. Spencer), that they have an individualistic bias (Thompson 2011; DaCosta 2007), to the idea that the 'mark one or more' move would make ethnic monitoring impossible and thus further disadvantage already disadvantaged groups (Small, 2001; Spickard, 1993). It is also claimed that the movement continues to hold problematic alliances with conservative 'color-blind' politics. Thus in a review of Dalmage's (2004) edited collection, Peebles-Wilkins asserts that 'The multiracial movement is comprised of mixed race families who attempt to promote social justice through organised political and other activities which de-emphasise race' (Peebles-Wilkins, 2006, 263). She goes on to suggest that '... the movement's ultimate goal is to alter racial thinking in this country [USA] and to promote color blind world views ...' (Peebles-Wilkins, 2006, 263). This kind of critique seeks to defend a civil rights agenda by arguing that the movement is at heart suggesting that we should not think about race. This shows the tensions in the disparate coalitions that form part of the movement and how they also reflect disparate academic perspectives on race and ethnicity. It mixes an idea that 'race' is not a simple scientific fact, with a desire to engage with the politics of 'race'. It argues that to hope for a 'race' free future, is to argue for 'color blindness' as if 'color' and 'race' were equivalent and the strategy for eliminating the one, is to refuse to 'see' the other. Clearly for those who are struggling to deconstruct ideas of race in all the multitude of ways in which they are thought, practiced and lived, this is at best a misreading of the theory and hijacking of a committed anti-racist politics. Certainly, the election of Obama leading to the much touted idea of the US as 'postracial' would seem like wishful thinking on the part of some, and a deliberate refusal to engage the ongoing racial inequalities and racism that abound. As Bonilla-Silva puts it 'Obama's blackness is becoming whites new weapon of choice for singing their color-blind lullaby' (Bonilla-Silva, 2009, 1076).<sup>9</sup>

In the UK this is also the case. Identity has been at the heart of the establishment of many activist groups such as 'People in Harmony' and 'Intermix'. Using the language of 'rights', and drawing on experience, many of the people involved in these groups are claiming the right to self-identify. Despite their avowed concerns about the positive nature of this challenge to existing terminologies, they might be termed 'defensive' or 'oppositional'

9 See also Brown et al. (2003) on color-blind politics.

identities. To clarify – the right to claim ‘mixed-race’ as an identity stands in opposition to a required tick box that names one ‘black’, Asian or ‘other’. In another sense, they may be perceived by some as defensive positions, in so far as they are often perceived as providing positive responses to attacks on family, history and heritage, which by extension cause damage to health and well-being. The Multiple Heritage Project was set up in Manchester in 2006 to work with young people, allowing them safe spaces in which talk about their own positions as mixed. Such projects are invaluable in a contemporary climate in which multiculturalism is being presented as entrenching and (re)establishing colour and culture lines. Crucially, the group pointed out that in 2009 it could not be taken for granted that it was possible to openly discuss these issues. Young people are being given the opportunity to explore the meanings that are attached to identity choices and use biographical data to inform and theorise their own lives. Of course, these young people also however draw upon the discourses provided outside of their families, particularly in schools and in the media. Their current preferred terminology is ‘mix’d’- something which alludes to the artistic and creative potentials of self-production, and they are now using this collective name and continuing to explore these issues with parents, educators and other professionals.

If as Arjun Appadurai suggested the late modern era has been characterised by a shift in what he terms the ‘social imaginary’ then it might be a helpful way to think about the rise in collective mixed race identities in the UK (Appadurai, 1996). If one aspect of the movement is to challenge the idea that mixed identities are somehow inauthentic, another aspect is one which celebrates people who have some kind of mixed heritage. This also is a complex issue, as the exoticisation and objectification of certain types of mixedness continues apace. Some of this may come from the mixed race movement itself. As Jon Spencer and others have noted, many ‘monoracial’ whites have been key activists in the development of the mixed-race movement in the US. It is this that can make the difference between mixed-race individuals and issues of inter-racial, – ethnic and – cultural sociality and kinship seem really important. Jon Spencer and Rainer Spencer both feel angry that many claims to mixedness are not based upon white supremacy but of mixed ‘superiority’; smarter, cleverer and most often – more beautiful than monoracial people. In addition, it is claimed that the collectivisation of these beautiful people is the ‘future’ of race (Ali, 2005). It is true to say that two people who claim different racialised identities who are in a partnership they consider to be familial, whether with children in it or not, can lay claim to being in a mixed race family. But in what ways does this challenge existing racial formations, if at all; and how helpful is this to understanding the complexity of those who are required to negotiate such multiplicity within a singular embodied self?

## RECOGNISING MIXED RACE

It is clear that recognition of mixedness as a lived category of experience is fraught with complex and contradictory elements. It has, as outlined above, been at the heart of discussions about the making and shaping of racial and ethnic groups. What is evident is that during the past century in the US and the UK the political recognition of mixedness has become a key issue. The Canadian scholar Charles Taylor’s classical liberal position on multiculturalism and the politics of recognition may be pertinent here. Taylor argues that a liberal model of authenticity requires individuals to be true to themselves, and that this true identity is crucial for self-actualisation. However, identities are dialogic, formed in relation between self and society. In order to be fulfilled, the self must be recognised by others. Building on the work of feminists and postcolonialists he suggests that non-recognition and mis-recognition are forms of harm, or even oppression (Taylor, 1992). But for Taylor the politics of recognition has two elements: 1) the politics of universalism which comes from the recognition of equal dignity of all humans and 2) the rise of the politics of difference. Under the first, we might conclude that all citizens have the right to be recognised, and most importantly, this recognition is central to the achievement of equality and social justice. The recognition of difference might be essential in order to achieve equality, and is not unconnected to the first. In both we see a need to address universal rights in relation to particular identities. Of course, Taylor is most interested in group rights, specifically minority ethnic and cultural group rights. He discusses ‘rights’ in their broadest terms, and considers equality in relation to a wide range of social provisions and outcomes in areas such as poverty, education and health.

In insisting on the right to name oneself ‘mixed race’ or ‘of mixed heritage’, groups and individuals are also blurring the boundaries between public and private spheres in the way that Taylor suggests feminist and postcolonial work has done. It is not enough to be able to narrate a ‘private’ tale of genealogy or kinship, such a position must be acknowledged in the public sphere. In the US, this leads to difficult issues relating to racial categorisation and anti-racism. In the UK, the importance of the political takes a slightly different form. The inclusion of ‘the mixed category’ can be seen as a victory in terms of recognition. However it has raised further questions in relation to the issue of the collectivization of mixedness. For example, ‘the mixed category’ in all its heterogeneity has become a group. So in a 2007 speech, the then head of the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights, Trevor Phillips, cited the speed of demographic change in the UK as one of the major barriers to a workable multiculturalism. In his talk he states:

[But] we are trying to achieve this [multicultural harmony] against a background of extraordinarily rapid

and unsettling change, not just in the social and economic environment but in the very composition of the British people.[...] For the first time, more than half of all ethnic minority Britons are British born. But even more significant is the astonishing rise in the numbers of mixed race Britons. In 2001 they numbered 674,000. New projections based on the census suggest that this number will grow to 950,000 in 2010, and 1.24m in 2020. By the end of that decade they are almost certain to overtake those of Indian origin to become the single largest minority group in the country. I welcome this, but as with all the changes we face it is not an uncomplicated prospect. The mixed race Britons are young, and they show the highest employment rates of any minority group. But they also exhibit the highest rates of lone parenthood and family breakdown, in some cases three times the average. They suffer the highest rates of drug treatment. We don't yet know why this should be so, though many people talk now of identity stripping – children who grow up marooned between communities (Phillips, 2007).

Phillips cannot be said to speak for mixed race Britons, and his statistics have been questioned, but his talk points to the paradoxical effects of recognition. In his talk he invokes the notion of a singular minority ethnic group named 'mixed'. Whether or not we might consider this problematic, he feels it is important because what he is calling mixed race Britons are an unusual group in that they are both particularly successful, but also particularly at risk.<sup>10</sup> And finally, he suggests the problem for many mixed race Britons is one of 'identity stripping', not a common phrase, but one that is as evocative as his pronouncement that these individuals are at risk of finding themselves 'marooned' between 'communities'.

In the first instance we may be concerned that the incredible heterogeneity of individuals who responded to the Census are collectivised into a singular minority ethnic group.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the continued tendency to either idealise or pathologise mixed people is evident in the discussion of achievement in employment and of family forms. Better or worse than others, but not simply equivalent – mixed race becomes a marker of difference. And finally, his comments about identity echo much older concerns about the potential psychic damage to mixed individuals their multiplicity may confer upon them – a form of identificatory outsidersness.<sup>12</sup> But more

importantly, rather than an inside/out model of some kind of inherent psychosis, Phillips alludes to the formative power of racial and ethnic communities. Mixed race people are banished from existing communities and thus have no community. In his formulation, recognition as mixed at the public, macro level of Census data has done nothing to alleviate the problems at the meso and micro levels. At these levels, it is precisely the desire for mixedness that is problematic and is a potential barrier to inclusion in existing communities. Under such conditions, why would mixed people not want to form their own communities? The problems that face many mixed race people are exacerbated by ideas of race that allow 'communities' to define themselves in such exclusive and purist terms. Phillips seems to elide race and ethnicity, and maps them on to cultural communities. What does this mean for an individual who is raised with ethnic, cultural and racial plurality? As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) have suggested, in its broadest terms, belonging to ethnic collectivities requires one to be able to muster the appropriate resources in order to be a member of the group. In the case of many mixed race people, despite being able to do that, they may still be seen as inauthentic in some way. What this points to is an ongoing question about the ways in which all these aspects – race, ethnicity and culture – of identity are invoked such that they continue to assume some kind of prior given 'pure' or 'singular' or certainly definable and bounded 'thing'. Quite simply, both those in favour of, for example, simple understandings of 'the Chinese community' and those who argue for the possibilities for solidarity within 'the mixed race community' are in danger of investing in the 'myths of origins', whether or not they escape charges of ethnic absolutism. The price of recognition might also be a form of representation that is either a glorification or pathologisation of mixedness.

One newer group, Turquoise, has this statement on their web-pages:

#### WHAT WE DO AND WHY WE DO IT

Turquoise are a group of young adults with a mixed heritage. We are taking a leading role in promoting mixed heritage within Britain. We recognise that there is a growing population of mixed individuals in Britain, and are keen to promote our own experiences born from embracing, celebrating and identifying with our multiple heritages. Our vision is to engage

10 Statistics in the UK show 'the mixed-race population' are more likely to be underachieving at school (Tikly et al., 2004), children are disproportionately represented in the care system (Barn, 2007) and in the prison system (Reza, Magill, 2006) as well as being at greater risk of crime than all other ethnic groups (Salisbury, Upson, 2004).

11 Work in the UK has consistently pointed to the ways in which mixed race identities are experienced as varied and diverse, and are, as with all identities, simultaneously produced through and with a range of other kinds of social differentiation, see below and Song (2010) on the heterogeneity of the 'group' and Bradford (2006) on the Census.

12 This has been a key feature of concerns about mixed race identities and is discussed in the UK context in Tizard, Phoenix, 1993; Ali, 2003; Ifekwunigwe, 1999; Parker, Song, 2002; Tate, 2005; Alibhai-Brown, 2001; and in relation to families in e.g. Olumide, 2002; Cballero et al., 2008. In the US, for example, Root, 1992; 1996; Ifwekunigwe, 2004; Rockquemore, Brunnsma, 2002.



with and promote the mixed heritage community so we can celebrate who we are by being able to identify with and see the achievements of mixed people in UK society. We are establishing a structured mechanism for mixed heritage people to come together to network, share their experiences, ideas, and have debates and discussions about their achievements (Turquoise Association, 2009).

This group of largely professional young adults seek to inspire a new generation of mixed individuals. They are concerned with including everyone in this group under the heading of community, and under their list of activities request global ambassadors and entrepreneurs. There is a point under their ethical statement at which they note that some people suffer discrimination over race, gender or disability and that this is unacceptable. Clearly the members feel strongly about the need for group recognition, and representation in many different forms. But where is the explicit anti-racist sentiment in this statement? How might we feel about a group who seek to 'promote' mixed race people? In spite of evident good intentions, such a remit might be considered by some as the result of a liberal anti-racist sentiment that fails to fully engage the structured forms of inequality that face *all* minority ethnic groups in the UK. While sympathising with the group's ideal of recognition and self-representation, the form it takes here could be interpreted as apolitical, and veering towards the 'celebratory', at the expense of critical engagement with the diverse representations and experiences of mixedness (particularly classed, geographical contingent, and hetero/gendered) and most importantly the processes of racialisation that form them.

#### CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A SITUATED POLITICS OF MIXEDNESS?

The distinct development of forms and processes of racialisation in the US and the UK have led to different kinds of political struggles for recognition for those who name them selves as variously multiracial, mixed race, biracial, having multiple heritage and so on. The struggles over the names also point to the different histories of race making, and it would seem misguided to attempt to transport models from one site to another. It is more important to consider the extremely complex and contingent discursive sites and practices that produce 'race' and mixed 'race' in their many forms. Specificity does not mean that we might not see points of similarity and patterns of congruence, but the need to understand that the particulars of what forms racialised hierarchies is what matters most to the project of dismantling them. We might better engage understandings of mixed race

by situating them within theoretical frameworks that are engaged with understanding the wider politics of belonging in multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural societies. As Avtar Brah suggests we must continue to problematise both the idea of the 'native' as well as the 'migrant' and to interrogate both how and why imagined origins continue to contribute to borders and boundaries and their crossings (Brah, 1996, 197). In this case, the border crossings that are inherent to a discussion of mixed race require a political engagement with the ways in which mixedness and mixing are produced and managed within sites which consist of multiple time-lines for indigenous, migrant and settler populations.

As outlined above, the mixed race movement in the US was explicitly engaged with a politics of recognition, which required the changes to the Census to allow more flexible and inclusive social identities, with limited success. In the UK similar discussions took place in a less organised fashion, and also resulted in recognition in the Census, again, not to the satisfaction of all (Aspinall 2009). The context for these inclusions are described by social commentators as periods of rapid change, and concerns about the ways in which racial and ethnic relations are managed in multicultural societies. There are fears explicitly expressed in the US about the collectivisation of mixed race which fit with wider concerns about the ways in which identity based movements may weaken the possibilities of coalition politics. Although the UK has not had the same kind of organised claim to recognition, it can also be seen to be guided by similar concerns to the right of self identification as the basis for a form of self actualisation. As Alcoff notes however, 'Strongly felt identities *in reality* do not uniformly lead to the political disasters the critics portend because identities *in reality* are not what the critics understand them to be (Alcoff, 2006, 41). She looks at how identity based interest groups need not inevitably lead to separatism in US race politics. It is the fear of separatism of various groups that underpins the discussions about community formation and multiculturalism in the UK. Yet, I would argue that the mixed race population (if one can call it that), while developing networks and collective forms of identification, does not currently perceive itself as a community per se. The most important thing is that even if mixed race people do perceive themselves as a community, this does not inevitably mean that this community is 'separate' from other issue-based groups or more importantly from other minority groups organising on the basis of race, ethnicity and/or culture. What seems to be more of an issue is the position of mixedness *vis a vis* hierarchical organisations of social differentiation. It is the hierarchical nature of social organisation that needs to underpin a politics of mixing, and this in turn that should inform what I am calling a situated politics of mixedness.<sup>13</sup>

13 In this instance I am drawing on Haraway and other feminists such as Alcoff's understandings on the need for all knowledge to be partial and situated, and for a recognition of the need to consider the 'politics of location' (Frankenberg, Mani, 1993; Caplan, 1993). For broader discussion of the 'situated politics of belonging' see Yuval-Davis et. al., 2006.

By considering a situated politics of mixedness we are forced to pay close attention not only to the complexities of contemporary positionalities, but how such positionalities have arisen. In the examples I have drawn upon, the US and the UK, the histories are in some ways intertwined, especially through colonialism and imperialism, and are yet distinct and specific. At the outset of the paper, I alluded to the fact that the term 'European' does not adequately cover the ways in which 'race thinking' developed in the rest of the continent – if at all. We know that the term means different things at different times and in different places, and ethnic and cultural identity are equally complex. The colonial histories of other European countries are often entwined with conquest and control within continental borders, as much as outside of them. In other parts of Europe that have undergone huge forms of upheaval in their more recent history, the notion of borders, of migrant or native, coloniser and colonised are different than those formed through the UK's 'island race' mentality. Where borders have been re-drawn, and ethnic, religious and cultural identities have been formed and re-formed in struggles for national recognition and territorial sovereignty, the issue of 'mixing' may be more fruitfully discussed through the kinds of understanding of multiculturalism as mentioned above which do not always centralise 'race' per se., In addition, postcoloni-

ality itself will need to be thought through the historical and geographic specificities that link to broader projects of control and containment in knowledge, politics and societies.<sup>14</sup> The ways in which identities are mobilised in political debate however, must still be considered through frameworks of social and political justice and equity, and with attention to the social conditions of advantage and disadvantage that attend them. In this case, forms of alignment and refusal, whether named as racial, or ethnic or cultural, still require an analysis of power and privilege, and a critical engagement with the politics of recognition.

I would argue that there is nothing intrinsically problematic about collectivising as mixed race, indeed individuals finding solidarity with others, rather than being defined as 'other', may be crucial for one's sense of self. However, it is as important to recognise the power dynamics in the which kinds of identifications are opened up and which foreclosed in this process, as well as how these processes feed into the perpetuations of racial hierarchies within societies, and how these are intercut by other kinds of inequality. This is as true of mixed identities and politics as it is of any other. Recognition is not necessarily a problematic goal, but cannot be an end in itself nor should be achieved at the expense of a continued engagement with the wider politics of race and racism within any given site.

## POLITIKA MEŠANE RASE

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### POVZETEK

*Članek obravnava možnosti in pasti razvijanja posebne »politike mešane rase« v Veliki Britaniji. Avtorica v prispevku opisuje, kako so rasne formacije v Združenih državah pripeljale do »gibanja mešane rase«. Upošteva tudi kritike tega projekta v kontekstu spreminjajoče se rasne strukture ZDA in s krajšo obravnavo položaja Baracka Obame kot hkrati »temnopoltega« in »mešane rase« ponazori nekaj težav teh politik. Članek nadalje preučuje način, kako se rasno mešane identitete v Veliki Britaniji trenutno umeščajo v razprave o multikulturalnosti. Medtem ko je premik k priznavanju mešane rase kot družbene identitete moč razumeti kot »politiko« priznavanja, bi morali po avtoričinem mnenju raje vzpostaviti določeno politiko mešanja in mešanosti, v kateri bi skoncentrirali protirasistične politike z razumevanjem za drugačne vrste družbenih razlik, ki so osrednjega pomena za oblikovanje rasnih identitet v Veliki Britaniji.*

**Ključne besede:** rasna politika, multietničnost, multikulturalnost, Velika Britanija

14 See e.g. Bjelić, Savić (2002), Korek (2009) and Huggan, Law (2009) for views on postcolonial approaches to central, eastern and south eastern Europe.

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