

**Making Mixed Race: Time, Place and Identities in  
Birmingham**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the identity-making practices of Mixed White and Black Caribbean people by drawing on qualitative interviews with 37 respondents aged between 20 and 56 years old. Much of the current literature on mixed race tends to focus upon individual socio-psychological accounts of mixed race identity. Whilst this thesis does borrow from this approach, it firmly situates individual accounts of mixedness in relation to the broader structural constraints and/or possibilities that continuously frame mixed race experiences. The thesis conceptualises structural contexts in terms of space and time, to unpack the external negotiations that are made by mixed race subjects in place and through different periods.

The study takes place in Birmingham, a city that has long been regarded as a raced space. By analysing how the different spaces and layers of the city are utilised in identity making, the thesis contends that ethnicity is not the defining aspect of mixed race identities like is often assumed. It proposes that research on mixed race that treats place as a backdrop fails to recognise how it produces different scales of belonging for mixed race subjects and how place functions as a major point of reference for ethnic identifications. The thesis identifies and accounts for a historical gap in the narrative of mixed race in Britain, by moving away from the common present-tense conceptualisations of mixedness and charting the historical trajectories of mixed race identities throughout post-1945 Britain. By analysing mixed race through an historical lens it does the important work of dislodging it from the current celebratory moment and takes account of how Britain's social histories and dominant systems of race thinking have consistently impacted upon generations of mixed race subjects.

In the coming analysis the personal, individual aspects of mixed race identity and experience in relation to the family, peers and sexual partners are explored only once the structural questions regarding place and social generation are considered. I argue that the micro-politics of mixed race cannot be understood without first tracing the macro-politics which make mixed race as an identity, and as a social category, possible in the first place. The thesis contends that acknowledgment of the spatial and temporal aspects of mixed race identity by broadening the analysis away from the individual emphasises the dialectical nature of mixed race identity, which is critical to the project of theorising mixed race.

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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## Dual to the Death

It became quite clear a few years after I drew my first breath  
That the world to which I had entered drew conflict of my skin; I call it a dual  
to the death

They say a baby has no concept of the tone of skin they're living in  
But something told me from within, some kind of different feeling  
That there was a little something different about my two next of kin

My mother's tone vanilla, or smooth shade of egg shell cream  
Whilst my pops face shimmered like an onyx stone that reflected the sun,  
whenever he smiled a beam

It's true! For the first few years I learnt from the world around me oblivious  
without a clue  
But then at a tender age the question arose, most kids I know have one shade  
of parent, how come I seem to have two?

A nagging question with no answer, surely this isn't right!  
I got four grandparents too, but two's black, and two's white

I looked for the answer in the mirror, I stared into the reflective screen  
Hold on!! That's crazy!! I'm neither shade, but a colour in-between

My mother had to use tact to make some sense was a tricky task  
She told me you are a beautiful blend of cultures, I inherited the term half-  
caste

A little time past, and it wasn't too fast before those kids from the Duggan  
family kicked my ass, they don't seem to like me for some reason, their  
mocking wouldn't pass.

I be at the brunt of their taunts, an introduction to racism's full blast.

Golly wog, coon!!

Ya' just a jam spoon!!

Jungle bunny wasn't funny, I wish to grow some muscles soon

So I could beat the words right out of them, get them in head lock and squeeze tight.

My Gran said "violence wasn't the answer you afe' use your mind to fight"

My mind thought of my friends who seemed to be a little darker than me

The stories that they told me about when kids from their school taunted too

Called them nigga and spade and made the noise of a monkey.

I made a connection with those friends who were experiencing what I too could feel

Whether dark or light skinned tone, we would say "Bro keep it real!!"

Then as time ticked on and I grew at fast pace

John Agard challenged Half-Caste, I now became Mixed Race

The same stigmas still existed,

To my white friends my hip hop swagger meant that I thought I was tough

But I started to experience something new, to my ebony friends, I just wasn't black enough

Which side of the fence did I sit on, it wasn't clear cut

They said I may be brown by my appearance but on the inside I'm white, just like a coconut

The strife and confusion,

Mixed or Half who could tell for sure?

That old classic scenario, which side would I fight for in a black and white war

Neither!!! No, no both!!!

Damn!!! What a stupid question

It was the war going on inside which needed comprehension

I mean deep down I was happy just to be me

But the outside world wanted answers for me to slot into a pigeon holed society

"I am whatever colour you see" an alien came down and told me and that seemed cool

Heritage is important, but it doesn't have to be a duel

I don't mean a dual like two; I mean a duel like kung fu

A fight for an identity, something to belong to

So whatever name you choose to call me, just make sure convey it to pride

Bob Marley said; "I don't stand for Black or White, but I remain on **God's Side!**"

By AEON

aka Daniel-San

# 1 Introduction

Mixed race is a knowable category, and one that has been recognised for some time now. This is undoubtedly owing to various social developments, such as the inclusion of a 'Mixed' category on the UK census for the first time back in 2001. At that census, respondents were given the option to choose from four pre-determined 'mixed' categories<sup>1</sup> (Thompson 2010; Thompson 2012; Song 2012; Aspinall & Song 2014). The results of the census, counted 661,000, or 1.3% of the population, as having a mixed ethnicity (Bradford 2006: 15). Of this, 237,000 were Mixed White and Black Caribbean (who are the focus group of this thesis), making it the largest of all the mixed groups (Bradford 2006: 15). By the following census in 2011, the mixed group was recorded to have grown faster than most other ethnic minority groups; during the decade the number of people in the population identifying as mixed increased to 1.2 million (Jivraj 2012). The Mixed White and Black Caribbean group remained the largest of all four, just over a third of the mixed population were counted into this sub-group (Table 1.1). Further to this, between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the Office for National Statistics made the 'decision to change the 'mixed' heading to 'mixed/multiple ethnic groups'' but without altering the four sub-categories (Aspinall 2015: 1080). This change, Aspinall notes (ibid: 1080), was 'symbolically appropriate', in that it recognised the potential for increasingly complex mixed heritages and the need to acknowledge those in some meaningful way.

**Table 1.1:** Mixed ethnic groups in England and Wales, census 2011

<b>Mixed Ethnic Groups</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White and Black Caribbean	426,715	35%
White and Black African	165,974	14%
White and Asian	341,727	28%
Other Mixed	289,984	24%
<b>Total</b>	1,224,400	100%

Aside from the emergence of mixed race in government monitoring data, there has also been increasing representations of mixed race outside of these official conceptualisations. Throughout the twenty-first century, mixed race bodies in popular culture have been co-opted to represent the country's supposedly increasing levels of tolerance and understanding when it comes to race,

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<sup>1</sup> The four sub-categories were; Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Black African, Mixed White and Asian and Mixed Other.

ethnicity and difference (Ford et al. 2012). In addition to this, successful, high-flying, mixed race 'poster figures' are not hard to come by; think of President Barack Obama, British Olympic champion Jessica Ennis, Formula 1 star Lewis Hamilton, and British pop stars and writers, such as Emeli Sande and Zadie Smith (Aspinall 2015). British film producer Danny Boyle even elected to choose a mixed race family in his choreography for the London Olympic Games opening ceremony in 2012 (ibid: 1073), conveying to the world the normalcy of inter-ethnic families in modern Britain. All of these popular contemporary representations of mixed race stress the banality of mixedness in twenty-first century Britain, and present it as an 'everyday' aspect of British life. This idea, regarding the normalcy of mixed race, also runs through the plethora of work on mixed race identity that has been produced from the late-twentieth century onwards. This proliferation of studies have most notably emerged from the UK and US, and have done the hard labour of speaking back to old negative stereotypes of mixed race that conceptualised it as an impure, confused and marginal identity (Root 1992; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Zack 1993; Rockquemore 1998; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Parker & Song 2001; Olumide 2002; Alibhai- Brown 2001; Ali 2003). In light of these public and academic conceptualisations of mixed race as an accepted and ordinary feature of the British racial landscape, it is perhaps unsurprising that I was directly confronted by a colleague very early on in to the writing of this thesis about *why* I had chosen the topic. After I explained the general outline of the proposed work, they replied; 'mixed race? What does that mean to the kids on the streets these days?'

This thesis contends that, within these perceptions that perceive mixed race as a banal social category, research topic, or otherwise, some of the trickier issues around mixed identity are overlooked and left unaccounted for. What is absent from the accounts that stress the everydayness of mixedness, are the more difficult questions relating to issues of belonging, authenticity and appropriation, that implicate mixed race subjectivities. I recall a particularly memorable incident that occurred in 2015 to briefly demonstrate the point I am trying to advance, as it signals some of the contradictions of the mixed race experience that this thesis seeks to explore. Following a women's march at the University of Manchester circa autumn 2015, a group of us had joined the post-social event hosted by the Students' Union, when we came across a young man in the hallway who was in some distress. We asked him what was wrong, and he told us that he had been accused of cultural appropriation, by a group of girls who he did not know. It was his dreadlocked hairstyle which had made

him the culprit, coupled with his fair, almost white skin. It soon became apparent that he was so upset because he was in fact Black mixed race, which he told us that he had repeatedly tried to explain to the girls before they walked away. This example of a young man being rejected from an aesthetic that he felt completely able to claim because of his mixedness, contradicts and speaks back to the ideas about mixed race aforementioned. The young man's mixed race identity and how he chose to package it, evidently was not a readily 'accepted' one; neither was he able to blend into the imagined multicultural twenty-first century British space, without issue. This thesis seeks to account for personal experiences such as these, by bringing them together with structural questions that explore the impact of changing socio-political contexts, on how mixed race is articulated and understood by those who embody it. Thus, a key question for the study, asks how mixed race changes over time, and also, how the mixed race experience is embedded in particular places. Through this approach, it will engage with *both* the 'personal and the political' aspects of mixed race subjectivity (Caballero 2005: 216). By being attentive to how time intersects with mixed identity, it hopes to raise more critical questions about the temporality of mixed race, rather than perceive it as an 'emergent', new racial identity, as it so commonly tends to be (Makalani 2001).

## **1.1 Locating the thesis within the field of mixed race studies**

Some of the key debates in contemporary mixed race studies reflect some of these changes in the ways that mixed race has been conceptualised, from historically pathological, to a modern, celebrated category (Spencer 2011; Ifekwunigwe 2004). By drawing mostly on individual stories and autobiographical writings that centre mixed race voices, much of the contemporary literature purports that mixed race is a legitimate, viable social category (Wilson 1987; Root 1992; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Zack 1993; Mahtani 2002). Importantly, mixed race is often presented as a healthy identity, that is fluid and able to successfully access and adopt multiple identifications in relation to changing social contexts (Song 2010b; Parker & Song 2001; Harris & Sim 2002; Thornton 1996). This argument, that mixed race subjects have disparate identity options available to them as a result of the malleability of their identity, has at times slipped into ideas that link mixed race with postraciality (Ali 2003; Zack 1995; Ifekwunigwe 1999). A central argument

being that, mixed race might offer up opportunities to deconstruct dominant discourses of race that perpetuate limited ideas about the naturalness of singular racial categories (Root 1992). Further to this, a common theme throughout the literature places stress on the impact of *external* racisms on negative self-perceptions or identity maladjustment that mixed race persons might experience. This argument has shifted the focus away from ideas that perpetuate mixed race as *internally* psychically troubled (Oluide 2002). Keeping some of these key aspects of the literature in mind, the upcoming discussion describes how this thesis seeks to build upon the current debates, and addresses some of, what I consider to be, significant absences in the field.

The first point, relates to the absence of place, in the analysis of mixed race. Generally, there has been engagement with broader questions about the different formations and conceptualisations of mixed race worldwide (King-O'Riain et al. 2014). More specifically, there have been important discussions regarding how mixed race is 'made' in different nations, in variable ways, through mediums like the census (Morning 2005; Thompson 2012; Aspinall & Song 2014; Aspinall 2017), and also, the residential patterns of mixed race people and families have been documented (Smith et al. 2011). What is missing from these types of accounts, are questions that ask how mixed race people engage with, and draw from, their *immediate* environments to understand and construct their ethnic and racial identities. This line of questioning, that asks how mixed race is reproduced and negotiated through the local, does not privilege *racial identity* as a defining feature of the mixed race experience, as so often tends to be the case in the field. Questions that explore how mixed race intersects with place, will unpack an important (often unaccounted for) layer of mixed race subjectivity, which is critical to the task of conceptualising mixed race identity.

Secondly, it is argued that throughout the literature, the issue of *time* is often not directly engaged with as it should be. This is both in relation to participant life histories and how they impact upon their present-day narratives and conceptualisations of self; and to the significant collective social histories and conceptualisations of (mixed) race that bleed into the present. Instead, many of the contemporary methodological approaches, tend to privilege a 'present-tense' analysis of mixed race (Mahtani 2014). By doing this, this thesis argues that there is an element of 'strategic forgetting' of our 'racialized histories' (Mahtani 2014:255) that takes place. I contend that it is through this process, that the celebratory discourse around mixed race is able to take hold of our

imaginings; a discourse that I think needs to be interrogated. Throughout the bulk of the study, questions regarding mixed race identity and how it relates to, and is constituted through time, are continuously revisited, to account for these absences in the literature. Further to this, by relying too heavily on individual accounts to draw conclusions about the mixed race experience, the literature, mistakenly, fails to marry personal narratives of mixed race with a 'wider analysis of social phenomenon' (Caballero 2005: 216). This type of singular narrative of the mixed race experience does not allow for a 'socio-political understanding' of mixed race (Caballero 2005: 99), that deals with critical questions about the structural racisms that order both the private and public aspects of mixed race lives. With this in mind, a central aim of the study is to conceptualise mixed race, not just as a personal identity choice, but as a historical, social and symbolic category, that is inextricably constituted by *period* and *place*.

Finally, although the positive conceptualisations of mixed race are very much a welcomed departure from previous pathological discourses that have been wedded to it, warnings have been raised about whether these might in fact reproduce uncomfortable ideas of heterosis (Parker & Song 2001: 9) The perception of mixed race as a 'modern', 'gifted', 'future' identity (Aspinall 2015; Mehta 2012), can uphold quite troubling ideas relating to hybrid vigour (Lewis 2010), which rest on the same biological discourses that have traditionally pathologised mixed race. Thus, in many ways, we see the continuation of the biologically determinate ideas, that once disparaged mixed race through pseudoscientific racisms (Bland 2007). However, in contemporary discourse, these are appropriated to construct mixed race as racially superior, which also has troubling implications for the assumed inferiority of other racialised groups (Aspinall 2015). These biological discourses that lurk beneath the celebratory accounts of mixedness also weaken the tentative inroads that have been made, to link mixed race with postraciality. This thesis seeks to deal with some of these complex questions about how 'mixedness' relates to 'race' more generally. Following on from this last point, the next section introduces the research population who are the focus of the study, and briefly engages with some of these questions regarding how *mixedness* intersects with *race*.

## 1.2 Mixed race; it isn't all Black and White though... is it?

Those who identify as having a Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage are the focus of this thesis. Historically, Black/White mixed groups like this have held a particularly prominent position in debates around mixedness, both socially, and academically. For example, through her analysis of online discussion groups and forums for self-identifying mixed people, Caballero (2005) found the emergence of a hierarchy of mixedness, which Black/White mixed people sat atop. And in the academy, due to the general tendency to analyse mixed race through a Black/White model (Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Wilson 1987; Ifekwunigwe 1997; Khanna 2010; Daniel 2002), there have been calls to 'decolonise' mixed race studies, by moving beyond a Black/White framework, to account for other mixed experiences (Mahtani 2014). However, it is precisely this superior position of Black/White mixes, which I contend, throws up important questions relating to the discussion in the above section, regarding how 'mixedness' relates to 'race'. For example, Caballero (2005) has reflected on how the persistent naturalisation of Whiteness and Blackness as diametrically opposed categories of race, might reproduce Black/White mixes as the most 'authentic' mixed identities. This was in fact, one motivation for the common use of term *mixed race*<sup>2</sup> throughout this thesis to describe the research population, as it recognises the centrality of this 'racial story' in their lives (Caballero 2005: 11). Aside from this, other contemporary terms such as mixed heritage/ethnicity/parentage, have been found to have little resonance in the everyday lives of the racialised groups they seek to describe (Aspinall 2009, Caballero 2013, Caballero et al. 2007, Barrett et al. 2006). Returning to the original discussion; although the recognition of non-Black/White mixes provide a fascinating understanding of the complex ways that we perceive and are implicated by racial hierarchies and expand the debate (Song 2010; Edwards et al. 2010; Caballero et al. 2008), these developments in the field do not need to be made at the *expense* of Black/White mixes. Rather, we should reflect upon how both Black/White *and* non-Black/White mixed populations relate to the social constructions of Blackness and Whiteness from their racialised positions (Mahtani 2014). Furthermore, is mixed race and mixed ethnicity regarded as

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<sup>2</sup> At times throughout the thesis, I also use 'Black mixed race', mostly to signal and recognise when Blackness emerges as a determining factor in the data or literature which is being presented. Alternatively 'Mixed White and Black Caribbean' is sometimes used when writing about the research population in relation to official statistics or other forms of ethnic monitoring data.

one of the same thing, and what do these questions reveal about how society deals with, and perceives mixing generally?

Although Black/White mixes appear to sit atop the hierarchy of mixedness in relation to questions of authenticity, the same cannot be said for their structural positions in relation to their other mixed counterparts. Generally, mixed people and their families in Britain have been found to have a socioeconomic advantage in relation to their minority non-mixed counterparts (Panico & Nazroo 2011). However, when looking at the profile of the mixed race group as a whole, there are substantial differences within it. For example, out of all the mixed groups, the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group are the most likely to be unemployed and the least likely to be in managerial and professional occupations (Bradford 2006). Further disadvantage is also evident in education. According to the 2001 census, the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group are the least likely to hold a higher qualification, in comparison to the other three mixed groups (ibid). Furthermore, this trend of educational disadvantage also appears to occur at school age, where the group are over represented in school exclusions and suffer low educational attainment, in line with their Black Caribbean counterparts (Caballero et al. 2007). Mixed White and Black Caribbean children are also particularly vulnerable when it comes to the social care system (Frazer & Selwyn 2005; Barn 1999). These examples evidence the continued need to explore the Black mixed race experience. Writing in relation to Black youth, Alexander (2016: 1433) notes that, 'the position of black youth... reveals how far there is to go, and how intractable the structures driving exclusion and discrimination'. I contend that the same can be said in relation to the position of Black mixed race populations, in the regards to the conversation around mixing. In amongst the popular representations which suggest mixed race bodies are the emblems of Britain's 'melting pot' society (Ford et al. 2012), these Black mixed race experiences inconveniently enter the stage and remind us that the conversation is far from over; and that the inconvenient axis of power we call race, continues to reproduce structural disadvantages, even in the lives of these 'beautiful' brown mixed people (Sims 2012; Lewis 2010).

### **1.3 Social generation**

As noted in an earlier section, the study seeks to dislodge mixed race from its current representations (Aspinall 2015), by exploring how social and personal histories constitute mixed race subjectivity. By moving beyond the present-tense conceptualisations of mixed race, the study does the important work of highlighting when and why mixed race has emerged as a significant social category, and how its absence and/or presence, implicate mixed race lives. It will carry out this historical analysis by drawing on data from three birth cohorts, to situate mixed race voices in the social contexts of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s in Britain. In light of this, the thesis could (loosely) be described as a social generational study (Woodman & Wyn 2015), in that one of its major aims is to unearth the 'distinctive historical consciousness' of each cohort (Vincent et al. 2013: 931). Despite taking this approach, it does not perceive social generation as merely a question of 'chronology' or 'dates of birth' (Hall 2017: 44). On the contrary, by taking this long view, the thesis is also privy to the fact that multiple generations exist side by side, in any given period. It recognises that although a social generation might 'belong' to a particular period, that group will share that 'historical moment' (Hall 2017: *ibid*), with other generational groups who bring their own histories to that time frame, and therefore, they will be indelibly marked by these other histories too (Chamberlain 2003: 33).

For the most part, the study presents the life histories of the participants but a significant focus is placed upon their coming of age stories. An ample number of empirical research studies on mixed race and ethnic identity more generally that have used young people in samples, have highlighted the significance of this stage of the life course, on identity development (Alexander 1996; Back 1996; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Jones 1988; Song & Aspinall 2012). Therefore the intention throughout the thesis, is to unearth some of the fundamental processes and relationships that occurred during participants' youth; such as the significance of their peer groups, their engagement in youth subcultures and their movement through social institutions like school, all of which have been found to have a fundamental impact on ethnic identity development (Hall & Jefferson 2006; McRobbie 1980; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Caballero et al. 2007).

## 1.4 A note on Birmingham

As previously discussed, in addition to the exploration of change over time, the thesis also engages closely with questions regarding place, and how it implicates mixed race. The personal histories that are elicited throughout the thesis are intimately linked to the social histories of Birmingham, where the study takes place. Therefore, as the thesis unpacks the social generational locations of the participants, it also remains sensitive to their spatial locations and their identifications with place. Thus, the question of change over time is often dealt with in relation to how it intersects with, and takes form *within* place. Birmingham is not a city that necessarily signifies mixed race, in the way that port cities such as Cardiff and Liverpool have done. The latter two British cities both have much longer histories of settlement and historically, have often been the focus of academic discussions that have engaged with the topic of mixed race (Bland 2007; Christian 2008; Rich 1986; Nassy Brown 2005; Rowe 2000). More recently however, there appears to have been a breadth of research that privileges the voices of mixed race Londoners and their families (Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010a; Benson 1981; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Bauer 2010; Song & Gutierrez 2015; Ali 2003). The thesis argues that the fact that Birmingham has the second largest mixed population outside of London, and historically has played a rather prominent part in national discussions about race more generally, warrants its inclusion as a significant fieldwork site for the study of mixed race. Below, I briefly allude to some of the key historical moments that have formed the racial story of Birmingham, to provide some necessary context to the fieldwork site.

As with other major cities in the country, Birmingham experienced high levels of in-migration from the Commonwealth in the post-1945 period and therefore, the city fits quite easily into the common, 'post-war Caribbean migration' narrative in Britain (Nassy Brown 2005). However, as Moore (2011: 5) reminds us, the 'Birmingham context is important' because 'the city was drawing in a large labour force not only to staff public services but to sustain the motor-car industry and its extensive supporting industries'. Further to this, large number of 'construction workers [from the] impoverished rural areas of the Republic of Ireland' were also being drafted in to help with the scheduled redevelopment of the city. In light of this, the city and its immediate surrounding areas had a particularly large immigrant population (Woods 1979), and historically, the

debates about how to manage and deal with this new population also entered the *national* conversation about immigration more generally.

In the post-1945 period, the city played a key role in national 'political debates about race relations issues' (Back & Solomos 1992: 329). This is evidenced by the numerous examples of scholarship that detail the influential impact of Birmingham on discussions and developments regarding immigrant education policy (Ydesen & Myers 2016; Tomlinson 2008), immigrant housing (Flett et al. 1979; Rex et al. 1977; Rex & Moore 1967) and the policing of Black youth (John 1970; Elliott-Cooper 2016; Fryer 1984). The influence on right-wing and Conservative party politics by local regional MPs of the past, such as the infamous Enoch Powell, have also been documented (Nayak 1999; Ashe et al. 2016; Bourne 2008; Solomos 1988). And notably, these regional discussions on race even had international reach. In 1965 'the Indian Workers Association invited Malcolm X to Marshall Street where [a] local Tory MP had used his position as a councillor to lobby for houses to be nationalised, and rented only to whites' (Elliott-Cooper 2016: 6,7). Despite being the site of racist right-wing political agendas such as these, local politics in the city were also increasingly influenced by a growth in ethnic minority representation that sought to change the direction of politics in the city through the 1980s. Notably, in 1984, the city hosted the first national conference for Black sections of the Labour Party (Back & Solomos 1995). Drawing on these examples that indicate the centrality of Birmingham in historical discussions regarding race in the UK, it seems ironic that the city has seldom featured in scholarship on *mixed* race and mixing in the same way. This thesis intends to respond to this omission, and write Birmingham into Britain's historical narrative of mixed race.

## **1.5 Chapter guide**

Caballero (2005:16) rightly warns that the contemporary official enumeration of mixed populations represent the emergence of new *conversations* about mixedness, rather than the growth of a new population. British subjects and citizens have in fact been mixing across ethnic and racial boundaries for hundreds of years (Fryer 1984; Dalrymple 2002; Rich 1986). Notably, it was at the height of Empire that the social practice of mixing and the people it produced, were increasingly regarded as degenerative, immoral and a potentially apocalyptic end to White Britain's social, economic and racial power (Bland 2007; Christian 2008). This introductory chapter has, at times, very

briefly alluded to some of the historical formulations of mixed race but it is in chapter two, that this history is presented in more detail. The chapter charts the trajectory of mixed race in Britain's racialised memory as a colonial category, a domestic anxiety and a symbol of tolerance. In documenting the emergence of mixed race in this way, it highlights a major gap in the historical narrative of mixed race in Britain, which this thesis seeks to fill. Furthermore, the chapter details what elements of these social histories and changing conceptualisations of mixed race, inform the conceptual framework for the thesis. After laying the theoretical foundations of the study, chapter three details the methods that were utilised to gather the data. This chapter provides further contextual data on the case study site Birmingham, in addition to the key characteristics of the sample, the interview approach that was used, the ethical considerations, and finally it deals with more subjective questions regarding my own position as a researcher in the study.

Chapter four is primarily concerned with exploring how much agency place has in racialising mixed race subjects. It is shown how localities within the city, are described in reference to their 'mentality', and 'character', not just their physicality (Nassy Brown 2005: 3). The 'characters' of these places are often found to be inherited, and reproduced by the mixed race subjects who reside in them. It is argued that through the processes of describing and attaching themselves to places, by drawing imagined boundaries around localities to mark them off as different and unique from others, the participants simultaneously engage in the making of their own ethnic identities. Throughout, place is found to provide a form of spatial language by which to talk about oneself not only in raced terms, but also within classed and gendered ones. The impact of mixed race *movement* through place is also explored in the chapter. This line of questioning seeks to explore how identity shifts between personal and external spaces such as the home, street, neighbourhood and social institutions, such as school. Through these discussions, the chapter identifies and accounts for how identity is formed within the multiple *layers* of the city. It foregrounds the continuities, contradictions and conflicts that mixed race subjects experience in relation to their identity, as they negotiate encounters with different people in different spaces of the city. Therefore, throughout the chapter it is argued that place is central to mixed race subjectivities. It becomes apparent that place is a significant axis of power that implicates mixed race identity, playing a significant role in how it is constructed and understood. By foregrounding place as a central conceptual framework, the chapter in a sense, de-centres mixed

race from the analysis, as it does not privilege racial identity as a salient determining aspect of mixed race subjectivity.

Building on chapter four that details the impact of place as an external racialising force, chapter five continues to explore the external, structural contexts impacting on mixed race, by situating mixed race voices in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. In the 1970s and 1980s debates about mixed race were, for the most part, not on the agenda. Therefore in this chapter, most of the work is done to unearth these missing mixed race narratives. With Ben Carrington's (2008: 424) assertion in mind that, 'racial identities are themselves formed by and through political struggles that are often staged within the arena of "culture"'; the chapter pays particular attention to how mixed race youth engaged in the popular 'black interpretive community' of Rastafari<sup>3</sup> through the 1970s (Gilroy 2002). It considers how their racial identities were informed by this social movement and the roots reggae music that was at its foundations. It unpacks how Rastafari was utilised as a method by which to sustain positive ethnic identifications at a time when 'Black youth' was increasingly being constructed as a problem category (Alexander 1996; Hall & Jefferson 2006; Hall et al. 2013). Again, youth culture is foregrounded in the analysis of mixed race identity through the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s, through a particular focus on the localised utilisation of African-American hip-hop in mixed race lives. Generally, it is argued that these Black expressive cultures were significant avenues of cultural translation for mixed race youth, emphasising that cues regarding racial, ethnic and cultural identities can be found in what might be considered 'alternative' spaces that exist outside the spheres of the family. It is shown that during the tokenistic celebration of 'difference' era through the 1990s, the younger social generations in the study, perceived that they experienced some increasing privileges. Ultimately however, despite clear discontinuities across the social generations regarding self-perceptions, it is argued that perceived privileges are conflated with increased recognition; the latter of which did not necessarily bestow the younger generations with any significant powers to escape the oppressive force of race thinking. It is argued that this persistent axis of power implicates all mixed race subjects in the study, albeit in different ways. Thus by the end of this chapter, the tentative attempts that have been made to link mixed race with post-race futures are problematised and brought into question.

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<sup>3</sup> Rastafarianism is an Abrahamic religion that developed in Jamaica in the 1930s following the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Selassie is regarded as a manifestation of God for Rastafarians.

After giving in-depth consideration to the external negotiations of mixedness, chapter six looks more closely at the personal politics of mixed race. It takes account of how mixedness is experienced as a private identity and within more intimate spaces, vis-à-vis friends, family and sexual partners. It begins by considering how participants relate to current representations of mixedness as a 'beautiful' racial category (Sims 2012; Lewis 2010) and one which has bridge-building potential in regards to racial and ethnic differences (Aspinall 2015; Olumide 2002). It considers how mixed race subjects might, at times, reproduce this rhetoric in their expressed self-perceptions. The chapter suggests that although surface readings of these discourses are 'positive', they rely on the same racial logic which have previously naturalised mixed race, but through much more negative rhetoric and metaphors. Generally though, throughout this chapter the mixed race is beautiful trope is particularly tested in relation to light skin privilege; the latter of which was found to (intermittently) manifest within participants' relationships with Black people in significantly *gendered* and at times quite negative ways. It is argued that historical colonial formations that were upheld by patriarchal racism are a significant contributing factor to these moments of contention. The chapter also considers how mixed race is negotiated in participants' childhood and adult families. It particularly exemplifies how Whiteness can at times rupture childhood family intimacies and how race continues to burden mixed race subjects in their own adult relationships when thinking about children. Generally, a key aim in this chapter is to evidence some of the more subtle and ostensibly innocuous ways that race enters mixed race lives, through some of their most intimate relationships. Following on from this final empirical chapter, chapter seven, draws on the material presented in the preceding three chapters and emphasises what I consider to be, the key findings of this study and their broader implications for the field and for our conceptualisations of race more generally.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

A central aim of this thesis is to analyse mixed race through a spatial and historical lens. It seeks to emphasise how mixed race experience is embedded in particular places and changes over time. This chapter foregrounds the conceptual framework for the thesis and is organised in chronological order. Throughout the discussion, it will become apparent that place is central to the changing social and historical conceptualisations of mixed race that are presented, in that it persistently emerges as a force which determines the '*rights and recognitions*' (Keith 2005: 18) of mixed race people over time. However it is in the following chapter, where the implications of place, as a framework of analysis for this thesis, and as a fieldwork site, are more carefully considered. In reference to the chronology of mixed race studies, it is mostly agreed by scholars in the field that the debates have broadly occurred in two distinct stages, and some, have highlighted a burgeoning third stage, or 'wave' of literature (Ifekwunigwe 2004; Caballero 2005; Spencer 2004). Ifekwunigwe (2004) has usefully named the three stages by pertaining to the dominant discourses and ideologies of mixed race that characterised each moment: the *Age of Pathology*, the *Age of Celebration* and the *Age of Critique*. As this thesis mostly borrows from the recent critical 'age' of studies, the latter half of the chapter is where most of the work is done to set out my theoretical stall.

The chapter begins by outlining some of the key debates that informed pathological discourses of mixed race, from the late eighteenth, through to the early-to-mid twentieth century. It starts by locating mixed race historically, as a colonial formation. It is shown how mixed race positions did not remain constant in any one region, and tended to shift over time in relation to changing power structures. I attempt to trace these precarious positions, by presenting some examples of mixed race in British colonies. The section begins with a brief account of mixedness in the USA, both during the period of British colonisation and afterwards. The treatment of mixed race in the US context is highly important for the discussion, given that US conceptualisations of mixed race have impacted on how mixedness has been conceptualised in the UK at particular historical junctures, and most notably, in the contemporary period. Although some of the formal links between the UK and US may have been disrupted throughout the eighteenth century, the more complex entangled

systems of thought regarding race were not entirely severed; both nations have developed 'long histories of perceiving race in terms of black inferiority and white superiority' (Caballero 2005: 25). I also allude to mixed race in the British Raj in India, and in Australia, New Zealand and Northern Rhodesia<sup>4</sup>, to show the continuities and changes in the way that mixed race has been conceptualised differently within the many countries that constituted the British Empire. I go on to highlight mixed race positions in the British West Indies, which has most direct relevance to this thesis. The following section details how pathological discourses of mixed race were transferred to the metropole, in the early-to-mid twentieth century in Britain. Informed by imperialist discourses regarding hierarchies of race and pseudo-scientific racist arguments during the period, the literature that emerged throughout that time, mostly regarded mixed race children and their families with disdain.

The chapter goes on to identify and account for the lengthy lull in mixed race studies in the post-1945 period, before its eventual re-emergence as a topic of inquiry circa 1990; the thesis regards this the 'missing wave' of mixed race studies. The chapter contends that this gap in the literature materialised as a result of significant social developments (and perceived problems) that characterised Britain through the post-war periods, such as the end of Empire and mass migration (Kumar 2003; Rich 1986; Fryer 1984; Solomos 1988), which overshadowed the 'half caste' problem of the interwar years (Christian 2008). During the post-1945 period, it is purported that mixed race was generally regarded as Black; case examples of how this transpired within institutions like the census and social work are foregrounded in the discussion (Gill & Jackson 1983; Small 1984). The *Age of Celebration*, or the 'second wave' of literature (Caballero 2005), emerged circa 1990 onwards. This collection of theory and research, mostly produced in the UK and USA, constituted the burgeoning of mixed race studies as a discipline more generally (Root 1992; Zack 1993; Rockquemore & Brunisma 2008; Brunisma & Rockquemore 2001; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Olumide 2002; Ifekwunigwe 2004; Christian 2000; Song 2001; Nakashima 1996; Root 1990). A central aim of these works was to reverse the pathological notions of mixed race that had long characterised the popular debates and academic discussions that emanated from the *Age of Pathology*. In this section, the chapter highlights some of the key concepts that have been advanced by mixed race studies

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<sup>4</sup> Present day Zambia.

during the *Age of Celebration*, and traces how rudimentary ideas emerging out of pioneering US scholarship, transferred to the UK context.

The *Age of Critique* (or third wave), Ifekwunigwe (2004) asserts mostly gained currency in the late-twentieth, to early twenty-first century. Although it overlaps with the second wave through its aims to dismantle previous negative stereotypes, what marks the disjuncture between the two, is the third wave's critique of the second wave's methodological approaches and theoretical conceptualisations of mixed race. The general claims are that the second wave of literature has been too focused upon analysing mixed race identity through *individualised* accounts, at the expense of broader contextual analysis (Small 2001; Christian 2000; Caballero 2005; Mahtani 2014). In this section, the chapter argues that a focus on the micro-politics of mixed race ignores the reconfigured discourses around race and racisms that mixed race as an ideology and as category throws up, and agrees with the critique that suggests the second wave of mixed race studies are for the most part, 'ageographical' and 'ahistorical' (Mahtani 2014: 46). It is in these latter sections where the chapter does the work of locating the study in the field, and outlining how it speaks to and advances on some of the key concepts that have been outlined throughout the chapter.

## **2.2 Mixed race in the colonies**

Race has long been a domestic issue in the USA. Prior to its independence from Britain in 1776, slavery had been in operation in the original Thirteen Colonies (Mitchell 2013). By the time of the revolution, many of the colonies had developed laws regarding race and/or slavery in order to strategise and deal with the slave population and more importantly, their mixed race offspring, who were almost entirely the children of Black slave mothers and white fathers (Wieck 1977). One such law, that reversed the 'traditional British patrilineal system' of descent, in favour of a 'matrilineal' one (Mitchell 2013: 40), is particularly telling of the general approach to mixed race populations during the period. The law was introduced with the intention of effectively defining 'race' through 'women's bodies' (ibid: 40), which consequently meant that the servitude status of mixed race children, followed that of their mothers. This system was produced to uphold the White systems of power that were in place, by allowing White (male) slave holders sexual access to Black slave women, without the risk of producing a 'free' person. Furthermore, by keeping the

mixed race child enslaved, the master's 'property' was simply replenished (Wieck 1977: 263). The anxiety around these 'cross-racial' sexual relations of concubinage and rape continued throughout the eighteenth century, and was particularly heightened in the nineteenth century when the economic institution of slavery was increasingly being challenged by Abolitionists (Hall 1997; Mitchell 2013). As far back as 1850, the term 'mulatto'<sup>5</sup> emerged in the US census 'through the lobbying of racial scientists and legislators who were sympathetic to racial science' (Mitchell 2013: 54). The continuous 'preoccupation... with measuring the Black or partially Black population' in the US continued until 1920, reflecting the ongoing 'concern of the White population with miscegenation and racial purity' through that period (Aspinall 2003: 280). By 1930 however, classifications concerning *gradations* of Blackness were halted, and 'Negro' became the only category for 'Black' (Davis 1991), indicating the nation's general willingness to utilise and accept the 'one-drop' rule for establishing its Black population. This rule essentially designated all people with *any* Black ancestry as Black (Morning 2005; Aspinall 2003; Waters 1990).

In a similar vein to the historical US example, the British arrived in India (as a trading, not yet colonial, force) as early as 1607, and inter-ethnic unions between Indian women and White British traders and officers were not uncommon. Unlike the American case, these unions were not perceived as problematic until the late eighteenth century (Anderson 2011). Until this point, many of the British half of such unions would go native (Dalrymple 2002), and become immersed in Indian ways of life. Furthermore, the British-descent Eurasians that were the product of these mixed relationships were in fact regarded an 'asset of British colonial government', often incorporated into the ranks of the British administration (Anderson 2011: 13). However, it was as British power in the region increased, that the Empire sought to exclude these Eurasians of British descent from a European identity (Dalrymple 2002). From 1780 onwards, Eurasians would be reformulated as an Indian minority (Chatterjee 1993). It is through this period, and the nineteenth century, as imperialism continued its ascendancy, that the term 'half-caste' was increasingly ascribed to mixed race Eurasian communities (Anderson 2011; Hawes 1996). The term 'half-caste' also had purchase in Britain's other

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<sup>5</sup> The term is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese fifteenth century word 'mula', meaning mule; the offspring of a donkey and a horse. Used in the Americas and the Caribbean in reference to persons with one White European descended, and one Black African descended, parent.

colonial projects, featuring in debates regarding what to do about the status of mixed populations in the Empire. It was used in the 'colonial statutes' of New Zealand in the 1860s to identify the Maori-Pakeha people, and 'was the salient term for persons of mixed aboriginal descent throughout much of the twentieth century' in Australia (Aspinall 2013: 510, 519). It also emerged as a significant category in the former British colony of Northern Rhodesia as a way to reclassify and denigrate the status of the mixed race Eurafrican community there in the early twentieth-century (Milner-Thorton 2012: 11; Milner-Thorton 2014).

In the British West Indies, although the echoes of half-caste as social category would undoubtedly have been heard, the region had a plethora of other terminology in operation to classify its people of mixed descent, such as Mulatto and/or (free) Coloured, Quadroon<sup>6</sup>, Sambo<sup>7</sup> and Mustee<sup>8</sup>, to name a few (Mohammed 2000; Reddock 2014). Mulatto, as in the US context, mostly stood to represent those with one Black African and one White European parent, within these complex racial schemas. However, unlike their American counterparts, who were for the most part forced into an overarching Black category, Mulattoes in the British West Indies were positioned in a social location that was quite distinct from African Blackness (Thompson 2012; Aspinall 2003). As Hall (2017: 83) has argued, in reference to the Jamaican context more specifically, the mixed descendants of the violent sexual unions between enslaved women and planters, 'were on occasion recognized by their white fathers and given land, hiring out slaves themselves'. Reminiscent of the strategies that were employed *initially* by the British to handle the Eurasian population in India, the Coloured population in the Caribbean were regarded as 'potential allies for the whites' (Heuman 1981: 47), in societies like Jamaica where, 'by the early eighteenth century slaves outnumbered their masters by a factor of eight to one' (Hall 2017: 68). However, the manumission of mixed children was not necessarily a given, and furthermore 'freedom' often translated as free from 'ownership', which was not necessarily 'a grant of civil rights' (Heuman 1981: 46). Thus, Coloureds still remained distinctly separate from the White upper stratum.

Further to this, the function of gender on Coloureds' bargaining power was also highly significant. As Caribbean plantation societies were mostly governed by

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<sup>6</sup> Offspring of a Mulatto and a White.

<sup>7</sup> Mixture between a 'Negro' and a Mulatto.

<sup>8</sup> Offspring of a Quadroon and a White.

White male slave masters, in these patriarchal structures, Mulatto men were 'perceived as... threatening... to the superiority of the white male' (Mohammad 2000: 30). Mulatto women on the other hand, were a more welcomed intermediary between the Black and White binary on the patriarchal plantations (Bush 1990). After Abolition, Coloured women continued to be upwardly mobile, generally occupying a higher status in gender relations with Black men (Hall 2017). As late as the 1950s, Black men were found to engage in hypergamy, by seeking women of a higher colour to themselves, and marrying up (Henriques 1953). It will become apparent in chapter six of the thesis, how these racialised gendered relations have continued to impact on contemporary mixed race populations. Keeping these colonial histories in mind, the following section considers how these conceptualisations of mixed race in Empire translated into some of the discomforts around mixed race in the UK, throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century.

## **2.3 Mixed race in the metropole**

As noted in the previous section, throughout the nineteenth century, race increasingly became an important issue for Britain in the Empire, and I outlined some of the implications of this for mixed race subjects in the colonies. In this section, I emphasise how mixed race became a domestic issue and a problem category 'at home', and explore how mixed race was rearticulated as a social practice and social category in its journey from the Empire, to the metropole. It should firstly be noted that, Britain was in fact, never a homogenously White society. Non-white populations have resided in Britain as far back as the Roman period (Fryer 1984). Despite the long presence of racial 'Others' in Britain historically, it did not tend to evoke the type of popular panic that it later came to do, in the early-twentieth century. Instead, Britain's relation (and reaction) to 'race', had for the most part, been formed in the imaginary, particularly for the average White citizen throughout the period of Empire. This however, did not mean that the 'thoughts' about race were not real in their effects. Empire and what existed 'out there' entered the domestic consciousness with enough force to allow for ideas of nation to take form (Kumar 2003; Young 1995). The country's self-imaginings as White, civilised and pure, were pieced together vis-à-vis those Other people, in those Other places, which served as a yardstick by which to measure themselves (Hall 2002). These ideas, were perpetuated even within the racialised advertising of household goods, like *Pears* soap, whose advertisement congratulated the civilising mission in the Empire; 'Pears soap is

a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilisation advances' (quoted in McClintock 1994: 128).

By the early stages of the twentieth century, race increasingly became a domestic issue, as the number of non-White Britons increased. During this period, many of Britain's Black and Brown colonial subjects came to settle in the British Isles during the First World War (Fryer 1984; Christian 2008). Many settled in port cities and towns to work on the docks and replace the British seamen who had gone to serve in the navy (Rowe 2000). In the aftermath of the war, many of those who had been recruited from the colonies into the army were subsequently demobilised throughout the country. This further increased Britain's non-White population, leading to moral panics about interracial relations. The practice of mixing, just as it had been increasingly problematised in Empire, was designated an immoral social practice at home too, as the following quote exemplifies.

Where we formerly saw one black in a large city we now see hundreds; where we formerly saw one woman married to a black, or living with him, we now see score. Such marriages should not be allowed.

(*Empire News* (12<sup>th</sup> August 1917) quoted in Bressey 2013: 550)

A further catalyst to the anxiety regarding inter-ethnic unions, was the concept of eugenics, that had been introduced by Francis Galton in the late nineteenth century (Searle 1976; Bland 2007). At the foundation of the theory, 'was the idea of 'racial' degeneracy' through miscegenation, and the pseudo-science advocated for selective breeding between people with desirable traits (Ifekwunigwe 2004: 13). Presented as an *ostensibly* more biologically robust theory of race than those which had preceded it, the movement gained currency throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Caballero 2005). The accumulative effect of these UK-specific developments was the convergence of social science with scientific racism in the study of mixed relationships and mixed children that had emerged in Britain's port towns, such as Liverpool and Cardiff (Aspinall 2013; Nassy Brown 2005; Christian 2008; Bland 2007; King & King 1938). These studies, although drawing on the specific half-caste situation in Britain, also took their lead from concepts that had been developed by US scholars during a similar period. Everett Stonequist (1937) for example, who theorised that the condition of the mixed race 'marginal man,' was characterised by inherent psychological difficulties, had far reach, and

influenced a similar sentiment in Britain's conceptualisation of mixedness (Caballero 2005: 59).

The patterns of mixed relationships that were the topic of the UK studies were qualitatively different from those which had occurred in the colonies. Whereas in Empire relations between White fathers and 'native' mothers constituted the most common mixed race situation (Milner-Thorton 2014; Hall 2017; Dalrymple 2002), the reverse was true in the UK. There was a re-gendering of the social practice of mixing in the domestic setting, where it was mostly White mothers who were in relationships with Black and Brown colonial men (Bland 2007; Christian 2008; Rowe 2000; Nassy Brown 2005). The sexualities of these women were regarded as immoral, vulgar, and as a threat to the nation's White racial stock (Rich 1986; Edwards & Caballero 2011). Although there had been these shifts in the gendered formation of mixed relationships, the conceptualisation of the children who were the product of mixed unions, were seemingly directly inherited from Empire. The term 'half-caste' was directly imported, re-appropriated and ascribed to the mixed race children who were central to the first wave of mixed race studies in Britain, in the early-to-mid twentieth century (Christian 2008; Bland 2007). This is indicative of the endurance of the colonial categories of mixedness, and the significance of the 'imperial networks in the British Empire' (Milner-Thorton 2012: 129), which enabled the term to travel across the Empire's disparate continents, and through time. In its journey from the Empire administrative offices to the metropole however, 'half-caste' acquired further meaning and legitimacy as a social category (Aspinall 2013). This was due to the fact that by this historical juncture, 'half-caste' was firmly upheld by the strong eugenics movement and pseudo-scientific racism of the period, that produced essentialist ideas about the character of the mixed race subject, as degenerative, and physically and mentally defective (Caballero 2013; Christian 2008). Aspinall (2013: 505) has asserted that, it was through these eugenicist sentiments that 'half-caste' was firmly wedded to pathological discourses, and was transformed from its origins as a 'somewhat benign...routine category' in 'colonial administrations', into a 'term of moral condemnation'. Generally then, this first wave of research in the UK, 'by and large perceived [mixed race persons] an aberration' (Christian 2000: 8). These negative ideas about mixed race did intermittently feature in later research that focused on Britain's 'coloured' and mixed race dockland communities in the 1940s and 1950s (Little 1948; Collins 1957). However, the Second World War brought major changes which put new, more pressing issues, on to the national agenda.

## **2.4 From WWII to the census: the disappearance and re-emergence of mixed race**

This section seeks to identify and account for the missing wave of mixed race studies by drawing attention to some of the key social developments, and changing conceptualisations and reformulations of race, that occurred in Britain during the post-1945 period. It seeks to highlight how these social changes contributed towards the disappearance of mixed race as a (problem) category and talking point in the national consciousness during the period, before it re-emerged as an ethnic category, and academic topic of inquiry in the late twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.

In Europe, the eugenicist thinking discussed in the previous section, 'finally accumulated in the Holocaust' (Aspinall 2015: 1074). In response to the horrors of the Holocaust, in 1950 UNESCO released a statement declaring that race was a social myth and warned against its dangerous consequences, calling for the term to be abandoned altogether (Thompson 2010; Song 2003). In Britain, the immediate post-war period was characterised by the mass migration of workers from the colonies and Commonwealth who were fast being recruited to fill labour shortages in the UK (Sivanandan 1981), and the eventual dissolution of its colonial project (Kumar 2003; Goulbourne 1998; Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists in the UK sought to unpack the 'race relations' issues that these social changes brought about (Alexander 2016). They focused their inquiries on the tensions between the majority 'host' population and new minority groups, in social spheres such as the labour market, housing and leisure (Rex & Moore 1967; Cashmore 1987; Fryer 1984). The argument that (coloured) immigration was increasingly throwing up 'social problems' for the nation, provided a coded way to talk about race (Solomos 1989). Therefore, despite UNESCO's 1950 declaration that race was dead, in post-war Britain, its formulation had only shifted somewhat.

As previously noted in chapter one, Birmingham (and the surrounding Midlands region) held quite a significant role in national debates and discourses about race relations during the height of post-war migration to the UK (Back and Solomos 1992). The election of the Black Country-born Conservative MP Peter Griffiths in a Smethwick by-election, with the help of the circulating slogan, 'If you want a Nigger for a Neighbour Vote Labour', entered the national conversation in 1964. Further to this, the notorious Conservative MP Enoch Powell, delivered his *Rivers of Blood* speech some years later in Birmingham in

1968, which had major consequences for how immigration would come to be handled on a national scale (Tomlinson 2008; Nayak 1999; Back & Solomos 1992; Ashe et al. 2016; Mercer 2000). The new immigration laws introduced soon after, in the early 1970s, were essentially designed to halt 'coloured' immigration (Fryer 1984; Garner 2010; Goulbourne 1998). Aside from these expressions of state sanctioned racisms through the 1970s and early 1980s, there were also increased levels of racist civic violence. Between 1976 and 1981, '31 people in Britain had been murdered by racists' (Fryer 1984: 395) . The emergence of 'youth' as a social (and more specifically, problem) category throughout the post-war period (Clarke et al. 2006: 3) also had implications for *Black* youth in particular (Solomos 1988), as a result of ongoing negative representations through the 1970s and 1980s. The 'mugging' epidemic in the early 1970s was one such issue that was racialised as a crime perpetrated by Black youth (Hall et al. 2013; Solomos 1988). The creation of this moral panic conveyed an image of a 'Black folk devil' which needed taming (Elliott-Cooper 2016: 9). Consequently, this sub-section of the youth population was disproportionately subject to draconian and racist policing tactics that were routinely enforced in urban areas of major cities. The accumulative effect of this ongoing marginalisation, criminalisation and alienation as a result of these forms of state violence was a series of uprisings, most notably in 1980, 1981 and 1985 (Solomos 1988; Elliott-Cooper 2016; Fryer 1984; Burgess 1985; Connell 2012).

In light of these developments, throughout the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, the state would eventually begin to explore ways to measure which groups were 'susceptible to discrimination because of their skin colour' (Aspinall 2003: 277). During this period, the UK census carried out trials and tests of ethnicity questions (Sillitoe & White 1992; Thompson 2012; Aspinall 2003; Office for National Statistics 2003). It is important to note that these census developments, especially throughout the 1980s, also reflected the specific concerns during the period about second generation Black British youths, and the ongoing racism in the wake of the riots. For example, calls for a 'direct question on ethnicity' (Thompson 2010: 133) were presented in Lord Scarman's Report (1981) on the Brixton riots, as one method by which to tackle racial discrimination. During the question testing, a Mixed ethnic category was trialled alongside other ethnic categories but the results eventually indicated 'that people of Mixed descent preferred not to be distinguished as a separate group' and instead tended to identify with the ethnic group of one of their parents – 'usually the father' (Bradford 2006: 7;

Office for National Statistics 2003: 10). In the case of Black mixed race populations, it is likely that these fathers would have been Black, rather than White. The Labour Force Surveys of 1979 and 1981 highlighted that out of those 'West Indian people... who were married or cohabiting, 22 per cent of men, and 10 per cent of women, had a white partner' (Tizard & Phoenix, 1993: 12); a continuation of the gendered patterns of inter-ethnic mixing identified in the previous section during the interwar years. It seems apparent then, that the state's strategies to identify and tackle racial discrimination, *and* the mixed race response *towards* that discrimination (by aligning themselves with a related dominant racial group), contributed towards the omission of mixed race on the 1991 census (Aspinall 2003), and its disappearance off the 'racial agenda' throughout the 1970s and 1980s more generally (Ali 2012: 171). In the 1991 census, the catch-all 'Any other group' and the slightly more tailored 'Black Other' options were the categories which were eventually introduced to capture people who might not sit comfortably in the other pre-designated ethnic groups (Thompson 2010).

Although 'Black', would continue to be formulated as a problem category through the 1980s, it was also rearticulated as a positive identity, in quite politicised ways (Alexander 2002; Sivanandan 1981; Mercer 1994). In social work throughout the 1970s and 1980s, arguments for same-race placements in adoption and foster care advanced by Black social workers, were emblematic of this shift, and of the politicised period more generally (Stubbs 1987; Gill & Jackson 1983; Small 1984). In the debates, 'both black and white' British social workers agreed that there should be no distinction made between children with one Black parent and children with two (Tizard & Phoenix 1993: 31). For Black social workers, their rejection of transracial adoption was not only a professional argument but an anti-racist political move and a method by which to resist societal discrimination more generally (Kirton 2000; Small 1986). It was argued that transracial placements would inevitably have detrimental psychological effects on Black and mixed race children (Gill & Jackson 1983; Ali 2014), and that they would not develop a Black identity, a positive sense of self, or be equipped with the correct tools to deal with racism (Small 1984). In some of these arguments, the culture of Black children in care was understood as the primary determinant of their needs, the site of their foundational character, taking priority above other social markers; and something which could only be effectively passed down to the children through Black carers. Within some of these arguments then, Blackness was at times fixed as 'settled, stable... and continuous' (Hall 2017: 76). This sentiment confused racial and

cultural identities as historically, socially and geographically determined, for something that 'is natural, biological and genetic' (Hall 1993: 111). The implications of such discourses of Blackness in mixed race lives are explored in chapter six.

Keeping this in mind, the following three sections shift the chronology forward, by tracing the emergence of mixed race studies in the 1990s. Some of the key themes of the pioneering US texts are presented and most importantly, the sections trace how these ideas translated to the UK context at a time when the Black essentialist subject was being re-conceptualised as hybrid, always in process and non-static, within discussions regarding new ethnicities (Hall 1992; Harris 2009; Alexander & Alleyne 2002; Back 1996).

## **2.5 The emergence of mixed race studies and its key tenets**

### **2.5.1 Mixed race as a positive, fluid, legitimate identity**

The *Age of Celebration* (Ifekwunigwe 2004) (or second wave of literature) comprises an ample number of studies on mixed race that began circa 1990 (Zack 1993; Zack 1995; Root 1992; Root 1996; Song 2001; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Aspinall 2003; Olumide 2002; Ifekwunigwe 1997; Ifekwunigwe 2004; Twine 2004; Wilson 1987; Gaskins 1995). This wave of scholarship was united in its aim to push back against the previous pathological notions of mixedness that had been produced during the *Age of Pathology*, and reframe mixed race 'in terms of identity and not marginality' (Tizard & Phoenix 1993: 28). Using predominantly 'actor-centred' (Ifekwunigwe 2004: 137), qualitative interview approaches that often foregrounded the individual biographies of participants, these works pushed for the reinvention of mixed race as a legitimate ethnic identity, in amongst other 'traditional' ethnic groups (Nakashima 1996). Legitimacy, it was argued, could be achieved through various routes; such as having *all* aspects of one's heritage equally recognised by external actors generally, and by being accepted by 'traditional' racial and ethnic communities, *without* being required to erase particular aspects of their heritage, as a condition for that membership (Caballero 2005: 83). These themes of mixed race legitimacy, and of the normalcy of having multiple memberships in different ethnic groups are evident in the quote below, from one of the pioneering US texts on multiracial identity, by Maria Root (1996). Root's *Bill of*

*Rights for Racially Mixed People* included statements of resistance such as, 'I have the right not to justify my ethnic legitimacy', and 'I have the right to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people' (ibid: 7). Scholars in the UK, produced a similar argument out of their works that sought to 'give voice' to mixed race people (Olumide 2002:188), to allow them to articulate their identities how they saw fit. Furthermore, the pioneering pieces of empirical work (Benson 1981; Tizard & Phoenix 1993) represented mixed race as a 'viable social category' (Parker and Song 2001: 6). It is important to note however, that unlike this UK scholarship, the academic networks which had steadily been producing a body of work on multiraciality in the US, existed in what Caballero (2005: 81) has called, a 'symbiotic' relationship, with the burgeoning multiracial 'activist' networks in operation during the same period.

Similar (rather politicised) sentiments of self-determination and the *right* to recognition, as in the examples of US literature above, can be seen as central to the Multiracial Movement's initial campaigns. Early on, it was the US census in particular that was perceived by the Movement as a key avenue through which to achieve these recognitions (Rockquemore 1998; Small 2001; Thompson 2012). Proposals for a separate race category were advanced by the rudimentary multiracial grassroots organisations, such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) and the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans (AMEA) (Caballero 2005; Thompson 2012). These campaigns were successful; at the 2000 US census, people of mixed heritage were invited to check multiple boxes on the race question for the first time.<sup>9</sup> Mixed race was also 'legitimised' as an ethnic category in the UK census in 2001 (Thompson 2012). However, this outcome was not linked to any type of mixed race 'activism' or organised activity by mixed people in the UK, but rather it was a decision taken by those working within the census agencies themselves (Caballero 2005). As noted in the previous section, Mixed options were not included in the 1991 ethnicity question (Aspinall 2003; Bradford 2006; Sillitoe & White 1992). However, the results of the survey indicated that a re-evaluation of Mixed options was needed, as 740,000 respondents 'selected the Other Black or Other Ethnic Group categories' (Bradford 2006: 7), and almost a third of that number

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<sup>9</sup> I use 'first' with caution here, because in actuality, US censuses have historically found many ways to measure how many mixed people were in its population. However, the difference was that in this re-emergence of mixed race options on the 2000 census, the form allowed for self-definition instead of being administered as a method to uphold and maintain racist hierarchies. There was also recognition of a variety of potential mixed backgrounds rather than the overarching obsession with White/Black combinations that 'preoccupied earlier generations' (Morning 2005: 3). These factors combined, made it a 'first time' phenomenon in this sense.

entered a 'description of their specific Mixed group' (Aspinall 2003: 278). In light of this, a Mixed category that consisted of four 'pre-coded tick boxes' (Platt et al. 2005: 36), was introduced in the 2001 UK census, to respond to this demand and capture the mixed population (Bradford 2006).

Through the US academic and activist networks' calls for the legitimisation of mixed race as an ethnic identity, there was also a clear argument for the recognition of mixed race as a *fluid* identity, which could successfully switch between racial and ethnic categories (Anzaldúa 1987; Root 1992; Thornton 1996; Harris & Sim 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2008). These ideas foregrounded the unpredictability of mixed race identity development, emphasising that the process did not necessarily follow a linear trajectory that ended at a final 'mixed' identification (Rockquemore et al. 2009; Harris & Sim 2002). A key argument was that fluidity was definitive to the mixed race experience (Root 1992), and on the other side of the Atlantic, UK scholarship was also recognising and representing mixed race identities as malleable (Parker & Song 2001; Alibhai-Brown 2001; Ali 2003). In the UK context, the growth of mixed race studies had mostly emerged during the 'tail end of the identity politics era' (Thompson 2010: 32), when ethnic identities were increasingly conceptualised as always *in process* and never quite finished (Rutherford 1990; Hall 1992; Hall 1990). In these arguments, regarding the creolization of identities and 'cultures of hybridity' (Bhabha 1994; Young 1995), mixed race was able to demand its 'turn in the spotlight' (Caballero 2005: 17) as a potential counter-hegemonic concept and identification that ruptured dominant paradigms. Taking influence from these broader theoretical developments in the British academy throughout the 1990s and borrowing concepts from US literature, many UK texts in this decade and into the early 2000s, echoed Olumide's (2002: 188) observation that, mixed race was able to 'move easily with difference'.

A number of texts indicated the disparate ways that 'fluidity', and the 'movements' that Olumide (2002) describes, took shape in mixed race lives. Statistical data identified how some people with mixed backgrounds, shifted between official ethnic categories over time, throughout their life course (Platt et al. 2005). More recently, qualitative approaches, have highlighted the *function* of fluidity in mixed race people's lives as a method of resistance and survival, for those who wish to assert their multiple heritages in a climate that seeks to pigeon-hole them into either/or categories (Joseph-Salisbury 2016). Generally, the ability to express fluid racial and ethnic selves has been deemed

as a positive aspect of mixed race, and used as evidence of its state as a stable, healthy and secure ethnic identity (Ifekwunigwe 1999; Ali 2003; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Olumide 2002). These arguments sought to undermine and dispute the previous pathological notions of mixedness (Caballero 2005) that constructed it as torn, mentally weak, and unable to move freely between the different categories which constituted it (Aspinall 2013).

### **2.5.2 Mixed race as a connected group identity**

Caballero (2005) has suggested that mixed race 'legitimacy' has (for the most part) been achieved. I argue that the enumeration of multiethnic people on almost 140 censuses worldwide between 1995 and 2004 (Morning 2014), goes some way in evidencing this. However, the discussions regarding the *connection* between mixed race people (Nakashima 1996; Caballero 2005; Root 1996; Anzaldúa 1987; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Olumide 2002; Zack 1993), Caballero (2005: 82) suggests is a future, 'potential' stage for mixed race, rather than the current reality of mixed race relations. This connection remains in a potential state because a so-called pan-ethnic, meaningful link between people who are *collectively* racialised as mixed, but as a group do *not share* common ethnic/racial heritages, is yet to be realised. However despite this, Caballero (2005: 152) has shed light on the mixed race networks existing in 'cyberspace', which might signify some form of linkages across disparate groups of mixed people. She explains that there is a 'distinct tendency' for those mixed race people who log on, to engage with mixed race communities online as if they were 'a social reality' and reflects on how the internet might have a significant role 'in shaping current and future conceptualisations of mixedness' (ibid: 160). With this in mind, if communities online are engaged with as 'real', what might run in parallel with this is the growth of a feeling of connectedness offline. In the UK context specifically, Miri Song has suggested that the increase in mixed race organisations, might also signify an 'embryonic, yet real, growth of a mixed consciousness – at least for a sector of the mixed population' (2010b: 340). These UK groups<sup>10</sup> have tended to fulfil more of a support role for mixed race people and their families, as opposed to the type of mixed race *activism* present in their American equivalents detailed earlier. Nevertheless, in the aims of the UK groups, it is apparent that there is a push

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples include: Mix-d [www.mix-d.org](http://www.mix-d.org), People in Harmony (PIH) [www.pih.org.uk](http://www.pih.org.uk), Intermix [www.intermix.org.uk](http://www.intermix.org.uk), The Inheritance Project (a non-profit organisation based in South Birmingham).

for the connection of mixed race persons (and/or encouragement of a group consciousness) which echoes some of the sentiments emanating from the second wave of literature (Ifekwunigwe 1997; Olumide 2002; Anzaldúa 1987).

Some writers in the US have attempted to theorise what the foundations for these connections across such a disparate group of people might be. An element of the second wave of literature has considered whether the tendency for mixed race people to consistently have their identities misrecognised, questioned or invalidated by others (Townsend et al. 2009; Cheryan & Monin 2005; Gaskins 1999; Campbell & Troyer 2007), is an identifiable universal mixed race experience, and could therefore serve as a possible foundation for interconnectedness between mixed people (Williams 1996; Daniel 2002). From this perspective, being framed as ambiguous and hard to place, might be considered as a defining and 'binding' mixed race experience (Caballero 2005: 98; Root 1992). This theme of misrecognition has been taken up in research on mixed race populations in the UK (Sims 2016; Song & Aspinall 2012). Unlike the US literature, which has tended to assume incidents of racial misrecognition by others as a negative experience (Cheryan & Monin 2005; Townsend et al. 2009), British academics Miri Song and Peter Aspinall (2012), have highlighted that mixed race people have variable responses to misrecognition by external actors. In their empirical work they found that responses to 'racial mismatch' were not consistent across the sample, and that reactions from participants were influenced by a variety of factors such as gender and class. Further to this, they found that misrecognition was not experienced equally across the different 'types' of mixed groups. Later, I reflect on how these variable experiences of misrecognition are intricately tied to visual categories of race; that is, how one looks (irrespective of self-perceptions of ethnicity), determines how one is read. However, in reference to the current discussion, Song and Aspinall's (ibid) findings importantly demonstrate that 'misrecognition' might not be a 'universal' mixed race experience, and therefore cannot be the foundation for any meaningful connections.

British academic, Jill Olumide (2002), has proposed a more convincing argument for how mixed race people might be connected across time and space, through her concept of the 'mixed race condition'. Rather than suggesting a 'rigid set of experiences' that apply to those racialised as mixed race (ibid: 4), she suggests that the foundations for connections is rooted in the shared experience of being similarly positioned within the broader ideologies of race. She explains that this mixed race state of being is

constituted of; occupying an ambiguous location in society, having induced dependency on other groups and being denied social space (ibid: 180). These experiences are presented as structural obstacles or pitfalls that mixed persons collectively face, which she argues must be challenged. She suggests that recognition of these obstacles by the group (that are essentially obstacles of *race*), would allow space for them (race) to be collectively deconstructed. This deconstruction of race is significant within her overall argument for mixed race connectivity. This is evident in her statement that, 'the possibilities for group solidarity lie in the ability to transcend race' (ibid: 5). This final point, which links mixed race group consciousness to liberation from race, leads to the third foundational argument that features in the second wave of mixed race studies.

### **2.5.3 Mixed race and the potential for transcendence**

Discussions that question the post-race potential that mixed race futures might spawn are, for the most part, theoretical rather than empirical insights into the mixed race condition. Empirical findings (in both US and UK literature) that contribute towards this discussion signal how some parents of mixed race children attempt to encourage them to have 'non-racial' identities (Edwards et al. 2010), and how mixed people themselves, at times, might adopt these types of individualised self-labels that move beyond racial and ethnic descriptors (Rockquemore & Brunsma 2008; Mahtani 2002; Twine 1996). Although these empirical insights are unpacked further in a later section, that considers how class, intersects with mixed race, and the impact of this on self-expressions like the ones described above. Theoretically, many of the arguments that link mixed race with post-race concepts, articulate this connection through an 'anti-race' perspective, rather than a colour-blind conservative 'non-race' discourse (St Louis 2015: 117). The conceptualisations of mixedness that are made through an anti-race, post-race framework do not purport that race is 'over', or that post-racality (where race is seen to no longer matter) is currently in existence (Goldberg 2015). Rather, for these writers on mixed race, there is a general recognition of the continued pervasiveness of biological discourses of race as a dominant mode of thinking, accompanied by their strong alignment with the social sciences paradigm, that race is a social construct. It is precisely from the vantage point of mixed race identity, analysis and theory that these scholars purport to be able to show that race is an erroneous, reductionist, and potentially harmful concept that has no epistemological value (St Louis 2015: 127). Early work by Naomi Zack (1995)

in the field of mixed race studies in the US, exemplifies this perspective. From this position, she calls for the rejection of race as *identity*. This process of becoming 'raceless' (ibid: 301), she states, would require individuals to refuse to identify both others and themselves through dominant racial typologies. Through this transcendence of race, connections would instead be achieved on the basis of a common, shared humanity.

In the UK, Suki Ali (2003) has borrowed from the progressive post-race arguments of Paul Gilroy (2000). Drawing on her empirical work with young mixed race children, she uses the term 'post-race thinking' to emphasise 'deconstructive approaches to identities' (Ali 2003: 9). In a similar vein to Zack's calls for the rejection of race (1995), Ali's (2003) term interrogates 'group' constructions of ethnicities (Ali 2003: 9) that make (non-essentialist) mixed race identities impossible. Her use of 'post race thinking' then, refers to the process of transcending our current modes of 'racial thinking', which might in turn, open up *spaces* and *opportunities* for new forms of identity making, belonging and solidarity, that do not rely on static discourses of race. Jayne Ifekwunigwe (1997, 1999), whose scholarship straddles both US and UK contexts, has also attempted to theorise how our 'thinking' might be altered; particularly through a re-evaluation of the dominant discourses we reproduce about mixed race through our terminology. She historically problematised the term 'mixed race' as a definitive descriptor for those claiming multiple heritages (Ifekwunigwe 1997, 1999), arguing that the term was complicit in maintaining the very 'idea of race itself' (Ali 2003: 6). She attempted to respond to this perceived shortfall, by re-appropriating the Francophone lexicon *metis(se)*<sup>11</sup> and proposing it as a replacement. Emphasising that *metis(se)* is not an 'exclusively... 'racial' term', especially when used in the French African context,<sup>12</sup> she suggested that it took full account of the complex diasporic identities that intersect and produce mixed subjects (Ifekwunigwe 1997: 131). Her new formulation, she suggested, provided a more progressive 'way to talk about... universal constructs [of] hybridity, creolization' and 'blending and mixing' (ibid: 131). However she later retracted these theoretical advances and retreated back to 'mixed race', suggesting that on reflection, it more accurately recognises the centrality of racism in the ideology of mixing (Ifekwunigwe 2004: xxi).

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<sup>11</sup> A French term denoting mixed race.

<sup>12</sup> Ifekwunigwe (1997: 131) names Senegal, as one such country where *metis(se)* might also be used in reference to people who have parents from different ethnic groups in the country. Thus, the term does not necessarily always connote mixed 'race'.

Therefore, despite the potential revolutionary future that is evoked in many of the debates regarding transcendency in the field of mixed race studies, nowhere is it explicitly spelt out how this might be achieved. Although the task of legitimising mixed race identity appears to have been successful, and the connectivity across mixed populations might be the next potential stage on from that, debates regarding the transcendence of race that run through the second wave of literature, are more of an 'ideal' phase for mixed race studies (Caballero 2005: 82). In highlighting the limitations of the mixed race, post-race claims, the following section advances my critique by detailing some of the weaknesses of the second wave of literature more generally. It is through these final discussions that I seek to locate how this study speaks to, and borrows from, some of the key debates aforementioned.

## **2.6 Critiquing the second wave of mixed race literature and locating the study**

### **2.6.1 Moving away from an individualist approach**

A central argument that has been advanced in the *Age of Critique* is that a substantial number of works in the second wave of literature tend to conceptualise 'mixedness through the articulation of individualism' (Caballero 2005: 95, 96; Small 2001; Christian 2000; Sexton 2008). The focus on the micro-politics of mixed race (Mahtani 2014), mistakenly fails to recognise that racial and ethnic identities are never solely about personal identity choices. The quote below succinctly explains how (mixed) race identities materialise on numerous intersecting levels.

Researchers [should] rethink the use of race as an all-encompassing construct in their analyses and instead begin to differentiate between racial identity (an individual's self-understanding), racial identification (how others understand and categorize an individual), and racial category (what racial identities are available and chosen in a specific context).

(Rockquemore et al. 2009: 27)

If all of these aspects of 'race' simultaneously constitute mixed race subjects at any one time, it becomes apparent that personal identity claims cannot be upheld as the sole unit of analysis in the field. I want to refer back to the

earlier arguments about the fluidity of the mixed race subject to help advance this point. In order for mixed race identity to be wholly 'fluid', all of the aspects of race named above must be relaxed. In actuality, this is rarely ever the case, and there are often significant disjunctures between racial *identities*, racial *identifications* and racial *categories*, which raises questions about the ability of mixed race subjects to develop *holistically* fluid racial identities.

Aside from this, it has been argued that discussions regarding the individual, day-to-day micro-politics of mixed race experiences tend to be mired in the 'present-tense' (Mahtani 2014). Furthermore, the implications of place are often overlooked in the literature (Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010b; Aspinall & Song 2013a; Tizard & Phoenix 1993). This lack of contextual analyses has been charged with being 'ageographical' and 'ahistorical' (Mahtani 2014: 46). The chapter thus far, has emphasised the non-static, contingent nature of mixed race through time, indicating the need to historicise mixed race and avoid these 'present tense' conceptualisations of mixed race experiences. The question of *place* has been central to the discussion, and the complex ways in which it intersects with time, and mixed race. The earlier section that detailed the British colonies oscillating approaches to handling mixed race populations, and the subsequent after-effects on domestic conceptualisations of mixed race, exemplify this (Milner-Thorton 2014; Dalrymple 2002; Mohammed 2000; Chatterjee 1993; Rich 1986; Hall 2017). Yet, whilst many things change in different spaces, many things appear to stay the same. Despite the contingent and contested nature of mixed race positions across Empire, the category of 'half-caste', appeared to maintain its meaning and have longevity. This was evident from its rather seamless transference to the metropole, where it retained its derogatory meaning (Aspinall 2013). More recently, despite the contemporary agreement that half-caste is a pejorative term Aspinall (2013) has noted its continued usage by particular sub-sections of mixed race youth and certain social institutions. Furthermore, despite the development of new nomenclature, such as the contemporary (and most favourable) term 'mixed race' (Aspinall 2009; Barrett et al. 2006), it is questionable to what extent the connotations that emanate from this are entirely *distinct* from those that were historically attached to its non-identical twin, 'half-caste'. Undoubtedly, the latter has a longer history as a pathological phrase, and the former does not hold the same type of historical weight (Bland 2007; Christian 2008; Aspinall 2013). However, to 'mix' race, or to 'half' caste(s), both suggest the existence of two (or more) distinct entities, fusing together to create something that is fundamentally different from those original parts that form it.

By reflecting on the trajectories of language and ideas that have been ascribed to mixed race, it is evident that we need to account for how social histories are embedded into the personal histories and social identities of mixed race subjects. Further to this, mixed race studies must map mixed race experiences onto geographically specific histories, so it does not run the risk of being charged as apolitical, *in addition to* ageographical, ahistorical. The point I am advancing is that the tendency to rely on 'notions of individualism' (Small 2001: 126), make the scholarship inward facing, and thus, the study of mixed race loses its '*anti-racist*' potential (Mahtani 2014). Individualised approaches, turn the gaze away from the persistent stereotypes (Stonequist 1937), racisms (Sexton 2008), racial categories (Aspinall 2003), and local and national histories (Christian 2008) that order mixed race lives.

### **2.6.2 Mixed race does not signal the beginning, or success, of postraciality**

These points regarding the need to account for the external, contextual effects on mixed race subjectivity, also illuminate some of the limitations that run through the mixed race, post-race linkages that have been posited in the second wave of literature (Zack 1995; Ali 2003). Taking lead from Saldanha's (2006: 9) claim that 'race cannot be transcended, only understood and rearranged', the chapter's retrospective analysis of mixed race, evidences how these 're-arrangements' of race occur. To return to the example of Empire once more; it was shown at the beginning of the chapter that mixing across 'racial' boundaries has been British social practice for many centuries (Rich 1986; Milner-Thorton 2012; Young 1995; Dalrymple 2002; Bush 1990). This has not however, in turn, led to the de-significance (or deconstruction) of race categories or markers in those respective places over time, or in their diasporas (Ropp 2004; Henriques 1953; Tate 2013; Hope 2011; Mohammed 2000). To echo Stuart Hall (2017), our current post-colonial states, do not represent the end of colonialism. The ending of the former modes of global organisation, have not translated into the end of colonial thinking, the latter of which still continues to privilege the lives of the ex-colonisers, and the devalue those of the ex-colonised (McClintock 1992). Theo Goldberg (2015: 154) purports that the 'postracial is to the racial, as the postcolonial is to the colonial'; that is, not representative of a binary opposition, or a great historical epochal shift but simply, of 'a different mode in which race is lived out'.

Song's (2015: 88) suggestion that the claims that mixed race signifies a move towards racial equality are 'facile', takes heed from the points above. She suggests that we should not be asking whether we can (or should) reach that post-race state, but instead, a more realistic trail of questioning, might ask whether the interactions and conflicts between populations are 'less racialized' than they have been in our pasts (ibid: 89). To advance on this, I suggest that a *progressive* way to interrogate post-race ideas through a mixed race framework, might be to consider how mixed race *exposes* new forms of race/isms (Goldberg 2015), rather than how it unsettles, deconstructs or moves us beyond race. Finally, I want to suggest, that the empirical examples of individual mixed race subjects who defy racial categories in favour of 'human' ones, are evidence of important day-to-day personal methods of resistance of dominant narratives and categories of race. However, without a contextual discussion of who it is that owns those categories and defines their boundaries (Solomos 1998: 53), the discussion becomes limited by its focus upon personal identity claims, at the expense of a wider analysis. By privileging agency over structure, the inherently dialectical nature of mixed race identity is not accounted for (Jenkins 1996), which uncritically glosses over structural inequalities and relations of power. Further to this, empirical findings indicate that not all mixed race populations equally feel that they are able to transcend race, or that their identity choices are 'fluid'. I advance on this point in the upcoming sections.

### **2.6.3 Interrogating the fluidity of the mixed race subject through an intersectional framework**

Often the starting point in research appears to (sometimes mistakenly) assume that ethnic/racial background will be mixed race subjects' dominant identity (Song & Aspinall 2012: 749). However, more recently, it has been indicated that other social identities (relating to religion, age, work/study) are increasingly being regarded as significant for ethnic minority groups more generally and for mixed race people, in twenty-first century Britain (Aspinall & Song 2013a; Song 2010a). In light of this, accounting for the intersectional nature of mixed race identities would be an important step towards better theorising mixed race. Furthermore, it has been found that other aspects of social identity have particular implications for how mixed race people experience and articulate their ethnicity (Song & Aspinall 2012; Twine 2004; Tizard & Phoenix 1993). Earlier in the chapter, it was noted that some mixed

race people utilise 'post-race' self-descriptors. However, these empirical research studies also importantly signify that middle class parents of mixed race people are more likely to encourage their children to adopt non-racial and/or ethnic identifications, such as 'citizens of the world', than those from traditional working class backgrounds (Caballero et al. 2008; Edwards et al. 2010). And in the US, it has been suggested that the higher one's social class status, the less likely they are to identify with their minority identity (Rockquemore & Brunnsma 2008).

In addition to impacting on how one might personally conceptualise and express a mixed identity, it is also important to note that class is a social identity which can be read off our bodies and thus might impact on how *others* identify us. Class is 'inscribed and marked on the body' (Tyler 2011: 525); our speech and style for example, are just some of the markers that become signifiers of our classed selves, which others use to relate to us (ibid). To make a more direct link to the mixed race situation, imagine the caricature of the (White) 'chav mum', who is often imagined as mothering 'a gaggle of mixed race children' (Tyler 2008: 26). Some of the foundations of this are rooted in the historical discourses about the sexuality of White working class women who were in relations with Black and Brown men during the interwar years (Rich 1986; Bland 2007; Christian; 2008). To expand this discussion, it is important to reflect on how the class distinctions that are read off 'chav mums' might implicate how the character of her brown working class mixed race child is perceived; in much the same way the depravity of Liverpool's White 'prostitutes', was thought to transfer onto their 'half-caste' children in the 1920s (Christian 2008: 228). The point I am trying to advance here, is that class functions in a very similar mode to how visual markers of ethnicity do. This theme relating to visual categories of race is taken up in the following section. For now, I shall return to the central argument for this section that suggests that a middle class background might serve as a resource for mixed race people.

A middle class background appears to help mixed race people to better articulate and read their ethnicities and unlocks a broader choice of (non)ethnic identity options (Song 2010b; Caballero et al. 2008; Mahtani 2002; Song & Aspinall 2012; Twine 1996). Therefore, if increased levels of freedom and/or choice (and thus 'fluidity'), come hand in hand with middle class backgrounds, fluidity cannot be conceptualised as a universal characteristic of the mixed race experience. This insight is especially significant, given the fact that

transnational patterns indicate that there tends to be a middle class bias in many of the samples (Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Wilson 1987; Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010b; Edwards et al. 2010; Caballero et al. 2008). This likely skews the conclusions that are drawn about the mixed race population as a whole in the UK.

#### **2.6.4 Accounting for visual categories of race in discussions regarding mixed race fluidity and racial misrecognition**

The way we look is an element of our social selves, which is readily available and accessible to others to make their own judgements about who we are (Aspinall & Song 2013b). US scholarship has done a more thorough job of theorising the impact of visual categories of race on mixed race identification processes than literature in the UK (Cheryan & Monin 2005; Rondilla & Spickard 2007; Campbell & Troyer 2007; Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001; Harris & Sim 2002; Khanna 2010). Khanna (2010) has specifically considered the influence of 'reflected appraisals' on racial identification. This refers to the process by which ideas about the self develop out of our responses to how we think others perceive our phenotype and/or general 'social' appearance such as clothes, and general self-styling (which also give cues about our racialised identities to others). It has been suggested that appraisals from others tend to have most influence on identification processes when the person who is subjected to them is in a state of instability or uncertainty (Backman et al. 1963). This, Khanna claims (2010: 101), 'may pertain to multiracial individuals, who are arguably more likely to encounter more ambiguity about their race than individuals with monoracial backgrounds'. Incidentally, her empirical findings showed that reflected appraisals for Black/White mixed race adults did carry weight, as they were found to 'shape 'internalized' Black identities' (ibid: 115).

This latter point regarding the impact of reflected appraisals for Black respondents specifically, indicates that not all mixed race people might face the 'ambiguity about their race' that she describes (Khanna 2010: 101). If, as she suggests, internalised identities are a reflection of how we think others perceive us, then internalised Black identities indicate that the mixed race Black people in her study perceived that they were read as Black by others. Although this references the US context, this is a transnational phenomenon. As indicated in an earlier section, the theme of racial misrecognition has been expanded on in some UK work (Aspinall & Song 2013b; Song & Aspinall 2012) which

documented differential mixed race responses to the experience of being misread by others. Song & Aspinall (2012) found through their sixty-five in-depth interviews with respondents from a variety of mixed backgrounds, that part-Black respondents were most likely to report being racialised as Black. This has also been found across numerous other empirical research studies (Khanna 2011; Aspinall & Song 2013b; Caballero 2005; Sims 2016; Song 2010b; Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001; Joseph-Salisbury 2016). These patterns indicate that Blackness tends to function as a permanent 'underlying mark of racialization', unlike 'no other racial designation'<sup>13</sup> (Gordan 1997: 57). This speaks back to the discussion emanating from the second wave that considered misrecognition by external actors (Campbell & Troyer 2007; Gaskins 1999; Cheryan & Monin 2005; Sims 2016; Song & Aspinall 2012), as a defining feature of mixed race identity, that might serve as a catalyst for the development of mixed race *group* identities (Williams 1996; Daniel 2002). These latter claims problematically assume that there is a 'quintessential mixed race look' (Mahtani 2014: 20), and that all mixed race subjects are faced with the *What Are You* (Gaskins 1999) questions regarding their identity. For this to be the case, all mixed race people would have to be read as physically ambiguous. I will empirically demonstrate throughout this thesis that this is not a uniform mixed race experience.

The discussion of misrecognition, and how it relates closely to visual markers of race, might also be expanded to include questions that ask *who* it is that is doing the misrecognising, and how 'misrecognition' can slip into forms of 'rejection.' Shirley Tate's (2013, 2005) work is particularly useful in thinking these ideas through. Writing on the complexities of Black beauty politics in Jamaica and its diaspora, Tate (2013) has described how some mixed race Jamaican heritage women in the UK, on occasion, might experience abjection from Black communities (and particularly from Black women in those communities) as a consequence of their phenotypes. Tate (ibid) has discussed how 'Black anti-racist aesthetics' *reject* 'white-oriented images of beauty', the latter of which are sometimes signified through mixed race phenotypical features, which (might) include light(er) skin and straight(er) hair (ibid: 231). She concludes that these phenotypes may become a mark of 'shame' for mixed race Black women (ibid: 230). The emotional impact of this shaming is intensified by the fact that these women, for the most part, feel attached to,

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<sup>13</sup> Caballero (2005) exemplifies how 'Black heritage dominates' self-styled terminology for Black mixed race identities in the US, with terms such as; *Blackanese* (Black and Japanese), *Blaxican* (Black and Mexican), *Blasian* (Black and Asian).

and a *part of*, the Blackness from which they are being rejected. These discussions throw up questions that have emerged as significant throughout the thesis; what is the impact of being misrecognised and/or denied from a relatable ethnic category that one feels invested in? And, how might exclusion from an identity by other, more secure, holders of that identity impact on mixed race subjects?

## 2.7 Conclusion

Throughout the chapter, I have traced and foregrounded the historical and geographical specificity of mixed race. I have done this to emphasise the key conceptual framework for the thesis, which seeks to unpack the ways in which external structures, shape the personal, through time and place. As noted in the introduction, I sought to highlight how place, continuously emerges as a racialising power in quite complex ways. For example, it was highlighted how nation states have historically introduced laws and census categories, all of which have had real social and economic impacts on people racialised as 'mixed' at particular historical junctures. The points advanced throughout this chapter relating to these discussions regarding how *national* discourses of race are produced and impact on mixed race subjects, are taken up throughout thesis. For example, chapter four considers the impact of the state's attempts to formulate 'official' racial/immigrant categories in schools in the 1960s and 1970s, on Black mixed race youths' educational experiences. Furthermore, chapter five also highlights how national ideas about race and difference that tended to denigrate non-White Britons historically throughout those same periods, were resisted by Black mixed race youth through their engagement in Black expressive cultures. In addition to exploring how mixed race identities have been implicated by structural patterns occurring at the level of the nation, place as a conceptual framework is also scaled down somewhat, to take account of city and local identities. These localised questions relating to identity are most closely considered in chapter four.

The issue of place throughout the chapter has been inextricably linked with questions of change over time. By beginning the discussion in colonial histories, and ending at the contemporary moment, the chapter has deconstructed the often taken-for-granted 'newness' of mixed race, as a discipline, population, racial category, and identity. This historical approach, which is central to the thesis, seeks to embark on a rediscovery of these mixed race pasts, in

conjunction with an analysis of our mixed race presents. And importantly, doing so with attention to place. By taking this approach the thesis advances the present-day (Mahtani 2014) conceptualisations of mixed race that dominate the field. In taking this long view, it has also become apparent throughout this chapter that there is a continuous, and rather uncritical, binary conceptualisation of mixed race, that configures it as either suffering a doomed state of being, or as a figure for post-race utopia. This thesis seeks to shift the debate away from this binary, by instead questioning how mixed race identifications are always a matter of negotiation in particular historical moments and in certain spaces (Rockquemore et al. 2009: 25). It is in chapter five where the issues regarding continuity and change in mixed race, in relation to racial discourses and inequalities are foreground. In chapter five, mixed race experiences are mapped onto some of the time-periods that have been documented in this chapter. It is in chapter five where issues relating to mixed race 'as Black' in the 1970s and 1980s and the mixed race relations to post-race discourses in the contemporary period are considered. The social generational identities of the participants are highlighted in order to explore the temporality of mixed race identity. In addition to using generation as a way to trace change through time, mixed race is also historicised throughout the thesis through personal life histories. The latter of which, take account of identity development through the life course rather than isolate mixed race narratives in time-specific periods; an approach which is elaborated on in the following chapter.

In addition to highlighting the weaknesses of present tense narratives, this chapter noted that the field has been charged with relying too heavily on the micro-politics of the mixed race experience, which I suggest, glosses over the prominent structural formations that implicate mixed race subjects. Although narratives about the private aspects of mixed race identity are drawn on throughout, in relation to external structures, it is within the final empirical chapter that the personal, back-stage aspects of mixed race experience are most closely traced. It deals, for example, with the impact of visual categories of race on self-perceptions and intimate relations with family and friends. Importantly, chapter six also draws closely on the significant macro-politics of Britain, such as the legacies of colonialism, to make sense of the personal micro-politics of mixed race experience that are presented. Generally then, the thesis comprises three main strands as a framework; place, time, and personal identity. It seeks to account for how external structures have imposed on, and

shaped mixed race identity. The following chapter details the methods that were utilised in the field to complement this analytical approach.

## **3 Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the methods used to gather the data for the thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, this thesis seeks to conceptualise mixed race as a geographically determined identity. To elaborate on the significance of place as a key aspect of the conceptual framework for the study, this chapter begins by providing further contextual information on the location of the research – Birmingham – and considers why cities are useful tools by which to study race more generally. Drawing more specifically on the relevant racial demographics and histories of Birmingham, it reflects on the potential implications of these for mixed race identity in the city, and explains why Birmingham is perceived as an important and relevant fieldwork site for the study of mixed race. As indicated in the previous chapter, the thesis also seeks to historicise mixed race. In light of this, the study has adopted a qualitative life history approach to gather data. Following the discussion of Birmingham, the chapter goes on to briefly describe why this method was the most effective way to capture the complexities of change over time. This is then followed by a discussion of the sampling process and the demographics of the participants. The following sections detail the practical processes involved in carrying out the interviews and explain how the data was analysed. The chapter then turns to focus on some of the issues of memory, performance and narration that emerged throughout the data collection process. It continues on to consider my own position as a researcher, and the ethical and political issues relating to power and representation in the study. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relevance of this overall methodological approach, for the research aims of this thesis.

### **3.2 Birmingham – the case study site**

The city is a useful framework for thinking through mixed race identity. This is not least because cities and their satellite towns are often the places where people tend to *mix* in Britain. They are the destinations for disparate flows of migrant populations (Vertovec 2007) and the sites of 'everyday multicultural' (Amin 2002). Birmingham is Britain's second largest city after London. At the 2011 census, its population stood at 1,074,300. Although not quite as

ethnically diverse as the capital (where just 45% identified as White British in the 2011 census), it is a very diverse city. Only 53% of the population identified as White British in the 2011 census and it has been predicted that by 2024 it will likely become a minority majority city (Hill 2007). Pakistani is the largest ethnic minority group in the city, followed by the Indian group and the Black Caribbean group; the populations stand at 13%, 6% and 4% respectively. A total of 4% of the city's population identifies as mixed and it has the second largest mixed population in the country (see Table 3.1). The city is particularly pertinent to this study, given the fact that the residential locations of Mixed White/Black Caribbean families indicate particularly high levels of concentration in and around Birmingham. Analysis of 2001 census data shows that of the 'top quartile of all the wards with thirty or more White/Black Caribbean families', 37.3% are located in the West Midlands, and in Birmingham in particular (Smith et al. 2011). Further to this, the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group are the largest of all the mixed groups in Birmingham by quite a significant margin. It makes up just over half of the mixed ethnic population there; this is not the case in the other top four areas with the largest mixed populations in England and Wales (see Figure 3.1).

Despite these demographics, Birmingham's mixed race population is yet to be the focus of (or at least a substantial part of) studies on mixedness in Britain. As previously indicated in chapters one and two, historically, mixed populations in port cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff have featured more heavily in academic and public debates (Christian 2000; King & King 1938; Bland 2007). More recently however, it appears that a lot of research (especially qualitative) on mixedness in the UK has been conducted in London, or uses samples that are heavily weighted with London-based participants (Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010a; Benson 1981; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Bauer 2010; Song & Gutierrez 2015; Ali 2003). In many ways this is understandable, given the fact that 33% of England and Wales' mixed population is located in London (see Table 3.1). However, it is important to recognise that London occupies a particular social location in the 'urban hierarchy' of the UK (Webber 2007). It is a 'global city' (Sassen 1991), which has a significant impact on the demographic of the mixed population there. For example, London has a much larger proportion of 'Other mixed' people in its mixed population than does Birmingham (29% and 18% respectively); and the Mixed White and Black Caribbean population make up a much smaller proportion of the mixed group in London (29% compared to 52% in Birmingham). Drawing on this data, it is evident that London-based samples run the risk of presenting a skewed

narrative of mixed race in Britain and might potentially limit the conversation regarding mixed race in the UK.

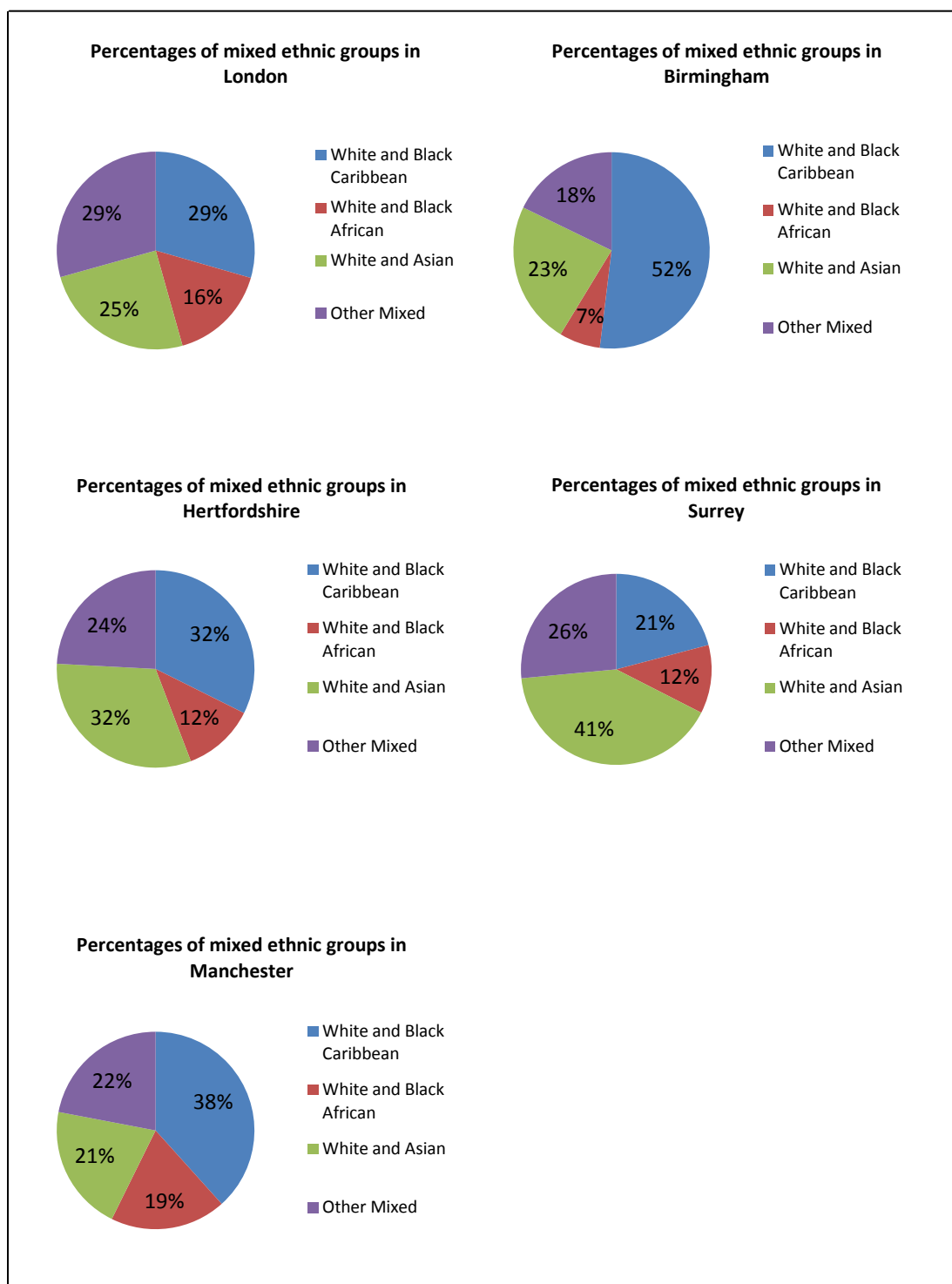
There are marked regional differentiations in the demographic of the mixed population throughout the country that might impact on how mixedness is conceptualised in these various regions. For example, Birmingham's large Mixed White and Black Caribbean population will undoubtedly have implications for how mixed race and *mixing* are conceptualised in the city as a mostly *Black* and *White* phenomenon. This is in contrast to London where the large 'Other' mixed group reflects its 'superdiverse' population and complex patterns of mixing that are a result of it historically being a 'predominant locus of immigration' in Britain (Vertovec 2007: 1042). The implications of this can be seen in Song's (2010b: 351) study, which found that 'being mixed' was regarded as 'quite ordinary' for many mixed race Londoners. By describing the varied demographics of mixed race populations throughout the country, this discussion has highlighted how cities (and place more generally) might play a pertinent role in racialising people (Harries 2012). Cities are 'raced spaces' (Keith 2005; Amin 2002) and a pressing question for this thesis is, what is the impact of living in the raced space of the city for those who reside within it?

**Table 3.1:** Top 10 areas in England and Wales where mixed ethnic groups reside, census 2011

Area	Number of mixed/multiple ethnic groups*	% of mixed ethnic groups**
London	405,279	33.1%
Birmingham	47,605	3.9%
Hertfordshire	27,497	2.2%
Surrey	23,554	1.9%
Manchester	23,161	1.9%
Kent	22,107	1.8%
Essex	20,885	1.7%
Nottingham	20,265	1.7%
Leeds	19,632	1.6%
Hampshire	18,051	1.5%

\* The numbers in this column are out of the total population of the Mixed Ethnic Group in England and Wales; 1,224,200.

\*\* The percentages in this column have been calculated out of the overall 100% population of the Mixed Ethnic Group in England and Wales.



**Figure 3.1:** The percentages of each of the mixed ethnic groups in the top-5 areas that have the highest mixed populations in England and Wales, census 2011

### **3.3 Choosing the Method and Selecting the Sample**

As stated above and in the previous two chapters, this thesis seeks to explore how mixed race identities intersect with place. Further to this, it is interested in critically investigating the temporality of mixed race identity, that is, how individual subjectivities intersect with changing social conditions. Although quantitative statistical data (like those presented in the previous section) provide useful context for the study, they do not allow for a deep analysis of participants' subjective experiences. Further to this, there is generally a lack of available historical quantitative data on mixed race populations. In light of this, in order to access historical, in-depth information on identity formations, qualitative methods were employed. More specifically, semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were used to elicit participants' life histories. Interviews were the most effective method by which to generate 'empirical data about the social world[s]' (Holsein & Gubrium, 1997: 113) the participants had grown up in, and ascertain how these environments had informed the construction and performance of their ethnic identities in their youth and adulthood. This qualitative approach was best 'suited to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences' of the participants' in the study (Bhopal 2010: 189). The interviews allowed space for respondents to articulate their narratives in fluid ways and allowed me as researcher to respond to these stories flexibly. Further detail on the content of the interviews and the style of delivery, is presented in section 3.4.

From the outset, a 'fixed purposive sampling strategy' was used to recruit participants (Bryman 2016: 414). To enable me to effectively deal with one of the central issues of the thesis regarding change over time in mixed race identity, I sought out contacts from a wide range of age groups. The initial aim was to recruit forty research participants – twenty born between 1955 and 1970 and twenty born between 1980 and 1995. The process of selecting the participants was informed by reflections from some scholars in the field who suggest that qualitative research on mixedness can be somewhat biased in two ways. Firstly, Caballero (2013: 3) has drawn on Maria Root's 'insightful consideration of methodologies of mixed race studies'. She states they have been helpful in drawing attention to the fact that participants in studies on mixed race are generally 'self-selecting in the sense that they tend to identify strongly as "mixed race" and are often actively involved in or conscious of debates around mixed race identities/families' (Caballero 2013: 3). In light of

this, I actively tried to avoid recruiting respondents from voluntary groups, forums or online websites that provide services specifically for mixed race people and their families, in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of obtaining a biased sample. Secondly, it has been noted that samples are often made up of mostly middle class participants (Caballero 2005; Small 2001; Mahtani 2014). Although this critique has been mostly levelled at mixed race studies in the US, the class issue is also relevant to the UK context. Numerous qualitative studies on mixedness in the UK also report high proportions of middle class participants in their samples (Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Wilson 1987; Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010b; Edwards et al. 2010; Caballero et al. 2008). To avoid class bias, I made an explicit attempt to access networks outside of the academy.

A variety of sampling approaches were implemented to achieve the desired sample. In the first stage of sampling I accessed my own informal networks in Birmingham.<sup>14</sup> I accessed these networks by distributing online and physical copies of the recruitment poster to family and friends (see appendix). I purposefully avoided the use of 'mixed race' as terminology on the poster so as not to discourage any people who had mixed backgrounds but did not identify themselves as such. Reference to 'heritage' seemed to be the most appropriate catch-all term that would appeal to a broader mixed race audience. I did not recruit anybody from my immediate networks and instead requested that people forwarded on the information to any friends and family who they thought may be interested in participating; seventeen participants were recruited in this way.<sup>15</sup> Aside from utilising informal networks, I distributed the recruitment poster on Birmingham neighbourhood Facebook pages and put physical copies in Black hairdressers, the Afro-Caribbean Centre, leisure centres, libraries, community centres, colleges and arts centres in different areas of the city. Three participants contacted me after seeing the advertisement in these locations. Once this approach was exhausted and it was becoming increasingly clear that it was difficult to sample male participants from the oldest cohort, snowball sampling was implemented (Bryman 2016). It was anticipated that referrals through this method would provide 'a common point of reference' for potential interviewees, which would help to generate a new wave of participants (Byrne 2006: 33). A total of thirteen participants were recruited in this way.

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<sup>14</sup> As I am from the city, this was an effective way to gain access to participants.

<sup>15</sup> Overall recruitment of participants was as follows: 17 through informal networks, 13 through snowball sampling, 3 through responding to the physical copy of the poster in public places, 3 via mixed race organisations and 1 through a radio callout.

The snowball sampling process also prompted me to broaden the scope of the research. As noted earlier, the initial aim was to recruit participants from two birth cohorts (1955 to 1970 and 1980 to 1995). However because of the difficulties in recruiting male participants from the oldest cohort I decided to relax the sampling criteria when two interviewees gave me the contact numbers for two potential male participants who were born in the early 1970s. I anticipated that boosting the sample with a middle cohort would provide valuable data and help answer the research questions more substantively, and so I pursued the interview opportunities. Both interviews generated a substantial amount of relevant and important data for the study. The participants presented personal narratives that were uniquely shaped by their experience of coming of age in the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s that were distinguishable in many ways from participants in the other two cohorts. From that point forward, participants born in the 1970s were actively recruited in order to provide a more complete historical analysis of mixed race identifications and experiences.<sup>16</sup>

Although snowball sampling helped with the recruitment of older male participants, it did not boost this sub-set of the sample as much as had been anticipated. Therefore, in another attempt to recruit older males, I appeared on Birmingham's major Afro-Caribbean community radio station – Newstyle Radio – as a guest speaker on their mid-morning show. I was invited to talk about the project and to put a call out for older mixed race male participants. Only one person responded and was subsequently interviewed as part of the project. In light of this limited recruitment success I eventually made the decision in the latter stages of fieldwork to contact three mixed race voluntary organisations to help the process along. Mix-d<sup>17</sup>, People in Harmony (PIH)<sup>18</sup> and The Inheritance

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout the thesis, the three cohorts are described as follows: 1955-1969 (60s-born), 1970-1979 (70s-born), 1980-1995 (80s-born). The reader must continue to bear in mind that these descriptors are only used for ease and despite appearing like closed off cohorts, there are very slight overlaps.

<sup>17</sup> Mix-d was founded circa 2007 with the aim of promoting conversations around mixed identity through the development of numerous resources such as workshops, educational material, an online website and general guidance for professionals working with young mixed race people.

<sup>18</sup> PIH was one of the founding mixed race organisations in Britain, set up in 1972 with the aim of promoting positive experiences of interethnic life.

Project<sup>19</sup> were contacted and three older male participants were successfully recruited in this way.

In total, thirty-seven participants were recruited for the research. The descriptors 'White' and 'Black Caribbean' mask the diversity of the final sample. For example, one of the participants in the sample (from the 80s-born cohort) was second generation mixed race. His mother was Mixed White and Black Caribbean and his father was Black Caribbean. Aside from this particular case, all of the other participants in the study had a White mother and a Black Caribbean father. And although the majority had a White *English* mother, there were some variations from this. A small number of participants had a first generation White Irish parent, and one participant wanted to assert her mother's (although quite far removed) White Austrian heritage in her interview. Black Caribbean heritage was mostly traced back to Jamaica but there were examples of participants that had lineage in various islands across the Caribbean archipelago such as; St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis and Barbados. Table 3.2 shows the number of participants in each birth cohort by gender. The sample was split relatively equally by gender; with nineteen female respondents and eighteen male. However the sample was slightly skewed with regards to age because the youngest participants were easiest to recruit.

**Table 3.2: Sample by age and gender**

<b>Birth Cohorts</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
60s-born	4	6	10
70s-born	7	4	11
80s-born	7	9	16
<b>Total</b>	18	19	37

Just over half of the sample (twenty-one people) had university degrees.<sup>20</sup> Out of these there were clear cohort differences in when people completed their

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<sup>19</sup> The Inheritance Project was an oral history and photo exhibition project funded by The Heritage Lottery which documented the stories of Black mixed race families in Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s.

studies; fourteen attended university and started their courses aged twenty-one years or younger (this was the case for majority of the 80s-born cohort) and seven completed university courses as mature students (all of these participants were in the 60s-born and 70s-born cohorts). This latter subset of respondents did not follow a 'traditional' trajectory into higher education as they tended to have 'troubled educational histories', having left education at school age (Reay 2002: 407). These participants experienced a late upward trajectory into professional positions. The remaining sixteen participants had completed college courses, diplomas of higher education, vocational training or had discontinued education after leaving secondary school.<sup>21</sup> Patterns of employment in the sample reflected Black African and Black Caribbean high rates of public sector employment in the UK (Li 2011). Around three quarters of the sample worked in the public services at the time of interview in a range of areas including; foster care, drugs support, education, youth and community support, mental health services, independent living services and early years provision. The levels at which people were employed within the occupations were quite evenly spread. Some occupied more professional positions as social workers, teachers or qualified youth workers and others worked in administrative support roles. The remainder of participants who did not have these employment characteristics worked in other clerical occupations outside of the public sector, had manual labour jobs, were self-employed or out of work.

As the patterns in occupation were varied, if we were to take education as an arbitrary measure of social class instead, then it might ostensibly appear that the sample is majority middle class due to the number of those with higher level qualifications. However, the majority of participants came from traditional working class backgrounds (using parents' occupations) and a third of the sample grew up in social housing. Importantly, the majority who did have working class backgrounds, held on to these identities in their self-descriptions. Some even described their childhood families as 'poor' or 'broke' in the interviews. These elements combined demonstrate the 'fractured class backgrounds' within the sample (Spence 1991: 228), which in many cases was further complicated by the fact that respondents were mixed race. For

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<sup>20</sup> The 60s-born cohort had the lowest proportion of people with higher education degrees; these proportions increased in the 70s-born cohort and again in the 80s-born cohort.

<sup>21</sup> The 16 were split as follows; 4 college qualifications, 6 secondary school qualifications, 4 vocational training and 2 diplomas of higher education.

example, a number of respondents specifically talked about their Black parent being more working class than their White parent; these participants had mixed *class*, as well as mixed *race* backgrounds. One example was that of an 80s-born respondent who, during the week, lived between his mother's and father's homes. The former was in an affluent suburb in the city and the latter in a deprived council estate on the periphery of the city. Taking all of these things into account, a clearer picture of the sample emerges. Although some participants had experienced social mobility, conclusively the sample was not overwhelmingly middle class, which is important given the earlier reflections on the class bias that is often prevalent in qualitative mixed race research. It is hoped that the equally balanced sample with reference to social class will help prioritise the voices of mixed people 'from working class and economically disadvantaged communities' (Caballero, 2004: 97).

All of the participants had come of age in Birmingham and the majority were born in the city, with the exception of two. One was 70s-born Assefa<sup>22</sup> who was born in Cambridge and moved to Birmingham in 1989 when he turned eighteen. The second was Amelia, who was born in London and moved to Birmingham just before starting secondary school. Just over half of the respondents were born in Birmingham and had never lived elsewhere. For those who had reported periods of living in different cities or abroad in adult life, all had returned to Birmingham on a permanent basis by the time of interview. Most respondents reported that they had lived in different areas in the city throughout their life course but for the purpose of the research, I only prompted them to narrate stories of their childhood neighbourhoods. The sample was drawn from a range of neighbourhoods in the city including but not limited to; Handsworth, Lee Bank, Sparkbrook, Moseley, Balsall Heath, Ladywood, Selly Oak, Hockley, Aston, Newtown, Northfield, Chelmsley Wood, Small Heath, and Nechells. As a result of this wide reach, the data allows for a comprehensive analysis of how mixed race identities intersect with neighbourhood identities across the city.

### **3.4 Conducting the interviews**

Before entering the field, I sought ethical approval from the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester. Once this was granted I began

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<sup>22</sup> This is a pseudonym; more detail on the anonymity of participants follows in the next section.

fieldwork in March 2015 and by September 2015 I had officially finished. In keeping with the University of Manchester, School of Social Sciences template for ethical student research with consenting adults, before each interview participants were sent a participation information sheet via email or post. This detailed the aims of the project, reminded them of their anonymity as participants, noted my contact details and informed them of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. I asked them once they had read the sheet to confirm their participation in the project and from there a venue for the interview was organised. Participants were always offered the opportunity to choose the location of the interview. Most opted to conduct the interview in their homes but some were carried out in public places such as cafes, libraries and foyers in public community spaces. The interviews conducted in homes offered less distraction and having the interview exchanges in their 'territory' and in 'familiar surroundings' facilitated conversation (Rhodes 1994: 549). I prefaced all of the interviews with a reminder that they would be tape recorded for my use only and informed participants that the tape could be stopped at any point. They were also reminded that their names and the names of other people that they mentioned in the interviews would be anonymised.<sup>23</sup> Interviews with the 80s-born cohort tended to be the shortest in length. The shortest interview lasted thirty minutes and the longest was two hours and twenty minutes. I kept a fieldwork diary as an audit trail and after each interview noted down my initial reflections on how I thought they had went, any significant conversations that took place when the tape was switched off, and any significant non-verbal exchanges that the tape could not pick up.

Generally the interviews flowed well, however there were some elements that could not be controlled for. For example the background noise in cafes and pubs was distracting. This sometimes broke up the flow of the conversation when utterances were asked to be repeated because they had been muffled under the noise or spoken in a low voice in order to maintain some privacy over what was being discussed. This lack of privacy was not unique to public locations however. Although participants' homes were the places where they tended to feel most relaxed and comfortable in relaying personal and intimate stories of their lives, on various occasions, the interviewee and I were not alone. I recall one interview with an 80s-born respondent whose mother intermittently entered the room and participated in the interview by answering my questions or correcting and expanding on her son's responses to me. By the

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<sup>23</sup> Neighbourhood names remained the same but all road names were changed.

end of the interview, he had seemingly lost confidence in his ability to answer the questions and at times even suggested I was 'better off' asking his mother as she would be able to recall the memories from his childhood better than he. At another point in the interview, his sister entered and asked what the reason for my presence was and I explained that I was conducting research on mixed race identity. She responded in jest, 'oh and how they don't have dads', before laughing and exiting the room. In another interview, a respondent's mother came into the room at the point when I had started questioning about her family; she did not leave for five minutes. Ironically the situation seemed to be most disconcerting for me as the interviewer rather than the interviewee. I felt some discomfort asking questions about her family when they were in the room. In both of these examples, the disruptions had negative implications for the interview process and limited the scope of data that might otherwise have been elicited.

For the first few interviews I had developed a questionnaire to gather demographic data on respondents' gender, age, occupation and education. Initially I asked respondents to fill out the short survey after we had met and introduced ourselves before starting the interview. Unfortunately, the use of the questionnaires proved to be ineffective. Firstly, it felt as though they heightened the hierarchy by serving as a metaphorical barrier that reinforced the dichotomy of the researcher and researched. The process of handing the respondent a form to fill out as I waited felt too clinical. Secondly, starting the interview with such a 'professional' interaction felt an unnatural way to help the respondents to relax and engage in a meaningful, honest discussion about their identity. After using the questionnaires with the first nine respondents, I discontinued their use and embedded questions which could be used as broad measures of social class within the interview schedules (regarding parents' occupations and participants' occupations and levels of education). The inclusion of these questions within the natural flow of conversation facilitated a more collaborative, non-hierarchical approach and proved effective in gathering the data needed (Oakley 1981). Another research strategy that was discontinued was the use of photographs as a tool to prompt memories. Having seen how photographs can be used as an effective way to elicit memories (Ali 2012), I anticipated they might serve as a valuable visual method in the interviews. In the first six interviews I asked respondents to bring in photographs but many forgot to do so. As I wanted to keep the method of data collection consistent, I eventually decided against their use. Furthermore, for those who did bring photographs in, they often did not stimulate conversation

in the way that I had hoped for and in some cases they hindered the process by breaking up conversations and taking the interviewees off topic.

As noted earlier, the interviews were semi-structured in order to maintain some consistency over the interviews (Corbin & Strauss 2015). There were clear themes I wanted to explore across all of the birth cohorts to allow me to effectively answer my proposed research questions. As a result, the interview schedules for all of the birth cohorts were almost identical with the exception of some additional prompt questions regarding cultural and political developments and popular culture that were unique to the period in question. Although the interview schedules guided the conversations, the semi-structured approach allowed participants to speak about developments and events that were significant to them, that had not been included in the schedule. This approach proved to be very useful to the research process. It consistently helped me further develop my questions and include new relevant themes to the interview schedules that I had not anticipated would be important.

Although the interview schedules for the three birth cohorts covered the same core topics, the order in which these were presented was subject to change dependent on how conversations developed. However as a general rule, all interviews were opened with the same questions about respondents' ages, whether they (and their parents) were born in Birmingham and which areas in Birmingham they had lived in over the years. It was anticipated that questions like these that prompted more fact-based answers would be quite straightforward for participants to respond to and would ease them into the interview process, as opposed to more abstract questions about their identity. The initial questions about place started with a discussion of their homes, then their neighbourhoods and then their movement outwards from the local, through the city. This approach made it easy for respondents to order their memories and proved to be an effective way to begin the conversation. The topics under focus in these initial questions relating to place, were mostly the micro-politics of the home, and issues to do with 'school, community and neighbourhood' (Amin 2012: 70). The questions queried who lived in their childhood home, how race was talked about in that space, how important their neighbourhood was in their overall identity, what social networks they had within the area and what social institutions they used. They were also asked about their perceptions of the more concrete demographic aspects of their neighbourhoods, such as the type of housing and the ethnic composition in the respective areas.

It was anticipated that memories of mundane everyday conversations about race in the home might have been more difficult for the older cohorts to draw on, as opposed to memories regarding the use of physical facilities like youth clubs in their local areas for example. In light of this, I chose to use television shows as a resource in the interviews with the oldest cohorts. This is because television can be a 'major agent in the production of... social memory' (Gray 2013: 79), and it has also been found to 'facilitate' conversation in the home (Lull 2014: 37). Further to this, during the 1960s through to the early 1980s it would likely have been one of only a few mass media outlets and thus a significant feature in the family home. Therefore, in the interviews with the oldest cohorts, I presented respondents with printed images of popular television programmes of the 1970s and 1980s that particularly dealt with issues of race (see Figure 3.2) to help prompt their memories. The handouts were reliably successful in prompting older respondents to reflect on how on-screen depictions prompted off-screen conversations within their families about race. The handouts also prompted respondents to recall other programmes that were a significant feature in their living rooms that I had not considered. The 1970s TV series *Roots*<sup>24</sup> for example, was frequently mentioned by the 60s-born and 70s-born respondents as a defining moment in the development of their racial consciousness during their youth. This show was subsequently added to the resource and proved to be a very useful prompt.

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<sup>24</sup> An American mini-series which told the story of a young 18<sup>th</sup> century African teenager called Kunta Kinte and his family, who were captured from West Africa and brought to America as slaves.



**Figure 3.2:** Some examples of the handouts with images from television shows that were presented to the 60s-born and 70s-born cohorts

Clockwise from top-left; *Mind Your Language* - 1977-79, 1986; *Love Thy Neighbour* - 1972-76; *The Fosters* - 1976-77 and *Here Come the Double Deckers* -1970-71

After questioning respondents about their experiences of the home and their local neighbourhoods, the following section of the interview schedule asked questions about ethnic identity. The fixed questions that were asked of all birth cohorts included queries about self-defined ethnicity, terminology, external categorisation, ethnic identity in relation to Black counterparts and difficulties in negotiating a mixed identity. A subset of questions were utilised to unpack how ethnic identities were performed in different spaces, subcultures, peer groups and in romantic relationships to help unpack the contingent, non-static nature of racialised identities and to ensure the research remained sensitive to the

'social and subjective processes of 'race-making' (Gunaratnam 2003: 110). For example, when asking the question regarding self-defined ethnicity, I would prompt respondents to talk about whether their self-identifications were the same in the school and home setting.

The additional prompt questions regarding ethnic identity were not identical across the three different birth cohorts. In order to unpack generational differences, questions were tailored to particular time periods. For the 60s-born cohort for example, I asked questions about political developments in the period in which they were coming of age. This included the rise of the National Front in the 1970s and the uprisings across the country in 1981 and in Handsworth, Birmingham in 1985 (Fryer 1984; Solomos et al. 1982). Questions about popular Black cultural youth styles of the 1970s and 1980s were also included to unpack whether the 60s and 70s-born cohorts' ethnic identities were informed by those. If yes, I asked further questions about ethnic identity performance within those particular spaces and vis-à-vis peer groups in those social networks. Again to help prompt memories, printed handouts with images of popular Black cultural styles and events of the 1970s and 1980s were presented during the interviews (see Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3:** Examples of the handouts with images of popular Black cultural styles and events of the 1970s and 1980s that were presented to the 60s-born and 70s-born birth cohorts

Clockwise from top-left; The first three images are taken from Clement Cooper's 1988 photo book, *Presence*, which documented the role of youth clubs and churches in Manchester's Black communities of Longsight and Moss Side. The final image is of the procession of Handsworth Carnival, Birmingham, 1989.

### 3.5 Analysing the interview data

The data being organised into three birth cohorts meant that the dataset was generally skewed. Because the eldest cohorts had the longest interviews, they produced the most data and it was sometimes difficult to negotiate this at the analysis stage and strike a good balance across cohorts. To ensure that I utilised the whole dataset equally I drew out key themes that featured across the groups, as well as the key themes unique to each of the social generations

in order to produce a succinct narrative out of all of the data, that effectively scrutinised change over time in addition to the more universal elements of the mixed race experience. As noted earlier, I scribed field notes after each interview. Once I exited the field, all interview tapes were transcribed and extensive handwritten notes were produced out of this initial listening process. This approach was effective in highlighting the recurrent broad themes and the accumulation of these notes informed the outline of the thesis. QSR International's NVivo 10 Software was used mainly as an effective way to manage and store the large dataset. Although it helped with the initial coding process to produce sub-themes under the broad themes, its usefulness reached a saturation point in that often it felt that the lifting and highlighting of quotes out of the transcripts and into folders in the software package stripped away some of the important context in which the comments were said. Therefore a substantial amount of the data was also manually coded to retain this context and make more meaningful links between themes and participants.

### **3.6 Some reflexive thoughts on the interview process**

#### **3.6.1 Issues of memory, narration and performance in the interviews**

Aside from practical issues that impacted the interview setting, it is also worth considering the problems that came with gathering data through memory and narrative. As noted in the previous sections, the interviews were semi-structured. This meant that although respondents were presented with examples of historical moments or popular culture and television that I anticipated would have been significant to them, they were also invited to fill the gaps with their own versions and understandings of events. On the one hand this helped produce rich personal narratives that enabled me to discern how the 'social histories' of Birmingham and Britain more generally mapped onto the respondents' 'personal histories' of these places (Ali 2012: 89, 90; Clark 2010). Through this data I was able to realise the extent of the impact of Rastafari on mixed race youth in the 1970s, locate where underground blues parties in the city took place, recognise how African American hip-hop impacted on Birmingham school discos in the late 1980s and unearth how Black youth cultures impacted on mixed race youths' social networks and mobility through the city. Further to this I was able to pinpoint major landmarks of reference

such as youth clubs and churches in the city which might otherwise appear insignificant on a map.

However, despite the unearthing of these detailed histories, I was also aware that memories are *made* and should 'be understood partly as performance' (Harries 2012: 49). By this I mean that memory and narrative have numerous functions and are not simply methods by which we extract observed truths or realities. And in thinking about the study of ethnicity in particular, it is important to be aware of the political weight that can often be intrinsically bound up with racial identifications (Kearney 2013). This is most definitely the case when racial identities have been a symbol of struggle or oppression, as in the case of Blackness, which was discussed at length in the interviews (hooks 1992; Hill Collins 2004; Sivanandan 1981). For example, how much might one's assertion of a Black identity in the interview, represent not only personal identity but also a political position and a statement of solidarity? Furthermore, what might be the impact of the negative political discourses that have been historically wedded to the category of mixed race (Christian 2008; Aspinall 2013) on how participants relate to it, or perform it in interviews? Being asked to speak about and recall past ethnic identifications, affiliations and allegiances might also have presented an opportunity for participants to negotiate their past and/or present vulnerabilities (Kearney 2013). In light of this I was sensitive to the fact that how participants talked about their ethnic identities throughout their lives, in hindsight, in the interview setting, might not always map directly onto how respondents have lived out their identities in their social worlds. These points are not made to suggest that the subjective making of memories produces false depictions of the past. Rather, they should be read as an acknowledgement of the fact that we are capable of biasing our memories for a number of reasons and in a number of ways (Schacter 2001: 9), and that there is always an element of 'fiction in the way that life stories' and memories are retold (Ali 2003: 29). In light of this, it was imperative that I remained reflective throughout the data collection about *methods* of memory making and not just the content of the memories themselves.

I also wanted to think about the *ways* in which respondents narrated their lives and not just the final narratives that they produced (Byrne 2003). This is because the act of narrating one's life is essentially a way of performing identity (Ricoeur 1990), a way of becoming something and someone. It is not simply a process of 'selecting events either from real life [or] from memory... and then placing them in an appropriate order' (Bruner 2003: 48). To be asked

about 'one's life is, to some extent, to be asked to give an account of one's self', and it was clear across the interviewing process that some 'selves' were not as easily 'reproduced through the life-story' as others (Byrne 2003: 30). In many of these cases it seemed that this was mostly the result of being inexperienced in giving accounts of oneself and having never been asked to narrate one's life story. These groups of respondents were not concerned with piecing together a coherent narrative for me. Others presented quite ordered accounts of their lives and themselves. These participants produced a narrative which seemed familiar to them and each part of their story appeared to have a more obvious 'function' in the complete, *overall* life histories that they presented (Bruner 2003). These participants seemed most able to draw on archives and anecdotes of their lives and piece them together into 'plotted' stories (Byrne 2003: 41) and it was clear that they felt they had stories that were worth telling, that needed to be told and were generally more vested in delivering a good interview. These kinds of storytellers tended to be participants who had engaged in discussions around race before, be it socially, in work, in study or with family, and they also tended to belong to the older cohorts in the sample. The depth of the 60s and 70s-born cohorts' narratives was evidenced by the fact that they tended to be the longest interviews.

In some ways, the reason for this pattern is perhaps quite obvious; the older participants had experienced more (overt) racism, and had seen more change in their identities having lived longer lives. This made the telling of narratives more urgent and also meant quite simply, that they had more to narrate. However what is also noteworthy is the fact that the older cohorts (as can be seen in the coming chapters) were very aware of and in-tune with historical Black struggles in post-1945 Britain. In light of this it is worth reflecting on how their narratives might have functioned as a method by which to preserve this past; they may have felt a particular type of 'ethical responsibility' in the retelling of these social histories through their own personal histories (Clark 2010). Thus the *function* of their narratives differed slightly from those in the 80s-born cohort. Indeed, at points it also seemed that the older cohorts felt a responsibility to 'pass on' stories of the past to me in particular as a younger person. In contrast to the interviews with the 80s-born cohort (who were a similar age to me), with the 60s and 70s-born cohorts, I had no ownership or first-hand knowledge of the pasts that they described. This created a particular rapport that left more space for events to be *explained* to me, rather than just

relayed.<sup>25</sup> Further to this we shared the same ethnic background. Therefore, in passing on the information they were not only giving me data for my research but also, in some sense, they were attempting to teach me things in a more intimate and personal way. In telling me about *their* history, in many ways they were also telling me about *my* history (more on the implications of my 'insider' position follows in the next section). The same cannot be said for the 80s-born cohorts who were my peers and did not have the same type of 'wisdom' to pass on. This notion of myself as 'audience' is also important in that it reveals my own influence on how the data was produced. The following section discusses in more depth, my own position in the interview exchanges.

In this section, the intention was to demonstrate the various elements that had implications for how the data in this thesis have been produced, be it where the interviews took place or be it more abstract questions about the processes involved in interviewing, memory making and storytelling. In light of this, the interviews themselves can also be regarded as 'topics' in the research (Byrne 2012: 212). The way that stories were communicated, the contradictions that sometimes surfaced and the way in which particular events were emphasised over others, are just some examples of how the interview process itself could sometimes serve as a rich source of data on the participants.

### **3.6.2 The implications of 'insider-led' research**

I have decided to write myself into the research for two reasons. Firstly, my perceived identity spoke to and contextualised some the data. Respondents often tried to use me as a reference point for their experiences in a myriad of ways, so much so that it warranted the use of a coding theme to record the interactions. Secondly, I have done so to respond to some of the questions raised by others in the field about 'insider-led' mixed race research and the implications of this for the type of data that are generated. For example, Caballero (2005, 2013) has drawn attention to the centrality of middle class, mixed race, female researchers in the second wave of literature on mixed race (Olumide 2002; Ali 2003; Song 2001; Ifekwunigwe 2004; Mahtani 2002; Zack

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<sup>25</sup> As can be seen at points in the following chapter, the older cohorts often made expressions of nostalgia when talking about the past. On reflection, this was a way in which to compare and contrast their experiences with that of the younger generations (to which I belong) and ultimately highlight key differences. For example, constructions of pastimes were often expressed through phrases such as, 'when I was young' or 'back in the day'. These replaced more concrete historical references to decades or years, and in turn glorified the periods of their youth and made them significant.

1993). She explains how they have played a significant role in re-writing a version of mixed race which has challenged the historical pathological narratives of mixedness that were too often constructed by those who were 'external' to the group (Stonequist 1935; Christian 2008).

As noted in the previous chapter, this contemporary work has pushed back against the derogatory rhetoric of earlier research, which is a development that has generally been welcomed in the field. However, Caballero (2013: 6) notes that some of the reflections by 'insiders', especially those that 'foreground... the importance of personal 'identity rights', that is the 'right' to identify – racially – as one chooses', have at times simultaneously prompted suspicion. Despite the fact that insider-led studies are 'sensitive to the complexities of the mixed race experience' (Caballero 2005: 21), calls have been made to reflect carefully on whether 'insider' researchers from a particular demographic, might feel urged to re-tell and represent *particular* types of narratives about mixedness (Mahtani 2009 in Caballero 2013: 6). Some of the earlier works have even been charged with erroneously presenting mixed race persons as an almost "arty", avant-garde, "new people" (Christian 2000: 5). Mahtani (2014: 61) has described this as a type of mixed race 'narcissism' on the part of researchers, who she suggests are also sometimes guilty of fetishising mixed race. Additionally, as was argued in the previous chapter, the suspicion around some of this (insider-led) second wave literature, arises out of their inability to critically contextualise individualised everyday experiences of mixedness within 'wider socio-historical and geographical constructions' (Caballero 2013: 6).

As alluded to at points in the previous chapters, this study is not driven by an agenda to re-write mixed race as a celebratory identity. Rather than dealing with questions of individual identity rights, it centres mixed race identities within the socio-political and spatial contexts in which they are formed. The topics of inquiry in the thesis deal frankly with the less glamorous and more troublesome aspects of mixed race realities, alongside the perceived privileges of such positions. It is in the more difficult conversations where the advantageous effects of being an 'insider' (i.e. being ethnically 'matched') were mostly realised. Much of the literature on racial matching in research however does rightly warn that ethnic identities are intersectional, and that 'racial sameness' alone should not be reified or be regarded as able to 'usurp all other social identities' such as gender, class, sexuality and disability in an interview setting (Carrington 2008: 429; Gunaratnam 2003). I agree with these arguments and recognise that my shared racial heritage with the participants

would not have carried as much weight if we had not matched on other criteria. Song and Parker (1995) have pressed for the 'cultural identities' of researchers and interviewees to be more fully accounted for in reflections on interviewer matching. Harries (2012: 78) usefully reminds us that the 'cultural identities' to which they refer, 'can be read in a number of different ways including personal appearance, language and dress'. It is these aspects of cultural sameness which facilitated further mutual understanding between us and gave me an element of credibility with interviewees. Using accent and dialect as a proxy for 'language', the 'brummie' accent that I shared with participants was indicative not only of a shared class background but of a shared local heritage. Further to this, our accents were additionally characterised by some Jamaican-derived words and participants (mostly the older cohorts) would sometimes switch to patois in our exchanges with the assumption I would be able to understand the dialect.

Writing on Black Britishness, Hesse (2000: 114) importantly reminds us that these identities have always been '*profoundly regionalised*' and enclosed by 'city-bounded' histories which produces another layer of connection beyond 'diasporic affinities'. This shared local knowledge and familiarity of accent provided the basis for relaxed interactions, especially when the topic of conversation turned to uncomfortable discussions, such as racism within the family or prejudice from Black peers. Whilst these factors were undoubtedly useful in creating rapport with respondents, I am not claiming that these alone gave me the ability to extract authentic accounts, neither am I attempting to carve out an authoritative position (Caballero 2013: 6). Instead I am arguing that at different points in the interviews my access to this 'cultural equipment' seemed beneficial to the interview process (Rhodes 1994: 549). This was evidenced through participants' comments such as, 'you know what I mean', which were attempts to cross-reference their experiences with mine. However in the same instance, this type of shared empathy between respondents and I also suggested to me that certain bits of information could be taken for granted in the exchanges, if participants assumed I had some kind of prior or shared knowledge about the mixed race experience (Bhopal 2010). I had to be acutely aware of when this might be occurring so that I could ensure that respondents explained to me extensively and in their own terms, the issues that they were thinking through. Furthermore, although these kinds of cross-reference comments were indicators of reciprocal trust, at times our matched characteristics simultaneously prompted intrigue, which sometimes slipped over into a type of cross examination. I was asked about the ethnicity of my parents

(most often which one was Black), if they were still together, what 'type' of people I dated, which terms I use to describe myself and in some interviews, participants compared aspects of their phenotype to mine, such as hair texture and skin tone. Although the questions about my identity were likely asked with the intention of getting information for the sake of it or to make small talk, undoubtedly, they were also asked as a form of self-evaluation and as a method by which to measure up their own mixed race experience against mine.

Although the oft-quoted Ann Oakley suggests that open, honest responses to interviewees' questions are a good way to promote 'intimacy' in interviews (1981: 49), I often answered the questions with short closed responses, as not to further reveal any other differences or similarities than those which had already been assumed. This is because I was aware that an element of 'distance' could also 'encourage disclosure' (Bhopal 2010: 188). Rhodes (1994: 551) has explained how distance and 'difference' between researcher and the researched can give way to a 'stranger value', that she argues can go some way in limiting the chance of certain information and knowledge being taken for granted. This position as a 'stranger' she also suggests, means that participants may feel 'less judged' than they might do if an 'insider' was asking the questions. In the sense that the insider might have more at stake and more involvement in the issue that is the topic of the conversation. Furthermore, where possible I wanted to limit the chances of respondents taking cues from details about myself and using them to tailor their answers accordingly. As alluded to in the previous section, interviews are only ever partial, 'sound-bites' of a person's life that have been edited and tailored for the interview exchange (Mahtani 2014: 94). With the inevitability of partial narratives as a starting point, it was important that I controlled the elements of the interview that I was able to, so not to further limit or bias the data that would be the final product. Finally, despite the various commonalities, there were also elements of disjuncture between us, meaning that ethnicity was not necessarily the sole 'social signifier' in the interviews (Twine 2000: 9). As noted throughout this section, aspects of sameness helped respondents open up about certain issues. However, generational differences meant that I was unable to anticipate the level of emotional upset some of these issues caused for the older cohorts. On two occasions the tape recording had to be stopped to allow participants to take a moment out. This was something I had never anticipated would happen, which on reflection is an inevitable result of my privileged position as a mixed race person who has come of age when mixedness has been increasingly

regarded as relatively a 'ordinary' and mundane social phenomenon (Ford et al. 2012; Aspinall 2015).

In light of these closing remarks, it is clear that mixed race researchers can provide familiar, comforting reflections, fostering reciprocal trust, whilst at the same time prompting self-assessments in participants that a perceived 'external' researcher might not. Further to this it is clear, as has been argued elsewhere, that researchers and the researched cannot ever be wholly 'matched' (Carrington 2008; Bhopal 2010; Song & Parker 1995; Rhodes 1994). The idea of 'matching' by race implies that racial identities are 'pure' and 'mono-cultural' (Gunaratnam 2003: 80) – an idea which should most definitely be eschewed from in the study of mixed race and hyphenated identities which 'trouble the binarism of racial and ethnic categories' (ibid: 81). In this section I wanted to present an honest discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of 'insider-led' research. In doing this I hope to have clearly highlighted the 'multiple positioning and (dis)identifications which shift during the interview process' (Song & Parker 1995: 254). Furthermore, it is argued that despite the limitations of 'race matching' arguments, in 'racially conscious' societies (Rhodes 1994: 458), perceived racial identities will likely have an impact on interview outcomes. However, rather than ponder over whether this provides racially 'matched' researchers with access to a 'single truth or reality' (Rhodes 1994: 458), I suggest that reflections on these elements of the interview situation in and of itself could instead be treated as a useful source of additional data, that contextualises and speaks to the initial data it seeks to produce.

### **3.6.3 Ethical and political considerations**

Issues relating to representation and interpretation were at the forefront of my mind when doing the analysis. Les Back and John Solomos (1993) have in the past presented their thoughts on the kinds of political and ethical dilemmas that face social scientists who engage in research on race and racism. My political dilemma was informed by previous ideas about mixed race that have preceded my work, that mark it as devious, tragic, oppressed and confused, or new, ascendant and attractive (Mahtani 2014; Caballero 2013; Aspinall 2015; Spencer 2004; Elam 2011). These stereotypes attached to mixed race, make it a vulnerable category on the one hand and an over-celebrated privileged one on the other.

Given the fact that I approached the data as an 'anti-racist researcher', rather than a 'value free academic' (Back and Solomos 1993: 179), the racisms which impact on the mixed experience were a key theme in the analysis. It was in dealing with and retelling the more pressing issues regarding mixedness where I was particularly worried about either being accused of bringing back the 'ghost of Muriel Fletcher'<sup>26</sup> (Nassy Brown 2005: 187-214), or being named as the kill-joy (Ahmed 2007) who reversed all of the hard work that those in the field that have done, through their challenging of the negative stereotypes of mixedness since the 1990s. The burden of representation and anxiety regarding how the work might be interpreted were only further compounded by my 'insider' position. Despite the fact that throughout the process I was always very conscious about interpreting respondents' stories as accurately and directly as possible, as an 'insider' I felt a 'suffocating sense of responsibility' to the participants at times (Ali 2006: 477), which made me worried about whether I was doing it as best I could. This burden was undoubtedly also heightened by the fact that to redress power imbalances and to keep an honest and open dialogue with participants, I let them know that they could access the final product once it was complete. I also informed them that they could keep in contact with me about how the research was progressing. This was done so as not to cut them off from the work that they were central to, at the moment the tape recorder stopped (Bhopal 2010). When thinking about if they were to read this work, questions about how I dealt with certain aspects of the data started to enter my mind. For example, in the few cases where respondents contradicted themselves in the interviews, I mostly tended to write about this as a finding, presenting it as an insight into the malleability and ambivalent nature of our identities and memories. On reflection, a better way to have dealt with these might have been to confront respondents in the interview and ask them to reflect on the reasons for the contradictions in their narratives.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the case, the overarching challenge in representing data is that the power almost always lies with the researcher (ibid; Harries 2012). By the end of the process, it is the researcher who maintains the power as the scribe of the story and as the editor of the final piece and this power is not easily

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<sup>26</sup> Muriel Fletcher was a graduate from the University of Liverpool's School of Social Science. She wrote the damning 'Fletcher Report' in 1930 that demonised Liverpool's 'half-caste' people and their families. The report was a part of the pseudoscientific studies of 'half-castes' in Britain's port towns and cities that were described in the previous chapter. The report had a significant part to play in the ongoing legacy of mixed race as a torn and confused identity. See Christian 2008 for further detail.

<sup>27</sup> Although, it is important to note that on some occasions I only recognised contradictions after the interview when listening to the recordings, and so in these cases, I could not have approached the issue in this way anyhow.

forfeited, making it mostly an unavoidable aspect of research (Song & Parker 1995; Ribbens 1989). It is what you do with that power and how you reflect on it that can have positive implications on the research that is produced (Oakley 1981; Gunaratnam 2003). In thinking about these issues it is all too clear that as Caballero (2013: 9) notes in her article about the *mixed emotions* that can arise from researching mixed race; the work produced can sometimes 'too easily move from the abstract to the academic to the personal'.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

This chapter has detailed the methodological approach used to gather the data that are presented in the forthcoming chapters. It has been argued that a focus on the experience of mixed race people in Britain's second largest major city, Birmingham, offers up an important opportunity to gain rich insights into the geographical variations of mixed race subjectivities. The life history, semi-structured approach to interviews with three different birth cohorts was the most effective method to explore one of the central questions of the thesis, that is, the implications of changing socio-political contexts on mixed race. The methods provided me with a profound insight into the specific social conditions in which participants' individual subjectivities were cultivated. In addition to being an effective tool by which to consider processes of change, the methods also allowed for an exploration of what remains stable in mixed race lives, despite the shifting circumstances different social generations may experience across changing social conditions.

Despite having this strong foundational approach to gathering the data, the chapter also presented some honest reflections on the inevitable pitfalls of eliciting data through narrative and memory to reflect on the realities of our subjectivities and how they are reproduced and made in the interview setting. It is hoped that in thinking about these issues, the chapter has shown that there will always be something slightly missing in the final product and acknowledgment of this has helped me to gain a better understanding of the final piece. It has been argued that the advantages of my 'insider-led' position most definitely helped the data collection but that these advantages were not necessarily always straightforward 'gains' and at times were difficult to negotiate. With all of these discussions in mind, the following three chapters detail the key empirical findings of the thesis.

## 4 The Making of Mixed Race in Place

### 4.1 Introduction

As noted in previous chapters, earlier work on mixed race has failed to critically contextualise mixed race identities within the periods and places in which they are formed (Mahtani 2014). This thesis conceptualises 'contexts' in both spatial and temporal terms. Taking the former as a framework, this chapter starts the process of incorporating Britain's second city, Birmingham, into the historical narrative of mixing in the UK. The intention is to situate mixed race identities within the thick material context of the city, rather than present a descriptive analysis of where mixed race people live or where mixed relationships occur, as has been done elsewhere (Caballero et al 2008; Holloway et al 2005; Smith et al 2011). Although the latter approach is adopted in this chapter to initially present context on the city, it does not dominate, as generally this approach treats place as 'merely a setting or backdrop' (Gieryn. F, 2000: 466), that is lived in, rather than lived *through*. This relegation of place in the study of mixed race is evident in other research studies where the mention of place features as a side note in the findings section (Song & Aspinall 2012; Song 2010b; Aspinall & Song 2013a; Tizard & Phoenix 1993), cautioning the reader that the impact of this variable is most likely significant for identity outcomes, without a developed discussion of how or why.

Where it does feature more significantly, literature has usefully highlighted the impact that the social class or ethnic diversity of an area can have on mixed race identity development. Wilson (1987), for example, found that mixed race children in multiethnic neighbourhoods were more likely to view their identity positively than children in predominantly White areas. High levels of diversity in the local neighbourhood have also been found to be important to parents who are bringing up mixed race children (Caballero et al, 2008: 11). On a grander scale, measures of geography have been expanded to take account of national contextual effects on the production of mixed race identity (Caballero 2005; Joseph-Salisbury 2016; Mitchell 2013; King-O'Riain et al 2014). In the Canadian context, Mahtani (2014) has called for mixed race studies to recognise Canada's colonial history as a White settler state, in order to better contextualise how contemporary mixed race immigrant populations are articulating their identities in the country and how these might differ from the

identifications of Canada's *indigenous* mixed identities. Reflecting on some of her earlier research, she has noted (ibid: 47) that respondents did not embed themselves in that story of Canadian history and failed to recognise the impact of it on discourses regarding multiraciality and also on their conceptualisations of their own mixedness. Instead, many talked about their day to day encounters and experiences and described Canada as a 'multicultural... liberal, democratic state' (ibid). She argues that relying solely on qualitative interviewing as a data collection method is a methodological flaw in mixed race studies, as they facilitate respondents in talking primarily about day-to-day experiences. In light of this, she suggests that theorists should marry participant narratives to national contexts even if 'our empirical material might not necessarily tell this story' (ibid: 47). Whilst this thesis recognises the importance of this in its theoretical approach, this chapter does not seek to force the features of the context *into* the narratives if these are not referenced and do not explicitly arise from the empirical data. Whilst it is imperative to explain the geographical characteristics and geopolitical histories of places (which this chapter does go on to briefly do) to help better contextualise and understand the narratives presented, the chapter is mostly concerned with critically exploring how and when these are referenced and rendered significant, *strategically* forgotten or simply not remembered in the telling of one's story (Ali 2012b).

Rather than adopting a place-based ethnography, the chapter explores how place constitutes mixed race subjects through an analysis of the ways in which respondents use place as a means to talk about their identities in raced, classed and gendered terms. Therefore the data and accounts of place that are presented should not necessarily only be read as a series of facts about the city. The accounts should be considered as evidence for how place is used as a tool to construct, understand and perform mixed race identities. For example, John Clayton (2008: 258) exemplifies how people living in diverse cities 'code' different areas in 'racial terms' to make sense of that diversity and to 'fix' their own identity in relation to other people in other areas. It is these kinds of attachments and personal investments in place, as it pertains to one's own identity making, that are central concepts for this chapter (Alexander 2011: 218). Concomitantly, it is argued that place is not a tool, device nor reference point that mixed race subjects have complete agency over, in helping them facilitate their processes of identity formation. Places too, are racialised, gendered and classed (Massey 1994). A pertinent example of how 'race is attached to territory' (Knowles 2003: 79), is through negative representations

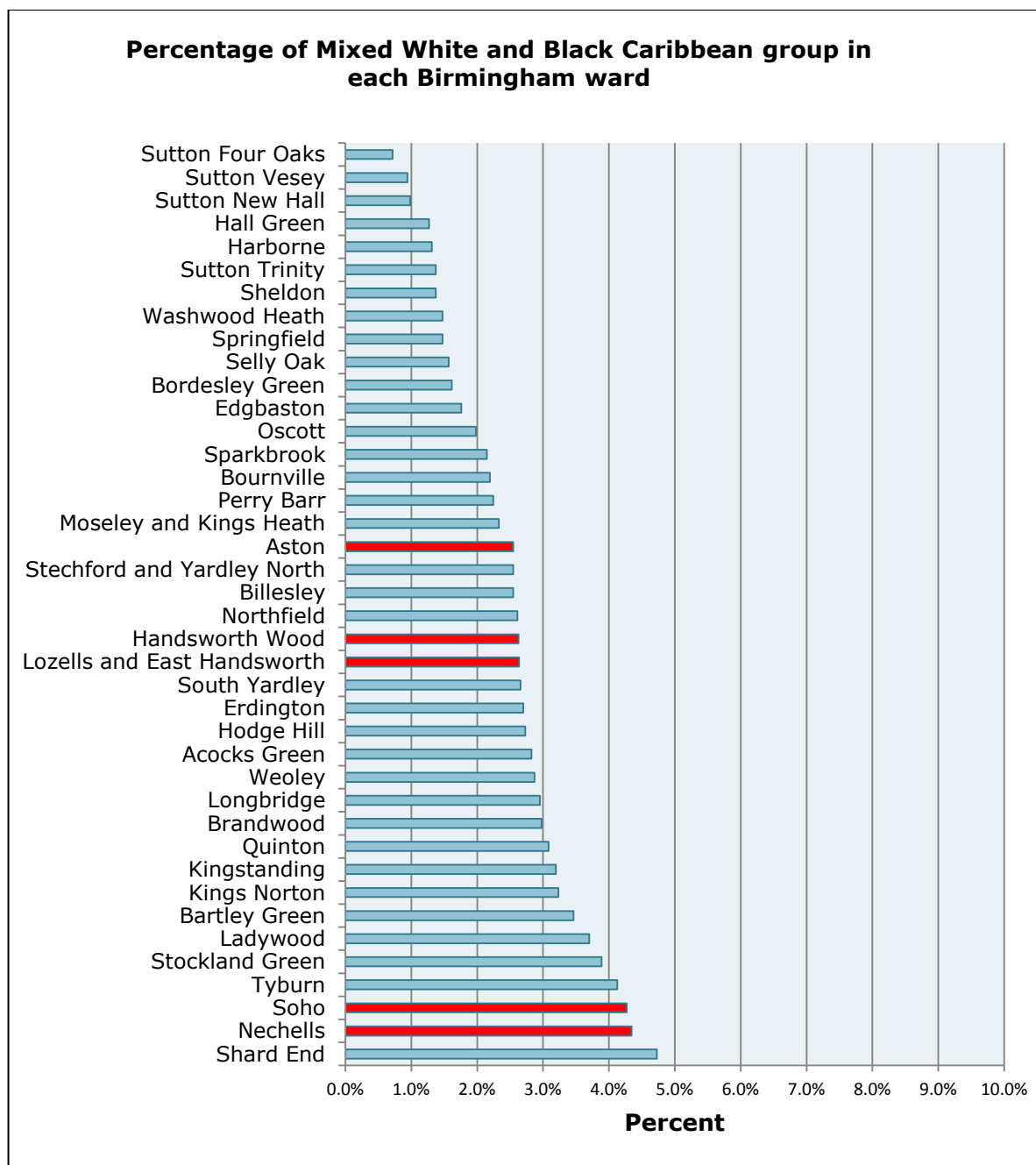
of racialised inner city zones, as messy, isolated, crime-ridden places (Burgess 1985). Signifiers such as these, mark the bodies of those who pass through, or are born into these imagined spaces. Thus, the chapter is also interested in how people come to be 'pinned down' in places (Tonkiss 2005: 45), and may be faced with the double burden of being *spatially* as well as *racially* labelled. In the coming chapter, the central argument that is advanced purports that 'a politics of identity is intrinsically a politics of location' (Mahtani, 2002: 480) and that place has much agency and power, in that it plays a significant role in organising social life and identities (Gieryn. F, 2000: 466).

The chapter begins by presenting some data on the patterns of mixed race residency in the city over time to provide some historical context. It starts at the contemporary period using census data that is available and works backwards, using existing qualitative data on the city (Flett et al. 1979; Back & Solomos 1992; Moore 2011; Rex et al. 1977) and the narratives of respondents in all three birth cohorts to fill the historical gaps for which quantitative data are not available, in an attempt to construct a more complete history of mixed race in the city. The chapter goes on to explore how these local areas and other locations in the city have been experienced by mixed race people. It does this by exploring the various locations that exist within different levels of the city to unpack how city identities are multilayered. To present this data coherently, the chapter is organised in a structure that mirrors participants' typical spatial trajectories, which generally begin in the private space of the home, and then out into the external spaces of their street, local neighbourhood and beyond.

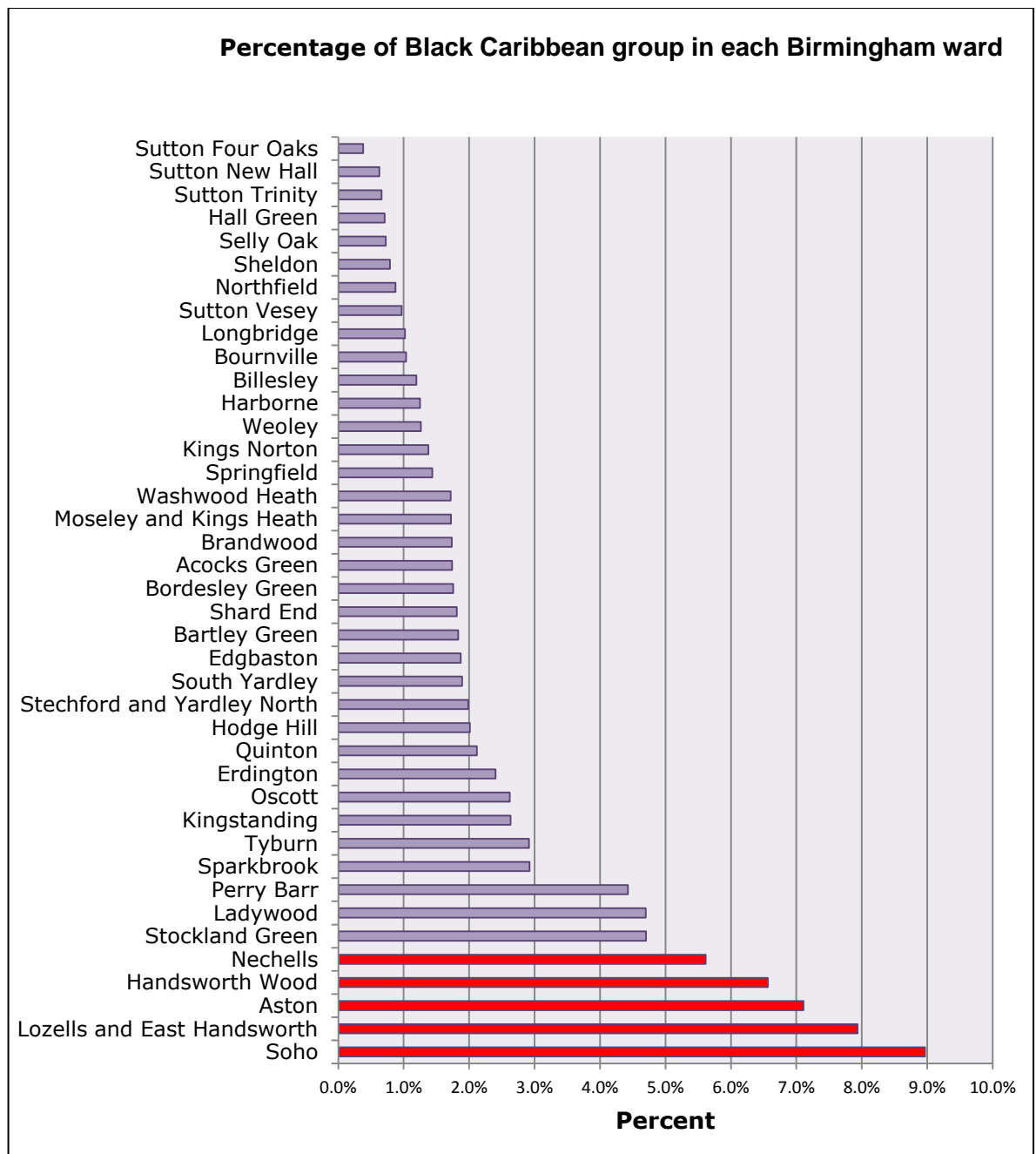
The analysis of the home borrows and expands on Twine's (2004) concept of racial literacy to unpack the (in)significance and presence (or absence) of objects, symbols and conversations regarding race in the home. In the analysis of local neighbourhoods I use participant narratives to critically explore how the populations, social institutions and geographic locations of the areas simultaneously constitute mixed race subjectivities; a standalone section on the experience of schooling is also presented. The findings are therefore organised through these key themes but cohort-specific experiences of these spaces are noted when necessary to highlight changing and/or similar experiences of place over time. The significance of change over time is dealt with more comprehensively in chapter five, which thoroughly explores generational effects on mixed race identity construction.

## **4.2 Setting the context: mixed race in Birmingham**

Building on the previous chapter that introduced some demographics on mixed race in Birmingham, this section moves on to describe these in greater detail. Contemporary census data on the city provides a useful starting point to reveal what is known about the current residential patterns of the Mixed White and Black Caribbean mixed race population in Birmingham. Figure 4.1 indicates that in 2011 Shard End and Nechells were the top two wards with the highest percentage of the mixed race population. At first glance, Shard End seems an unlikely area to have the highest proportion of mixed race residents as it is mostly a White area with few ethnic minority groups generally. However on closer inspection of the data, generally the Black mixed race population's residency patterns do not mirror those of their respective minority counterparts. Just 4,060 (or 16.3%) of the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group are located in the five wards with highest concentrations of the Black Caribbean population (marked out in red on each graph - Figures 4.1 and 4.2), compared to 36% of the Black Caribbean group. Furthermore, unlike the Black Caribbean group, the mixed race population is more dispersed throughout the city and not as highly concentrated in specific wards.



**Figure 4.1:** Percentage of Mixed White and Black Caribbean group in each Birmingham ward, census 2011



**Figure 4.2:** Percentage of Black Caribbean group in each Birmingham Ward,  
census 2011

It is difficult to provide an extensive historical overview of mixed race residency in the city due to the lack of historical quantitative data containing detail on mixed ethnicity, particularly pre-2001. Nevertheless, an exploration of historical qualitative data on the city and the narratives of participants go some way in explaining mixed race historical geographical trajectories, and how these may have formed the contemporary patterns of residency presented above. The

next section begins this task by presenting information on some of the developments in housing that occurred in the city in the post-war period. This discussion reveals how historical processes influenced past and present patterns of Black Caribbean residency in the particular areas that are shown in Figure 4.2. The focus on the historical settlement patterns of the burgeoning Black Caribbean migrant population in the city in the post-war period concomitantly highlights where opportunities for mixing with White residents and starting mixed race families were most prevalent.

### **4.3 Historical Black residency and mixed race trajectories – exploring the foundations and filling the gaps**

In addition to major in-migration to Birmingham in the initial post-war period, 'massive slum clearance... in the inner parts of the city' was being undertaken (Moore 2011: 5). This reconstruction of the city was a response to the severe war-time bombing that many of the inner city districts suffered and was also part of a broader ongoing project to demolish the unhealthy, dangerous housing that still stood near the city centre (Chinn 2015). Many of these deteriorated pre-1919 and war-damaged houses that were designated for demolition had been privately owned. The City Council was responsible for their replacement; consequently many of the new builds were council houses (Rex & Moore 1967) and many of these were built on the periphery of the city in the 1960s. During this period, discriminatory housing policy enforced a five-year waiting period for social housing and as a result many of the new council houses were largely denied to new arrivals – and especially to 'coloured' immigrants (Rex & Tomlinson 1979). According to Rex and Moore's (1967) seminal text, the accumulative effect of major in-migration but no housing to meet the needs of these new populations, was the growth of a distinct type of housing market in the city. Separate to the labour market where many people (immigrant or otherwise) enjoyed high levels of employment, the issue of housing, they argued, had become an 'autonomous field of conflict' (Moore 2011: 6). Rex and Moore (1967) used the concept of 'housing classes' to understand these processes and the differential positions in relation to the housing market in the city. The migrants in the city had the least bargaining power in relation to the 'means of housing' (Moore 2011: 5) and thus occupied a lower social housing class.

With limited access to the new housing provisions on the outskirts of the city, migrants instead sought out housing near the city centre; initially in 'red-brick terraces being held by the city council for demolition or others that had not yet been designated for slum clearance' that were cheap to rent, in neighbourhoods such as Balsall Heath (Moore 2011: 5). Others turned to 'the net-beneath-the-net of the housing system' (Rex & Tomlinson 1979: 123) and found residence in large dwellings 'broken up into rented rooms', otherwise known as lodging houses, located just outside the inner ring of terraced housing (Moore 2011: 8). Houses of this type were located in places such as Handsworth, Aston, Small Heath (partially located in the Nechells ward), Lozells and Sparkbrook.<sup>28</sup> Often, it was single male immigrants who ended up in these single rooms to rent. The physical clustering together of migrants in this way would eventually come to create 'ethnic enclaves' in the city (Tonkiss 2005: 44) and have implications for how certain parts of the city came to be regarded as raced spaces for many years to come. Many of the 60s born respondents reported growing up in those areas with histories of Black Caribbean settlement. In the excerpt below, Isabelle (49) told me she was born in one of the lodging houses in Handsworth in the 1960s. The passage indicates that Isabelle's White mother found herself in residential circumstances similar to that of Black Caribbean migrants. Despite being a single English (White) mother, her mixed race children were visible indicators of her association with a 'coloured immigrant' and thus, in this instance, her ethnicity was unable to afford her the privilege of obtaining anything other than the lodging house.

So my mom had her [Isabelle's sister] at the time, erm, I was born on Brownhill Rd in Handsworth. My mom had a room there. Yeah [...] so basically, yeah, she couldn't get accommodation anywhere else, only Handsworth really and it was only Asians that would erm... rent a room to her. [Isabelle, 49]

In Gail Lewis' (2009: 9) autobiographical material she poignantly recalls her mother's continuous reminders to her that she 'never stopped paying' the price for having Black mixed race children. In the piece she lists the many consequences her White mother faced because of '*Birthing Racial Difference*' (ibid). The example above represents one of the consequences Isabelle's mother was faced with. The denial of material resources such as housing because of racial discrimination in public housing, estate agencies and by private landlords

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<sup>28</sup> See Figure 4.2 for an indicator of how these residential patterns have mostly continued for the Black Caribbean population in the city.

was commonplace, and mixed race families headed by White mothers were not spared. Dennis Marsden's 1969 study (in Edwards & Caballero 2011: 533) on the experiences of lone mothers and children on state benefits in the mid-1960s, found that lone mothers with mixed ethnicity children were likely to experience 'overt institutional prejudice'. He specifically noted the role that 'officials at the National Assistance Board' had in acting on this prejudice (ibid). Another 60s-born participant Diane, 52, also told me that her parents lived in rooms shortly before she was born.

Back then we lived in rooms [...] when dad first come [...] that's how they lived [...] late fifties, early sixties and erm they had a shared kitchen and dad would be at work and mom weren't allowed to go and cook in the kitchen [the other occupants] give her real grief and then dad would come home and then dad would have to step in. [Diane, 52]

Diane does not explain why her (White) mother was the recipient of such 'grief'. However, the excerpt hints at two possibilities. The first is that the macro-politics of race relations penetrated the walls of the migrant lodging houses and influenced the micro-politics within them. Thus, even within the boundaries of what might have been considered safe refuges, protected from external racist hostility and prejudice, mixed race relationships were frowned upon, making mixed relationships precarious amongst both the oppressor and the oppressed. The second likely factor is that the majority of the early post-war migrants had been male. They outnumbered women by quite some margin and this demographic pattern remained almost consistent during the peak migration years from 1952 through to 1962 (Foner 2008: 6; Deakin 1970; Byron & Condon 2008). Therefore during this period, migrant lodging houses were likely to be gendered spaces, with mostly male occupants, which may have constrained women's access to, or ownership of, that space. By the time Diane was born, her parents had moved to Balsall Heath, one of the inner city areas designated for slum clearance, again mirroring the general movement of Black Caribbean migrants during the period. Her vague memory of playing in 'bomb pecks'<sup>29</sup> in the area indicates the state of neglect it was in and the ongoing legacy of the war time bombing in the city; others of her generation had similar memories.

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<sup>29</sup> Old bomb sites, bomb craters, debris or derelict buildings left over from WWII bombing, which often became adventure playgrounds for children in the many years that followed.

I keep seeing, this little girl and she's playing on what looked like a bomb peck and other kids are playing, families are sitting outside and we're just on this like, what I know now to be a bomb peck [...] lots of erm buildings weren't quite built [...] I reckon that that was to do with the war and things not being redeveloped erm as quickly as we might [...] now. [Diane, 52]

By the 1970s there had been numerous developments in relation to housing in the city. Lodging houses had been deemed a public health risk, houses that were scheduled for demolition and redevelopment were instead subject to 'improvement programs' and the waiting list for houses reduced from five years to two (Rex et al. 1977: 123). Further to this, new policies of dispersal were put in place in 1969 to prevent high concentrations of 'coloured tenants' on housing estates in the city (Flett et al. 1979). The end aim of the policy was essentially to achieve the dispersal of the Black population 'from the inner-city ghettos' (Flett et al. 1979: 293). Conversations regarding housing in the interviews with the 70s-born participants suggest that they felt there was some degree of dispersal of non-white residents across the city during the 1970s that continued on into the 1980s, and they particularly discuss the dispersal of mixed race families, including their own. However, none of the participants attributed this perceived dispersal to the city-wide policy that had been in place.

Interestingly, the common perception that emerges from the accounts of the 70s-born respondents is that there were burgeoning *mixed race* communities in particular (rather than Black or other ethnic minority populations) that were forming in historically White areas of the city in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The general residential cross-cohort patterns that arise from the data seem to support these accounts. In total, half of the 70s-born participants reported they had grown up in predominantly white areas, compared to just one of the 60s-born participants. Also, it is worth noting that this 60s-born participant, Robert, was born in December 1969, making him the youngest in his cohort. Robert's account is included amongst the testimonies of the 70s-born participants below because his story within this discussion on housing signifies the beginning of a broad shift in residency patterns across the three birth cohorts. Excepting Robert, examples below are taken from 70s-born respondents who were either born in, or moved to, traditionally White areas of the city as children.

Robert, 45, moved to Chelmsley Wood from Small Heath in 1978 with his

mother, father and sister when he was nine years old. The former neighbourhood is an example of an overspill archetypal White council estate built new on the periphery of the city in the 1960s that would previously have been denied to immigrants. It was 'a popular zone for 'white flight' in the post-war years' (Nayak 1999: 156; Cashmore 1987). The latter neighbourhood was, and still is, an ethnically diverse area where many migrants from the New Commonwealth historically settled (Dudrah 2002). Robert explained that he was 'the oldest mixed race person around [Chelmsley Wood]', and told me that 'there weren't really blacks and stuff like that'. His perception that he was the 'oldest' at just nine years old suggests that the mixed race population there at that period was young, and thus represented a relatively new demographic on the estate. An account from Anthony (born 1979) suggests the same; he distinctly recalled there being other mixed children in his primary school but 'no Black children'. In contemplating the large presence of mixed race populations in traditionally White areas of the city like Chelmsley Wood, he referenced stories he had heard from his father. He had told Anthony that Black men from his 'generation' would risk being chased by 'NFs' and 'teddy boys' by travelling to places like Chelmsley Wood because they were 'interested in White women'. This idea that there were incidences of non-cohabiting mixed relationships across localities in the city mirrors 40-year-old Bradley's story about growing up in (the predominantly White area) Selly Oak with his White mother (who was born in the area) through the 1980s. He explains that there were a number of single parent mixed race families in the area headed by White women, and suggests that the fathers of the children would come to visit them from other areas in the city.

[Selly Oak] was predominantly [...] a council estate. Erm predominantly White, a few mixed families there. I lived in a little avenue, so there was like... there was a woman who lived in there with her mixed race son [...] yeah [...] there was probably like [...] two mixed race boys around by me. No full Black people nah [...] they was all mixed race, all living with their mom. And then like the dads would come around whenever.

[Bradley, 40]

This qualitative data goes some way in illustrating the residential patterns of mixed race families through the city over time, during the periods for which previously, there have been no available quantitative data. Further to this, the narratives speak to the broader changes in patterns of ethnicity and housing that have taken place in Birmingham historically. The emergence of a 'small

ethnic presence' (Cashmore 1987: 5) in places like Chelmsley Wood in the 1980s occurred when these areas were simultaneously experiencing social and economic decline. Homes located in these types of areas on the periphery of the city that were previously regarded as the most desirable and prestigious places to live in the 1960s (Nayak 1999), by the 1970s onwards had become 'characterised by relatively high rates of unemployment, physical decline and social residualisation' (Moore, 2011: 10). They were decreasingly regarded as sought after White sanctuaries set apart from the deprived rings of the inner city and therefore became much easier to access. Furthermore, the dispersal policy that had begun in 1969 reached its peak by 1974 (Flett et al. 1979). Therefore by the mid-1970s, Black 'suburban migration' was on the increase, but often these residential patterns were a result of 'constraint rather than choice', just as they had been in the decades before (Flett et al. 1979: 305). It became evident that racist housing policy continued to impact on ethnic minorities' residential choices even after the amended Race Relations Act in 1968 that made discrimination in housing unlawful (Moore 2011). Furthermore, like Isabelle's mother in the 1960s, these discriminatory policies did not spare White women with Black partners. The single discriminatory case that eventually led to the suspension of the dispersal policy in 1975 was that of a White Irish woman, who had been allocated a 'White-designated' property. The offer was subsequently withdrawn once it came to light that she had a Jamaican husband (Flett et al. 1979).

By utilising existing historical literature and qualitative interview accounts, this section has explored the residential patterns of mixed race families through the city over time. The childhood residency patterns of the 60s-born cohort appeared to mirror those of the Black Caribbean migrant populations in the city in the post-war period. The narratives of the 70s-born participants suggest that during the 1970s, mixed populations were also living in more traditionally 'White' areas throughout the city, again mirroring historical data which suggests increased minority presence in these areas over time (Cashmore 1987; Nayak 1999). The 2011 census data on mixed race residential patterns in Birmingham presented earlier on in the chapter, suggests this trend might have continued in the contemporary period (see Figure 4.1). After exploring the residential patterns across the sample, the following section unpacks how race was negotiated within their homes, in these neighbourhoods.

## 4.4 Talking race in the home

Within the home, as children and young adults, lessons around dining, bedtime, playtime and homework are learnt, as well as more abstract concepts of identity. Although at times homes can become semi-public spaces when they are entered by persons who are not the fulltime occupiers,<sup>30</sup> this section considers the private familial aspects of the home. It specifically questions how in conversations and interactions with family, ideas around ethnicity, identity and racism present themselves in the home. It explores how the home serves as an initial 'fixed point of reference' for ethnic identity making (Douglas Porteous 1976: 390), and as a space where children are socialised into learning how to see and deal with racisms and prejudice (Ward 1996). Throughout, this section borrows Twine's (2004) concept of racial literacy as a framework.

Drawing on some of her empirical research with 102 members of Black/White inter-ethnic families in England, Twine (ibid: 882) defines racial literacy as a set of practices that White parents engage in, with the explicit aim of providing '[their mixed] children of African Caribbean ancestry with resources that assist them in countering everyday racism'. For Twine (2004), racial literacy is the accumulation of specific practices that are *consciously* anti-racist, that are performed by *White* parents, often with the aim of encouraging a Black identity over a mixed one (ibid: 901). In her study, these practices varied and included the parental provision of educational books, anti-racist home interiors (including material objects such as African-inspired art/furniture) and the facilitation of child (or young person) involvement in Black social institutions and social networks. This original conceptualisation of racial literacy is expanded on in various ways in the upcoming section. Firstly, it analyses the concept solely through the standpoint of the mixed race child or young person. It also explores why some mixed race homes might *lack* racial literacy. Further to this, it critically unpacks the role of Black parents in the transference of racial literacy to test the assumption that this is naturally provided by virtue of their Blackness, and to momentarily shift the focus away from the White parenting of mixed race children (Caballero et al. 2008; Harman 2013; McKenzie 2013; Barn 1999).

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<sup>30</sup> Here I am referring to general visits by family friends, plumbers, electricians etc. However, I can recall one participant from the 60s-born cohort who told me that his house was frequented by 'West Indians' when he was a young boy because his father was a barber, and used the space to cut people's hair because there was a distinct lack of Black barbershops during the period.

Finally, it dismantles practices of racial literacy into three types: explicit, implicit and non-familial. Twine's (2004) conceptualisation specifically unpacks how *explicit* anti-racist racial literacy that is transferred by White parents is broached in a way that is clearly meant to teach anti-racism, survival mechanisms and heritage. In addition to exploring these explicit forms, the discussion unpacks implicit racial literacy practices to consider the ways in which this type of identity education might also be unintentionally transferred from parents and guardians to their children. By juxtaposing the two, it offers a more nuanced understanding of how different manifestations of racial literacy shape the thinking of mixed race people. Non-familial racial literacy makes reference to the transference of knowledge and education through non-parental mediums inside the territory of the home. It considers the extent to which these types of racial literacy might just as effectively do the important work of teaching mixed race youth significant lessons about their ethnic identity. This final analysis then moves the discussion forward towards the negotiation of public spaces and territories outside of the boundary of the home, with a specific focus on schools.

#### **4.4.1 Explicit and implicit forms of racial literacy in the home**

Why should you be able to walk in somebody's house necessarily... and know the culture of somebody who lives there by the basis of the pictures that they've got on the wall? Because actually I don't need pictures of *anything* other than what I like on my walls [...] I don't feel that I need to have things that are particularly Black or African on display, for me to feel that this is a Black woman's home. It's a Black woman's home because I live here. [Martina, 49]

I use 49-year-old Martina's quote above to begin this section as a provocative strategy. Her rhetorical question queries the function and purpose of a particular type of racial literacy within the home. This was her response to a question I asked about whether her White mother (who she lived with alone as a child) put things in the home to reflect her heritage. Her answer should be kept in mind as the section unfolds.

The examples of *explicit* forms of racial literacy in the data are reminiscent of Twine's (2004: 901) original conceptualisation of the term. To prompt this discussion, I asked questions such as, 'do you think your parents ever actively put things in the home to represent your heritage?' Or 'did you ever have

conversations about race or ethnicity in your home?’ In the examples that follow, racial literacy is used to educate and we also see the labour that Black parents engaged in. The findings are only slightly different from Twine’s (2004), in that the parents in these examples do *not* appear to encourage a ‘Black’ identity that is in place of or *discourages* a mixed race identity. The data that chime with Twine’s (ibid) findings relate to class. She found that class had implications for how racial literacy was performed. For example, middle-class parents were able to take children on holidays to destinations that were significant to their children’s heritage; working class parents on the other hand tended to reside in multiethnic neighbourhoods, relying on local shops and familial networks to obtain objects that ‘reflected black images’ (ibid: 894). Akin to those findings, in these examples the conduits through which racial literacy was transferred were starkly different for middle class and working class participants. Eighties-born Matthew grew up with his White mother, who he lived with alone full time until the age of thirteen, when he began living with his father. Matthew described his mother, a teacher, as ‘a very educated, liberal woman’. When he was a young boy, she brought her teaching skills into the home. Through informal home schooling, she provided him with knowledge of Black history and art, whilst simultaneously encouraging the embrace of his nuanced Black *mixed* identity.

I’ve only just realised in the past [...] five years [...] how much [...] she made a conscious effort that I would... understand and embrace... my ethnic diversity, my mixed race... and I thank her for that. She would [...] encourage me to read poets such as Benjamin Zephaniah [...] she was really hot on me only identifying as mixed race and not as Black, not as White but being mixed race and really embracing that. She would [...] positively enforce notions of the erm... Black element of my culture because obviously I didn’t live with my father for my childhood.

[...] she educated me on slavery and erm, even pre-slavery when Black people were potentially free and kings, queens, living in a civilised situation erm... and had a lot of technology. See, she made me aware of these things. [Matthew, 26]

Darius’ parents had similar strategies of racial literacy which included the celebration of both a Black and mixed race identity. Also from the 80s-born cohort, 30-year-old Darius lived in his White mother’s home after she and his father broke up when he was ‘one or two’ years old. Following the separation

he continued to have regular contact with his father. His mother was a teacher who later became a university lecturer; his father previously worked for the Home Office and at the time of interview, undertook community development work.

My dad still gives me cards [...] he'll make sure there's Black people [...] on the card and he always used to say to me when I was little [...] 'look at these cards, they don't have Black people on them' [...] like it was that kind of thing everyday – buying a birthday card – maybe that would be how they'd broach it. Otherwise sometimes maybe they'd buy me a book [...] I remember a book I had about ... elephants and Black elephants fighting the White elephants and then them mating and having like grey elephants and that kind of thing. [Darius, 30]

The literary and historical forms of Black representation above were used as methods to help Darius and Matthew articulate the complicated contours of mixed identity. They served as anti-racist, political tools to direct Darius' and Matthew's moral compasses, by making them conscious of social injustices, racial inequalities and difference. For 70s-born Malcolm below, social *injustice* and racial inequality appeared to be more of an immediate issue in his life that he needed to be aware of for survival. The warnings from his mother regarding police racism seemed to be used as a method to help Malcolm articulate the complicated methods of *Black* survival. Her conversations, or racial literacy, were less to do with his mixed *identity* (as in the examples above) and more to do with racism. Malcolm described his mother as 'the most qualified unqualified person in the world', and told me, 'she fed all of us by cleaning people's shit basically'. His father offered no form of economic or childcare contribution. Lessons regarding race in this example illuminate the vulnerabilities that arise from being located in a working class, multi-ethnic neighbourhood, like Sparkbrook, as a mixed race youth.

She used to say to me: 'In this house, you are Malcolm, your colour doesn't make a difference [...] but once you walk out that front door, your colour will be the discerning factor which you will be judged by, so when you're with a group of White friends or are involved in something and the police come, they're going to pick you out, because you stand out', and my mom taught us this from when we were very, very young. [Malcolm, 42]

Aside from his mother's warnings about police racism, Malcolm felt that generally the lessons he received from his mother were transferred to him in quite subtle ways. These types of lessons I refer to as *implicit* forms of racial literacy and the remainder of this section presents some examples of these. They are distinguishable from explicit forms because participants perceived that these types of markers and cues in the home were not there as the result of *conscious* efforts by their parents to educate and guide them on the topic of race, anti-racism or ethnic identity.

I would say whatever cultural markers that existed in our house were not done as an intentional means to support, educate, guide, influence [...] my mom as a young White girl and her own experiences of her own family, had far more affinity with the Black community, she'd had far more love from them, far more support from them [...] it was... I think non-intentional on my mom's side definitely [...] I don't think she ever did it on purpose [...] she never cooked rice and peas as a point to be like well because the kids are mixed race, I should learn how to make rice and peas because it's gonna help... it was never like that. I never felt corny for one second growing up, or that something was done just intentionally [...] I think if she tried to, she would have messed it up [...] that's what I think people do [but] in trying to you end up ballsing things up, so my mom's never tried – or I don't ever see that she did – she just did it [...] I wasn't being force fed cow foot and butter beans and [...] dem tings deh. I didn't go through that. [Malcolm, 42]

By cooking Caribbean foods his mother passed on knowledge to Malcolm about his Caribbean heritage. However, he did not perceive this as the result of any conscious decision-making regarding her parenting but instead, as a consequence of her historical circumstances. Elsewhere in the interview Malcolm explained this history to me. He told me that she had fallen pregnant with him at fifteen years old in the early 1970s but that his maternal grandparents had disapproved of her having a Black child. This subsequently led to the demise of their relationship. Therefore, from a very young age she was left as sole carer to him (without the support of her family or Malcolm's father), and his three younger siblings who eventually followed (also mixed race). He explained that it was the Black community in Sparkbrook where he grew up, who took her 'under their wing'. Part of that care was teaching her new skills such as cooking that would later happen to help her in her maternal role. What is also of critical interest in this excerpt is how Malcolm highlights,

what he perceives to be, some of the possible hazards of engaging in *explicit* forms of racial literacy. This indicates the importance of discerning between the different 'types' of racial literacy. Through his praise he constructs his White mother's parenting approach as authentic and natural, subtly distinguishing her from other White mothers who might more forcefully (and unnaturally) include elements of Black culture in their parenting of mixed race children.<sup>31</sup> He emphasises that he was never made to feel that his mother deliberately manufactured a particular lifestyle for her and children through their supposed cultural 'needs'. For Malcolm, if she would have done so, this would not have allowed him a natural, independent development of his own.

There were many other examples throughout all of the cohorts of White mothers cooking Caribbean food. Audrey, born in the 1960s, said that her mother learned to cook Caribbean food whilst living in rooms with her father in Handsworth before she was born and explained that she continued to cook it for them as children simply because it was cheap. Similar to Malcolm's mother, Audrey's mother acquired this skill through her circumstances. In both cases this implicit form of racial literacy was not necessarily implemented to pass on cultural knowledge; instead it had mostly been acquired as a means of survival for these two White mothers. Both examples indicate the implications of social class on the type of racial literacy that is transferred to children (Twine 2004). Further to this, they provide detail of the implications of other complex contextual factors, such as generation, racism, neighbourhood networks and familial rejection.

In addition to food, music was a common cultural signpost identified in the interviews. The transference of this type of racial literacy from White mothers to their children was often framed in a multicultural discourse. Participants described their mothers' musical tastes as 'worldly', 'universal', 'open-minded', or in the case of Malcolm below; 'eclectic'. Many described their mothers' particular love of Black artists and musical genres, which meant that they were familiar with this form of Black art from a young age. In the examples below, musical knowledge is constructed as a natural preference, rather than a parenting strategy. Interestingly, in the case of 60s-born Brandon, music would

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<sup>31</sup> There were some examples in the data of participants who explicitly disapproved of White mothers of mixed race children who 'act Black'. Unfortunately, there was no space to further explore this in the thesis but for the most part participants tended to disassociate their own mothers from those 'other' inauthentic 'Black acting', White mothers. By doing this, participants were in many ways protecting *their own* authenticity.

eventually become a central part his life. He went on to construct his own sound system<sup>32</sup> as a teenager and toured the country with it.

The thing is even like music [...] yo my moms<sup>33</sup> would play The Bee Gees, Dr Hook, U-Roy, Gregory Isaacs, going to Barry Manilow. That's how my moms was [...] you couldn't tie her down [...] so until today, I've got that same eclectic kind of taste in food, film and music, you know. [Malcolm, 42]

Mom liked a lot of Black singers and that [...] still the same now, I still sit down with my mom and listen to the music that she used to listen to before. [Brandon, 50]

Another implicit form of racial literacy was the presence of Black aesthetics within the home. This was not unique to one type of family. Jayden, from the 80s-born cohort grew up in a house headed by his White mother with three other mixed race siblings; his father died when he was a young child. He remembered that his mother had a Jamaican clock and described a piece of art on the wall; 'two sticks and then like silk in the middle or something and there [was] like a poem on there, I swear it was like Jamaica's poem or something like that'. Similarly to the Jamaican clock, two other participants with Kittitian backgrounds, one 70s-born and the other 80s-born, identified examples of mundane household objects that did not generally stand out as significant cultural symbols in the home, such as Kittitian tea towels and trays. Nevertheless they functioned as quiet reminders and subtle representations of the Caribbean. The latter example of the Kittitian tray came from 30 year-old Darius, who grew up mostly in the care of his White mother and White step-father. The tray had a map of St Kitts on it, and as a child he had always thought it was shaped like 'a chicken drumstick'. The tray which blended into the background at mealtimes may not have stimulated conversations about the country, its history, political state or climate. However it did provide a foundational lesson on the geography of his Caribbean ancestors and stamped on his mind a blueprint that allowed him to recognise the country in amongst the Caribbean archipelago. The significance of maps do not feature in Twine's (2004) analysis of racial literacy but the importance of this kind of visual

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<sup>32</sup> The sound system has its roots in Kingston, Jamaica. Gilroy (2002: 216) describes it as a 'large mobile disco'. The significance of sound system culture in the lives of the 60s-born cohort is discussed further in chapter five, which includes a critical analysis of how certain sub-cultural scenes implicated mixed race identities through the 1970s and 1980s in Britain.

<sup>33</sup> This is a colloquialism for 'mom', and does not represent plural 'mother' figures in his life, so to speak.

representation is clear from 60s-born Olivia, who grew up with her White mother, Black father and Black mixed race siblings. When asked if she thought her parents put things in the home to actively represent her heritage, she told me that she did not think so but explained; 'we had a map of the Caribbean, so we knew where Jamaica was and Jamaica was the centre of that map, in the same way when you see a map of the globe, England is the centre. Jamaica was the centre of that map'. The ability to see the location of Jamaica and situate it in the world on a daily basis provided her with an alternative racial cartography, in which Jamaica was a salient feature.

Diane, from the 60s-born cohort, grew up with her Black father, White mother, two older sisters and one younger brother. The conversation below about Black aesthetics in her home was not prompted by any direct questioning from me regarding 'cultural' markers. Instead it emerged when I asked her to describe her home. It did not appear that the items and décor she described were things that had been carefully selected by her parents to teach her about her heritage.

D: Yeah [...] like a terraced and your front room was your best room [...] we weren't allowed to be in there [...] that was where [my parents] entertained, you know friends come that kind of thing [...] I could never get my head around how it was furnished some of the stuff.

K: What, in the house?

D: Yeah 'cos it's like... what is that [...] where's that come from? So the front room we had a glass cabinet, we had a [radio]gram erm, the settees had those crocheted stuff on them, over the backs, you know all that sort of stuff [...] and we'd go to dad's cousins or a family member and we'd see the same things – never really understood it, and erm... I went to Jamaica... I got it... that was Jamaica, my front room was Jamaica [...] yeah and it wasn't until I went to Jamaica that [...] kind of *oh, I get it, I get it now* [...]

K: [...] Did other neighbours have the front room, how else –

D: No, no, no, they weren't like that, we'd go in their houses [...] none of that, there was no feature room like that you know [...] so it was just odd [...]

The excerpt shows a generational effect and also the significance of her father's presence in the family home. The traditional front room that Diane describes is an archetypal West Indian home in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than representative of merely decorative tastes, the aesthetic of *The Front Room* (McMillan 2009) raises complex issues relating to migration, class, heritage and family. The significance of 'the gram' in the home should also not be lost. Her father, a first generation Caribbean immigrant who came to England in 1956, like many others would likely have used music as a way of 'filling the gap in their consciousness' between the lives they had left and the lives they found in Britain (Jones, 1988: 34). For many, the radiogram was a first essential purchase upon arrival in Britain and became 'a standard piece of furniture' in every Black dwelling (Jones 1988: 34).

#### **4.4.2 Race not on the agenda**

*'There wasn't really much Black conversations going on'. [Levi, 43]*

A significant proportion of respondents reported a lack of racial literacy in the home. In these examples there were no significant markers of ethnicity in the house and discussions regarding race, or concerning respondents' mixedness or heritage did not feature within their households. This type of situation was not limited to one cohort, or to a particular type of family set up. It could be seen in families headed by single White mothers and in families where both parents were present.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for its absence also varied; some felt the topic of race was bypassed by their parents intentionally, whereas others felt that avoidance of the topic was not deliberate. Some parents who would generally avoid topics regarding ethnic identity did so in order to normalise it and make it unseen or unproblematic. Bradley, 40, grew up on a mostly White council estate in Selly Oak, with his mother and younger sister. When asked whether he remembered any conversations about ethnicity that occurred in the home, he seemed to assume I was searching for a problem; 'not in my house really. Erm [...] or you know I'd probably bring it up and my mom would be like, you know I love you and this and that and she wouldn't really, it wouldn't really be an issue'. James, aged 30, from the 80s-born cohort grew up in ethnically diverse Handsworth Wood (the more affluent version of neighbouring Handsworth). He lived in his house with his mother, father and younger brother. He stated that his parents did not prompt conversations about how he

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<sup>34</sup> Only one respondent lived in a single parent home headed by a Black father.

should articulate his identity because they did not want to 'make an issue of it'.<sup>35</sup> In these excerpts, to talk about ethnicity was to talk about difference, a potentially divisive topic in a mixed family that might interrupt familial intimacies (Lewis 2009). To acknowledge these issues would also require the acknowledgement of other more pressing subjects around racism, and so it was disregarded. In other families, the topics of ethnic identity and/or race were simply not on the agenda, not necessarily in a tactful way to navigate around difficult issues, but because it simply was not regarded as important.

#### **4.4.3 Black parents that lacked racial literacy**

The racial composition of the family was (sic) related to... aspects of the young people's behaviour and attitudes, in an unexpected way. Those who lived with a black parent were less likely to feel that colour was central in their lives than those who lived with a white parent.

Tizard & Phoenix (1993: 169)

I want to briefly expand on Tizard and Phoenix's 'unexpected' finding as it relates to some of the findings in this study that suggested some Black parents did not provide racial literacy in the home. This is of critical interest because it unpicks the assumption that Black parents of mixed race children are naturally equipped to provide racial literacy (explicit or otherwise) by virtue of their Blackness, or that 'racial empathy [follows] naturally from racial resemblance' (Twine 1999: 203). This 'racial logic' has been observed in Black communities and within anti-transracial adoption arguments (Twine 1999; Kirton 2000; Small 1986). As the education of children has often been found to be the responsibility of mothers (Reay 1995; David 1993), it is unsurprising that a breadth of research on mixed race families have focused on White mothering techniques and have specifically explored White women's ability to 'teach' their children about ethnicity, racism and identity (Harman 2013; Barn 1999; McKenzie 2013; Banks 1996; Twine 2004; Edwards & Caballero 2011). The relative absence of research on the Black parenting of mixed race children strengthens Twine's (1999: 192) findings that suggest a higher parental standard is often applied to the White (mothers) of mixed race children.

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<sup>35</sup> James' response may also signal a broader shift, as the following chapter shows, that younger interviewees overall tended to have a more individualised idea of their identities and were not as preoccupied with issues of race/ism in their lives in comparison to the older cohorts.

Although many Black parents in the sample were able to empathise with racism because of having felt the effects of it directly, their understandings and experiences were not necessarily always passed down to their mixed race children, and the presence of Black parents in the home did not necessarily stimulate conversations or lessons regarding race. The reasons for this appear to be quite complex and differ somewhat from examples in the previous section that suggested avoidance of the topic of race in some homes was a strategy employed to avoid acknowledging difference in the family. For the most part, it seemed that Black presence in the home was ascribed with such significance that it was assumed that there was no *need* for Black parents to do this type of labour. However in the example I present below it also appears to be quite intricately linked to complex issues regarding generation and diaspora. Olivia, aged 47, grew up with her mother, father, two sisters and brother. Although she had markers of ethnicity in the home,<sup>36</sup> she specifically recalled that her father generally disregarded Jamaica, and explained that he did not provide her with any substantive understanding about her Caribbean heritage.

When dad would talk about Jamaica, he would always talk about it in jest [...] and joke about being from the jungle which obviously didn't help with our cultural understanding but that was also his... ignorance as well [...] I don't think it was ever something dad felt he needed to do [...] to educate us about our culture because it's probably something he thought [...] we would be leaving behind. Even though he always ate West Indian food in the house, culturally lived as a Black man, you know... all the typical things that you would have expected of a Black man, that's who my dad was, although he doesn't speak patois. [Olivia, 47]

Firstly what emerges from this excerpt is the obvious framing of Black culture through an essentialist discourse. Olivia states her father lived 'culturally as a Black man' and that he behaved in all of the ways you 'would have expected of a Black man'. She does not go on to list those behaviours here but elsewhere in the interview she again refers to him as a 'typical' Black man and names one of those typical Black man activities as going out every Friday and Saturday night until the early hours of the morning. The key issue however relates to

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<sup>36</sup> The map of the Caribbean as mentioned in the previous section. She also stated elsewhere that her mother learnt how to do traditional Black hairstyles such as canerows but does not recall how she acquired this skill.

generation. Her father's perceptions of the Caribbean and his family are obviously informed by lingering colonial legacies. Not only did he not engage in forms of racial literacy, he actively dismissed his cultural history all together. In another exchange, Olivia stated that she thought her father felt that getting a White woman was a 'prize' and that having mixed children would secure them an advantageous position over their Black counterparts. Therefore it is clear that in partnering a White woman and having mixed race children in Britain, he felt that his indefinite departure from the 'jungle' had been confirmed. This postcolonial psyche is the fallout of what Hall (2017: 25) calls the 'Two Jamaicas', a social stratification or 'pigmentocracy' that was formed out of historical colonial formations in the Caribbean which to this day closely links class, colour and race in the region (Mohammed 2000; Tate 2013; Gabriel 2007; Henry 2013). The lasting impact of these colonial formations is illustrated further still in chapter six that details how it has impacted all of the participants' everyday lived experiences in the study in one way or another, thus highlighting how it penetrates various stages of the life course.

#### **4.4.4 Non-familial racial literacy in the home**

*'We used to go crazy just to see someone of colour on a mainstream channel'.  
[Lucien, 50]*

The previous sections presented examples of how racial literacy was performed in both implicit and explicit ways by the family in participants' childhood homes. That is what I would like to call a traditional racial literacy trajectory; from parent to child, within the home. The last sections presented some examples of households where race was not a feature and briefly centred Black parents in the discussion. This section exemplifies that racial literacy cannot always be controlled, organised or omitted by parents and that respondents can see and learn race in other ways. In the data there were examples of racial literacy that was transmitted through non-familial mediums such as television. It became immediately clear that the impact of television was a cohort effect, as these examples were mostly present in interviews with the 60s and 70s-born participants who witnessed burgeoning representations of Black characters on British television through the 1970s and 1980s (Daniels & Gerson 1989; Malik 2002; Mercer 1994). Anthony, 36, remembered one of his favourite shows *Diff'rent Strokes*; a popular American sitcom that ran in the 1980s about two Black boys who are adopted by a well off White family. People often told him

that he looked like the main character in the show, Arnold, because of his afro. He recalled watching a particularly upsetting episode that prompted a conversation with his mother about the implications of race.

It was an episode where they wanted to take Arnold away from Mr Drummond because they thought [...] that the two boys should be raised by a Black family – social services came. And Arnold was upset and I couldn't understand it and I remember asking my mom like what's going on like, you know I don't get what they're doing? And my mom trying to explain that they're different races... but I was only young and I do remember like I couldn't quite get the concept. [Anthony, 36]

In other examples, television did not just provide a medium to recognise and see Blackness and race more generally but also served as a resource to teach the history of it. In interviews with the 60s-born cohort, the television show that came up repeatedly without prompts was *Roots*. *Roots*<sup>37</sup> was a 1970s mini-series which told the story of an eighteenth century African teenager called Kunta Kinte and his family, who were captured and brought to America to be enslaved. The popularity of the mini-series and the impact it had on African American audiences in the US has been documented (Taylor 1995; Delmont 2016) and so too has its reception with British audiences (Stollery 2017; Kyoong Hur & Robinson 1981). Here I specifically unearth its significant impact on Black mixed race British audiences at the time. It served as an awakening for many respondents who had never before been exposed to the traumatic realities of slavery in Black history. Many reported that this type of honest history was not available in school and for most it was not provided through parents or guardians either, at least not in such a frank fashion. Martina, 49, and Isabelle, 49 both stated the show taught them both about the complexities of their mixedness. For Martina, it signposted her towards the upsetting possibility that ancestors on each side of her family may have come together in the context of violent, brutal slave and master relationships; 'during my teenage years when *Roots* came on telly the first time and I was watching that [...] I had to reconcile within myself that, the ancestors of my mother's people enslaved the ancestors of my father's people'. For Martina, that history is something she feels that she continues to embody until the present day; her 'racially mixed body, signifying the [historical] transgression that produced it' (Mitchell 2013: 239).

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<sup>37</sup> The TV show was based on the novel *Roots: The Saga of an America Family*, written by Alex Haley, first published in 1976.

That is the legacy that I live with... that [...] the two sides of my family at some point were diametrically opposed to one another. White people don't have to live with that... and Black people don't have to live with that, yeah? If you are mixed, you have [...] possibly... within yourself... a piece of reconciliation to do... with that. [Martina, 49]

For Isabelle, the show also offered the chance for some reconciliation. Prior to watching the program her identity had been a site of contestation, made vulnerable by accusations from others, that she was not Black. After seeing the pain and suffering of enslaved Africans through the show, she felt connected to a wider African diaspora, and recognised that she could simultaneously and rightfully claim both mixed race and Black identities.

I think I was probably... 14 and they showed Roots on the telly [...] it kind of educated me to a degree, it [...] helped me to understand where I came from [...] so although you say I'm not Black [...] my heritage is the same as yours [...] in the sense of... of slavery, erm Africa, you know... so it, it educated me really so that was kind of [...] really important... and then I got quite angry... really angry and I was really angry towards White people and I kind of rebelled. [Isabelle, 49]

That anger, upset and emotional reaction of rebellion that Isabelle describes was present in other interviews. These participants became an 'active audience', in that they utilised the educational lessons they had lifted from the show (Malik 2002: 27). The show was a metaphorical call to action which offered a direction in which to steer feelings of frustration and resist and recognise their oppression in 1970s and 1980s Britain (Hall et al. 2013; Solomos 1988; Sivanandan 1981; Solomos et al. 1982; Fryer 1984). Assefa, born in 1971, was raised in a children's home in Cambridge. He moved to Birmingham at eighteen to live in Handsworth after meeting a Birmingham-born Rastafarian in a Black Cambridge pub. For Assefa, the show prompted a double consciousness (Du Bois 2007), through which he was able to recognise his *racial* positioning as a Black youth in British society. Below he remembers how all of the children in the home watched the show. Diane from the 60s-born cohort also recalled the anger that surfaced at school when the show was aired.

Listen... as I speak about the kids' home, *all* of us would have spoken about Roots [...] I remember we all saw that together – me, my brother and sister [...] the first time it was aired... must have been '76 or '77 in this country and [...] that was when we first kind of... *understood* the

oppression, the... the non-tolerance of Black and... and the biggest thing I remember is, '*I am not Toby, I am Kunta Kinte*'. So we remember certain things from them ages there, and definitely that changed how we [...] saw ourselves [...] you know... it had an impact on us. [Assefa, 44]

I remember when *Roots* first came on telly... and all Black people hated White people, so the teachers, everybody was getting stick... about slavery... and it just ended up being like... you know all this aggression and nobody ever really talked about it. [Diane, 52]

Reflecting on the discussions in this last section, it has become apparent that racial literacy need not only be sourced through parents. It is transmitted through many conduits and functions in a myriad of ways in the home, which raises some intriguing questions about which type of racial literacy really matters. Ultimately, conversations about race in the home do not happen in isolation and any lessons learned are further contextualised, contested or confirmed through experiences that occur outside its boundaries. A significant site of secondary socialisation outside of the home, and a space which signified major life transitions, was school.

#### **4.5 School identities**

Schools were a key site in which lives converged and were highly influential in the evolution of respondents' identities. They served as initial sites of socialisation outside of the home and family, functioning as sites of collectivity, social exchange and social encounter (Tonkiss 2005). For many, it was the movement from one school to another that facilitated their navigation through the city, allowing plentiful opportunity to encounter unfamiliar territories and open up new networks accordingly. Many respondents particularly recounted the impact of their transition from primary school to secondary school on their social networks. In most cases, respondents attended primary schools in their immediate localities which had populations that were representative of their local neighbourhoods. When choosing secondary schools, many travelled to schools beyond their locality; in most of these cases this decision was made by their parents who were in search of 'good' schools (Burgess & Briggs 2010). Therefore the movement between schools for many was not only a coming of age transition but a departure from the local which forced participants to navigate unfamiliar routes through the city (De Certeau 1984). Before

exploring how respondents navigated these movements, the first part of the section unpacks some of the different socio-political contexts in which these school encounters have taken place, to lay down some important foundational context. Through this discussion, the section contributes to the breadth of texts in the sociology of education and race that have focused upon how ethnic minority young people experience the educational system through their racialised identities (Gillborn 2008; Archer & Yamashita 2003; Tikly et al. 2004). The focus here is not on achievement and outcomes. Instead like others before it (Mac an Ghail 1988; Mirza 1992), it unpacks how schools over time have been sites of cultural struggle (Warmington 2014), with a particular focus on how mixed race youth have encountered conflicting conceptualisations of their racialised identities in school over time and how these have been negotiated.

Race was central to school policy when the 60s-born cohort were born and attending school. From 1966 to 1972 the Department for Education and Science (DES) required that schools provided 'statistical information on children born outside the British Isles with parents born abroad, and children born in the UK whose parents had come within the previous ten years' (Tomlinson 2008: 31). The place of mixed race children in these conceptualisations of 'immigrant children' was somewhat ambivalent. For example, although 'mixed race immigrant children' were supposedly excluded from these counts (ibid), archival information suggests that prior to 1966 the Birmingham Education Committee had already started a local count of 'non-European' pupils, in which head teachers could use their discretion when it came to defining who would be classed as an 'immigrant' child (Ydesen & Myers 2016: 8). Guidance issued to head teachers in 1964 and 1965, 'possibly in connection with this local count', explained (ibid);

'...whether or not to classify a child as an "immigrant"... must be in some measure a matter for the Head's own judgement but you are asked to use the following as a guide... all pupils of non-European stock (one or both parents) should be regarded as "immigrants" even if they were born here' (ibid: 8).

In light of this, the consistency at which mixed race children would have been implicated by the dispersal policy proposed by central government in 1965 is unclear (Tomlinson 2008: 30). The policy recommended that local authorities 'bus' immigrant children into schools with higher numbers of White British

pupils, to facilitate appropriate levels of integration and ensure they did not become too concentrated in particular schools (Vincent et al. 2013). Gail Lewis (2009: 9) ascertains that as a mixed race child in the 1960s, had she attended a school with high levels of Black and brown children, she would have been implicated by a policy like this. Because it was one which essentially emphasised there was a *colour* problem in British schools, not just an 'immigrant' one. Despite the confusion over mixed race positions vis-à-vis these aggressive policies, what was certain was that schooling during the period was regarded as 'a major vehicle to bring... about' assimilatory gains, whereby immigrant groups shed their culture to effectively adopt mainstream British customs (Tomlinson 2008: 28). Therefore when the 60s-born cohort entered schools, they were 'intense zones' of struggle within the broader assimilationist project that the state had been perpetuating throughout the decade (Lewis 2009; Carby 1982).

Interestingly however, mixed race children in Birmingham were shielded from the harsh impact of the bussing policy in particular. From its inception the local authority, alongside the Inner London Education Authority (both had the largest number of immigrant children in schools) rejected the policy (Tomlinson 2008: 30). However, Birmingham's rejection of the policy was not a signifier of an egalitarian approach to the schooling of non-White children in the city. The belief that the presence of non-White children in schools was problematic, and 'the lingering pseudo-scientific beliefs in the intellectual inferiority of black children' consistently characterised educational policies throughout the country during the 1960s (ibid: 40; Ydesen & Myers 2016), and mixed race children felt the impact of these prevailing trends. Isabelle, who was born in the shadow of these policies in 1966, was the daughter of an immigrant father born overseas in Jamaica, and a White British mother.

Schools were extremely racist [...] the fact that they put Black children at the back of the class [shows] that they never believed that you wanted to learn. If you showed any interest in anything, it wasn't pursued *at all, at all* [...] they weren't putting Black kids forward for anything, only sport [...] if you ask a lot of Black and mixed parentage children, you know, 'what do you want to do when you grow up?' You know, they would already decide for you, what you were going to do. Basically [...] you were gonna be a nurse [...] if you were lucky you were gonna be a nurse (laughs) do you know what I mean? So, erm [...] you were gonna do a menial job, you weren't gonna be like a lawyer or a

doctor or anything like that [...] the racism in schools [...] it was really bad. [Isabelle, 49]

The excerpt indicates how Black and mixed race children were historically clustered together and experienced a similar form of explicit anti-black racism in schools; a racism that notably continued on throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Mac an Ghail 1988; Sewell 1997; Mirza 1992; Mirza 1999; Carby 1982). Martina aged 49, from the same cohort, also pointed towards the historical blanket treatment of Black and mixed race children in school settings. Brought up in a single parent household headed by her White mother, she retold an anecdote of when she started at a new school in Handsworth in 1978, aged 13. She explained that on her first day her teacher ushered her to sit with 'all the Black girls', who subsequently became her close group of friends. However, having grown up in a typically 'English' home, Martina explained that at first, she was unable to understand the girls' use of patois. This unfamiliarity initially dislodged Martina from the Black peer group she had been ascribed to by her teacher. Isabelle also referenced an experience that happened to her at school, which was specifically related to her *mixedness* rather than perceived Blackness, thus distinguishing her school experiences from those her Black peers may have faced. She describes a unique type of anti-mixed race racism that occurred in her last year of primary school (circa 1976); 'there was a fight between Black and White [pupils], they put me and my brother in the middle of the playground'. Within the momentary eruption of a racial conflict within her school, she and her brother were used by each side as a physical and metaphorical buffer between Whiteness and Blackness. In being simultaneously racialised as Black by teachers and as 'in-between' by pupils, Isabelle had to negotiate the microcosm of the school in ways that were distinguishable from her Black counterparts. When read alongside the ambivalent position of mixed race children historically in educational policies, these examples raise some important questions about how the broader institution of schooling failed to accurately account for mixed race pupils in the school population, within discussions regarding race. Although Isabelle and others across the cohort demonstrated multiple shared points of reference with the Black school experience, mixed race identity in the educational setting clearly has points of divergence.

Through the 1980s there were significant shifts that occurred both outside and inside schooling institutions. This had implications for both minority groups in schools and the authorities that ran them. Firstly, the rising popularity of

Rastafarianism and 'Black power' through the 1970s that had been considered a threat in British schools (Tomlinson 2008; Mac an Ghail 1988) had been steadily replaced by a less anxiety-inducing Black hip-hop sub-cultural identity and style (Gilroy 2002; Hebdige 2006). This, alongside the Rampton Report (1981) and The Swann Report (1985), both of which officially recognised the racism experienced by ethnic minority pupils (Vincent et al. 2013), undoubtedly contributed toward the 70s-born and 80s-born cohorts' increased expressions of agency within the school setting. In the following chapter the shifts between each social generation in the study are pulled out more explicitly. These feelings of agency might not have translated into any useful forms of bargaining power however, as the aforementioned reports were accused of being unable to garner any 'meaningful action' (ibid: 931). Furthermore, the subsequent multicultural models of education that ensued throughout the late 1970s and 1980s were also charged with being tokenistic, rather than entailing an effective anti-racist framework (Troyna & Carrington 1990; Warmington 2014). In light of these flaws in the interventions, it is likely that the unique experiences of mixed race pupils in schools, like 70s-born Chris' below, continued to go unacknowledged through the late 1980s. Chris started secondary school in 1986; he stated that during his first year he would often be called a 'Paki' by White pupils.

[White pupils] didn't even understand where I was coming from [they] were identifying me with something that had *no, no* correspondence with who I was, you know they're calling me a Paki. So you're saying I'm from Pakistan, you're saying I'm Asian, you know it's anything that's not White [...] Because I wasn't fully Black, because I was brown, I think they just associated brown with erm... Pakistanis or whatever it was, do you get what I mean? But my hair was curly, there was *nothing* there [...] for you to think to yourself that I was Asian in any way whatsoever, you know? [Chris, 40]

Song & Aspinall (2012: 749) have focused on the everyday disjuncture between expressed and observed identities in their study on the racial mismatch of mixed race young people, and found that there was no 'uniform desire among mixed people for identity validation'. However, this example highlights the impact of racial mismatch when it operates specifically through the prism of racism. The racial slur and misnomer 'Paki' forcefully pushed Chris outside of Blackness, an imagined community that he was unable to connect to (in those particular interactions) through the shared experience of suffering

specifically, anti-*Black* racisms. Although this example of, what might be termed, 'misguided' racism, might rightly be conceptualised as a less insidious form of prejudice in comparison to the routinised anti-Black institutional racisms in schools, the White pupils' unwillingness and/or inability to see where Chris was 'coming from', nevertheless goes some way in revealing the multifaceted racisms that are unique to the mixed race experience. Racisms, that have generally been unaccounted for in the historical accounts of 'immigrant children' and 'Black pupil' experiences of school (Mac an Ghaill 1988; Mirza 1999; Mirza 1992; Sewell 1997; Tomlinson 2008). Both of these are categories that mixed race pupils have seemingly been written into and cast out of at different historical moments, making mixed race a residual category in the broader focus on ethnic minority children's achievement in school (Blair et al. 1998; Bhattacharyya et al. 2003; Gillborn 2008; Vincent et al. 2013). Despite attempts by some scholars to focus on mixed race experiences of schooling in recent years (Ali 2003; Haynes et al. 2006; Tikly et al. 2004; Caballero et al. 2007), Caballero (2007) asserts that the erasure of mixed race experiences in the education system has not been significantly addressed.

Aside from these more complex questions regarding school, identity and race, it was also clear that school was a way to navigate through the city. For many, it offered up new possibilities for identity formation and in some cases provided the space to negotiate fractured identities. Matthew, born 1988, referred to secondary school as his 'sanctuary [...] where normality kind of reigned'. He lived between two areas of extreme contrasting demographics; his mother's house in Harborne (White and affluent) and his father's home in Newtown (ethnically diverse, deprived). School provided a harmonious space to reconcile his contrasting living arrangements and his identity. Seventies-born Chris, grew up in the inner city area, Lee Bank. His mother's choice to send him to a school in Northfield, a predominantly White area on the southern outskirts of the city, meant that his secondary school served as a route into unfamiliar territory.

I was 11 [and] all of a sudden I've gone to this [secondary] school that's 95% White [...] I've gone from a [primary] school that's probably 80% non-White [...] so it was [...] a big eye opener for me. And I adapted quite well and I think that's where my fluidity kind of come in, in terms of being able to balance. So I kind of lived two lives, I lived a life at school and then I lived a life on my estate [...] I never mixed them, I never used to bring people from my school down to my estate, I never

used to bring people from my estate up to see friends from my school, I kept them separate [...] I'm ashamed to bring a White girl who I'm seeing back to where I live but *my mom's White* [...] you know it was a case of, I wanna keep this one on the down low and just keep it up here, you know, and that's what it was. [Chris, 40]

This transition between schools enabled him to negotiate a more fluid identity. Despite this, he made an active decision to keep his school life and estate life separate. That school life included girlfriends - White girlfriends who he chose not to bring to his estate for fear of being shamed. School also allowed for opportunity to meet new people and for respondents to recognise the intersectional nature of raced identities and come face to face with different versions of themselves, as in the case of 70s-born Ezra below. He explained that secondary school was where he had his first encounter with middle class Black boys who represented a form of Blackness that was strikingly different from what he had known in Balsall Heath. '[At] secondary school [the Black pupils] weren't from Balsall Heath, they were from Moseley [...] their parents [...] were all homeowners. They were... erm... Kittitian and Barbados... erm... you know' [Ezra, 41]. The parents of the Black boys at his secondary school did not live in social housing as was the case for many other Black youth in his locality and further to this, their heritages were in the smaller Caribbean islands, not Jamaica. For Ezra, through his encounter with other versions of Blackness, he was able to situate his own Black identity in a broader Caribbean diaspora.

This section has considered participants' experiences of race, ethnicity and movement through the city via schools. The next section explores participants' experiences of other significant social institutions in their local neighbourhoods, as sites of community making and cultural translation. More specifically, it explores changing perceptions of, and connections to, neighbourhood. It builds on this section by exploring more in-depth questions about how participants negotiate their identities when moving through the city, beyond their familiar localities.

#### **4.6 Neighbourhood identities and ethnic codes in different localities**

It was very clear from the data that the reported experiences of neighbourhood differed across the three cohorts. Generally, the 60s and 70s-born cohorts spoke more frequently of their attendance at social institutions, such as local

churches and youth clubs, than younger participants. The centrality of youth clubs as a territorial and raced space in the urban landscape has been noted elsewhere (Back 1996; James 2012; Robins 1992; Alexander 2000). Lucien below exemplifies a further function of the youth club. During his attendance through the mid-1970, his youth club served as an alternative educational space, and thus provided him with a type of cultural capital.

There used to be a youth club [...] on a Wednesday and it used to finish at about 9.30pm and I remember two of the youth leaders [...] you know after the club we'd be outside on a summer evening and I remember them politicising us [...] talking about Marcus Garvey but you know really explaining what Marcus Garvey was about and talking about [...] self-determination and that we have [...] to do twice as... three times or four times as good in school. [Lucien, 50]

A 'long established institution' in the Caribbean community – the church – has also been found to serve as a form of cultural and social capital in Black Caribbean communities (Reynolds 2006: 280; Byfield 2008). The 60s and 70s-born respondents who did report church attendance mostly went to Black, Pentecostal churches, described by two respondents as 'happy, clappy'. The church functioned as a dynamic community space for their families, especially during their early childhood, and reasons for attendance were not solely to practice religion. Olivia, 47, recalled that her church provided childcare for her mother in the form of a 'summer play scheme [...] arrangement' and Lucien, 50, felt that his mother had signposted him towards the local Sunday School mostly in an effort to 'keep [he and his siblings] off the street' and into a supervised safe space. The continued significance of the church in the 60s-born participants' teenage years is also shown in the following chapter, as they would often be used as venues to host community music events and sound system parties. These social institutions were community-organised, community-run 'traditional socialisation agencies' (Evans 1994: 183) and sites of encounter that instigated community ties and opportunities for bonding. The potential capital these social institutions provided for the 60s and 70s-born cohorts is important to consider when reading their expressions of nostalgia in the interview exchanges that related to their childhood neighbourhoods. Although the 80s-born participants spoke fondly of their neighbourhoods, their memories were not loaded with the same sentiment. Older cohorts frequently described their neighbourhoods as 'close-knit' and 'tight-knit' communities.

M: [...] everyone was in everyone's houses, if I came home from school at lunchtime and mom was at work, I could go down the road to aunty Elaine and [...] have a little food there and I could go to aunty Andrea or... do you know what I mean, it was that kind of... everyone's your aunty or your mom or whichever [...]

K: So quite a community vibe?

M: Yeah man, absolutely, yeah man, in the very early 80s it *really* was like that [...] everyone's your aunty.

[An interview exchange with 70s-born Malcolm, 42]

In the excerpt, community closeness is presented as a factual characteristic of the early 1980s, as was 60s-born Diane's suggestion, that the 'sun shone everyday' during the six weeks school holidays in the early 1970s when she was a child. These expressions of appreciation for the 'simple pleasures' of their youth (James 2012: 71) were indicative of a sense of loss. This is especially because they were often juxtaposed with contemporary youth experiences that were mostly perceived as being limited, because of a lack of freedom, outdoor exploration and communal unity. The extent to which a decline in community has occurred over time in *reality* in Birmingham is questionable. However, to supplement the participants' accounts of community, there are less subjective measures of change over time that indicate a decline in the use and significance of social institutions like churches and youth clubs schools generally (Bruce 1995; Evans 1994). More specifically, the Pentecostal churches of the older Caribbean tradition have also 'generally stagnated or declined' (Hunt & Lightly 2001: 105) and so too has local government funding for anti-racist grass-roots community groups (Elliott-Cooper 2016). Additionally, despite the persistent significance of Black supplementary schools (Mirza & Reay 2000; Reynolds 2006), Andrews (2016: 1) suggests that since the movement reached its peak in the 1980s, numbers have 'significantly declined'. By encouraging opportunity for encounter and collectivity, these places and initiatives 'built in' opportunities for civic engagement to localities (Gieryn. F 2000: 477). They were racially defined neighbourhood and community institutions (Reynolds 2005: 275) that functioned as 'segregated spaces of radical opposition', where minority communities could access alternative pedagogies and a range of valuable resources (hooks 1995: 6). Their general decline indicates a substantial shift in the landscape of urban communities and might go some way in explaining the older cohorts' expressions of nostalgia,

that not only represented longing for place and community, but a 'yearning for a different time' (Boym 2007: 8).

In addition to thinking about the impact of these historical shifts it is also important to keep in mind that remembering is a complex and unstable process (Kearney 2013; Schacter 2001; Ricoeur 1990; Clark 2010). Although participants' positive narratives and memories of the past are generally taken at face value, a more critical analysis of the cause and effect behind these accounts of community is needed. As noted earlier, the older cohorts' romantic memories of the yesteryears emphasised notions of 'rootedness, localism and collectivity' (Mirza & Reay 2000: 530) and the descriptions were presented as if they were factual characteristics of their childhood communities. In addition to the presence of the social institutions that may well have fostered communal ties during the 1970s and 1980s, there were multifaceted racisms that had been burgeoning since the arrival of migrants from the Commonwealth in the immediate post-war period. These racisms were exuded through politics, citizenship laws, schools, the police, the labour market and housing (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992; Garner 2010; Elliott-Cooper 2016; Goulbourne 1998; Gilroy 1982). This history also brings to bear questions about the choices people had in regards to their community making. For many of the older cohort, reminiscent of 60s-born Lucien's account below, the local served as a place of refuge. It provided them with 'intrinsic value', as has been found in other studies that have dealt more specifically with the positive impact of community ties within Black Caribbean communities (Reynolds 2006: 274; Alexander 1996).

When I look back – and I don't know whether this is imagined memory... erm... but it was just a very close-knit community... there was a lot of Irish, a lot of people from the Caribbean. Erm, and they just seemed to gel and bond and I can *vaguely* remember a family gathering which was really diverse and I have to say that until I sort of left Sparkbrook, I didn't really know there was such a thing as colour or race. [Lucien, 50]

'The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one' (Boym 2007: 9, 10). Lucien's momentary reflection on whether or not the memory was real or imagined is a clear example of how nostalgia muffles memories and impacts upon one's contemporary thoughts about one's history. Despite his uncertainty, he ends with the claim that Sparkbrook was a microcosm in which he felt safe. Whether the memory of a harmonious

community was real or not, through his narrative he stabilises his memory and fixes his identity in place, thus demonstrating how in the process of relaying stories of the past, narrators are able to re-work, and re-position themselves within them (Ricoeur 1990; Schacter 2001).

The notion of community was also signified through expressions of 'local patriotism' (Back 2005: 28). Respondents from areas with long histories of ethnic minority settlement were most likely to pledge patriotic allegiance to those areas. Diane from the 60s-born cohort and 70s-born Patricia, grew up in Small Heath and Handsworth, respectively. Both had lived out of the areas for many years but still felt connected to them; Diane through a network of friends she called the 'Small Heath girls' and Patricia, through a more abstract emotional connection. Patricia explained; 'I consider myself to be a Handsworth girl, Handsworth until I die'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the historical pattern of migrant settlement in the area (Rex et al. 1977), Handsworth often emerged as a significant point of reference for many respondents across the cohorts. Below, Maya from the 80s-born cohort, explains Black and ethnic minority communities historical attachment to the area. Handsworth emerges as an example of what De Certeau (1984:108) calls a 'haunted place'; in that its foundational character is constituted by multiple migrant 'spirits', whose historical presence have contributed towards a collective history in the area.

Handsworth has got this status amongst [...] Black... and minority ethnic communities like, I guess, as a whole. Like... *everyone* can claim some kind of family or heritage there. But it's like it makes it like almost authentic. Erm... and [...] you come to know a lot of people [...] I've known in Birmingham [...] a lot of people come from Handsworth or have passed through Handsworth... or they wanna claim Handsworth.  
[Maya, 27]

Maya's observation that '*everyone* can' claim Handsworth has rootedness in the fact that contemporary ethnic minorities in the city are likely tied to Handsworth through their family's historical patterns of settlement in the area (Rex et al. 1977; Dudrah 2002). Her reference to 'heritage' invokes the idea of a local citizenship that is authenticated through these historical ancestral bloodlines in the area. Interestingly, I was momentarily quizzed on my Handsworth citizenship 'status' in an exchange with Ezra, a 70s-born participant. When it came to light that I was from Handsworth, to be sure I could validly lay claim to that heritage, he asked; 'Handsworth born and bred?'

The question was posed in a way to clarify if I was indeed a sincere member of the Handsworth diaspora. Maya too, clearly wanted to differentiate between 'types' of Handsworth residents in her discreet reference to those who might not be 'naturalised' citizens of the area through birth or ancestry, in her description of those who 'wanna claim' Handsworth. This also signifies the perceived social capital that is attached to the area. Having historically been the 'front line' to major uprisings in Birmingham, Handsworth affords a rather prominent position in the 'urban topography of Britain' (Knowles 2003: 90, 91). As a result, it has emerged as a symbolic 'counter-space' in the city (Lefebvre 1991: 381, 382). It is these overlapping histories of migration and resistance that prompts a shared racial narrative and visualisation of Handsworth as a Black area in the city, especially amongst residents, like 70s-born participants Ezra and Assefa, who referred to it as 'the [Black] capital' of the city and as 'Rasta heaven', respectively. This is despite the fact that statistically, the Asian ethnic group is actually the largest in the area, constituting 60% of the total population; the Black ethnic group is the second largest ethnic minority group in the area (22%).<sup>38</sup> Whatever the case, the ethnic codes that are imbedded in different localities in the city have significant implications for how mixed race subjects become racialised in place.

Chris, 40, explained the effect of implicit ethnic codes in Lee Bank, on his own mixed race identity. Lee Bank was one of the inner city areas that Birmingham City Council designated for redevelopment in the post-war period. Slum back-to-back housing was cleared throughout the 1950s and the area was redeveloped into a council estate of houses and high-rise flats throughout the 1960s (Jones 2004). It has recently been regenerated again (circa 1999 onwards) and turned into a 'city living village' called Park Central, populated by modern apartment blocks (ibid). By the time Chris was born in the mid-1970s, the area had already begun deteriorate. He described Lee Bank at that time as a 'predominantly Black neighbourhood,' in which he 'took on a Black identity'. An identity which was predetermined for him; 'it was more just my environment, choosing for me really. So the environment I lived in chose what identity I was to take on.' Chris' affiliation with other Black and mixed race people in the area instilled in him a Black identity. His Blackness was a situated identity, prompted by his emplacement in Lee Bank. Nicholas, 26, also described Handsworth as a 'situation', in which gradations of Blackness were insignificant.

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<sup>38</sup> See; <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/upweb/partner-countries/united-kingdom/handsworth-area.aspx> [date accessed 05.06.17]

When I grew up in Handsworth [...] you're seen as Black. And I think in that situation [...] we all are... because in that respect in the community you're in... you know, we all eat the same food, we are all from the same culture like and [...] I think that's definitely how it's seen because I don't think – especially growing up – there wasn't a differentiation between being mixed race and Black. [Nicholas, 26]

The Black regional hegemony in the respective inner city areas described, have had a profound impact on how both of these interviewees came to construct Black ethnic *group* identities. Whether real (actual numbers in the population), or imagined (symbolic Black power), in the examples above this perceived hegemony racialises mixed race subjects in those areas as Black. The impact of Black regional hegemony on mixed race identity formation is seen more explicitly in narratives that detail the impact of moving into and out of areas or 'situations' like Handsworth. Bradley from the 70s-born cohort, who grew up in Selly Oak, a majority White area in the south-west of the city, provides one such narrative. In Selly Oak, Bradley had continuously connected with the other mixed race boys in his area. In Selly Oak, 'half-caste' was a collective, significant ethnic category in and of itself. It was the category Bradley and his mixed race friends utilised as a foundation for group solidarity and connectedness, formulated through their minority position in the area.

We always kind of gravitated towards [each other] it was like magnetism. You see someone mixed race and they just becoming your friend, you get me? [...] in the White areas where I grew up with mixed race people, there was an allegiance [...] we identified each other straight away. [Bradley, 40]

As a teenager in Selly Oak, Bradley often got into trouble and was arrested on a number of occasions. After an accumulation of incidents, one particular arrest when he was thirteen years old, prompted his mother to lose patience and she did not collect him from the police station. Subsequently, he went into emergency foster care and following that was temporarily moved to what he described as a 'children's home... kind of hostel place' in Handsworth. During his time there he quickly formed friendships with the other young people in care and extended his networks to other inner city areas like Balsall Heath. Whilst he was out of the home one day in a local pub 'looking to buy some weed' he saw his uncle (his aunt's partner who he had contact with as a young child). Shocked by the situation his nephew was in, Bradley was eventually

taken in by the family for a period of time. During his time in Handsworth, Bradley was not marked out by his ethnicity and did not connect to other mixed race boys in the area through mixedness.

There was a few people [in Handsworth and Lozells] that was mixed as well but [...] we didn't kind of connect on the level that I connected with the other mixed people [in Selly Oak] because it was like we were all Black kind of thing [...] it was just a different kind of allegiance do you know what I mean? [...] you identify through [...] the things that we were doing, rather than what we are [...] and then it's like how... how far do you wanna go [...] because like the further you go, the more Blacker you was [...] not necessarily the more Black you are but the more respect you got, do you know what I mean [...] then obviously this [...] is what I'm about now as opposed to like, all that good upbringing that I had, now I'm like going the other way and it's like well I can't be [good], so I have to be this. [Bradley, 40]

This shared context meant that the youth in the area mostly perceived each other in 'non-racialized terms' (Alleyne 2002: 620). In moving to Handsworth, Bradley's sense of belonging was not dependent on race, but on the local and also through the 'things'<sup>39</sup> he was involved in whilst residing there. It seems that the agency he had over his identity was particularly constrained in this urban locality (Alexander 2016: 1432). Reminiscent of hooks' (2004) analysis of Black masculinities, Bradley's identity was implicated by stereotypes and popular representations of Black masculinities as criminal and hypermasculine (hooks 2004; Hall 1997; Hall et al. 2013; Mercer 1994). As Hall (1993: 111) reminds us, Black life is not lived outside of representation, so it is unsurprising that Bradley conceptualised Blackness and criminality as one and the same thing.

Despite the fact that Bradley self-racialised as Black during his time in the area and that he regularly engaged in what he perceived as 'Black' practices, he reported not 'feeling' Black right away. At times in Handsworth he described feeling as though he were out of place (Cresswell 1996). These uncomfortable feelings were prompted through his unfamiliarity with subtle symbols of Blackness in Handsworth, like the Swahili name of the hostel he first resided in and through explicit rejection from his Black peers. He would intermittently be

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<sup>39</sup> A euphemism for petty crime.

rejected by Black boys in the area on the basis that he originated from 'the White boy ends' of the city. In this case, the distinctions between mixedness and Blackness that 80s-born Nicholas suggested were mostly insignificant in Handsworth, could apparently be reified and exposed by local identity. This rejection weakened Bradley's claims to a Black ethnic *inner city* group identity and chances of obtaining any localised power that might come with that. Bradley's entrance to this group identity was conditional and predicated on his ability to authentically claim a substantial connection to the inner city, a connection that his childhood friend Chris, aged 40, had easily obtained by the location of his birth.

In the excerpt below, Chris uses his local area Lee Bank and the inner city more generally as geographical metaphors for social class. Despite the fact that mostly White areas like Bradley's in the 'outer-bands' of the city, have historically been the places where the majority of racist attacks are concentrated in Birmingham (Nayak 1999: 160; Jones 1988), the inner city zones have historically been the sites where the struggles against racisms have erupted (Hall & Jefferson 2006; Elliott-Cooper 2016). Below, Chris argues that an acute form of inner city deprivation materialises in these environments that non-White residents in the outer regions are shielded from.

Bradley's lived a life where he's grew up predominantly in the south of the city. I can tell you, Bradley didn't grow up in a deprived area. He might have been in an outer city deprived area but [...] in an inner city area it's different [...] and I can hear it, when people talk I can hear it (clicks fingers) straight away [...] and I know that's where you're coming from. [Chris, 40]

Interestingly his perceptions of inner city and outer city ecologies are somewhat different from Power's (1997: 14), who has argued that 'all-White peripheral council estates are often more isolated, poorer and closer to social breakdown than racially mixed inner cities'. Nevertheless, which of the locales are 'worse off' is less pertinent to this discussion. Instead, what is of critical interest is Chris' construction of the inner city as the most genuine and significant site of struggle and how territory is central to his processes of identification. He gives 'social definition' to the inner city through an 'active process of exclusion' (Massey 1995: 196). By engaging in a specific form of boundary making and claiming ownership of the inner city, he excludes Bradley from that space (Archer & Yamashita 2003). In doing so, he effectively denies

Bradley his 'deprived' status, despite the fact they share a very similar class background. Thus, their shared ethnic and class identities are seemingly usurped by their local identities, the latter of which, according to Chris, are embodied, as they can be heard through accent. For Chris, Bradley is unable to perform the specific type of creolised speech forms that have historically been found to characterise multi-ethnic inner city subjectivities (Hewitt 1986; Back 1996; Archer & Yamashita 2003; Gilroy 2002). Aside from accent, visual aesthetics were also drawn on, to decipher between mixed race subjectivities across the city. However unlike Chris, Ezra from the 70s-born cohort did not reproduce the idea of dichotomous inner versus outer city identities.

What I found is that... [mixed race girls in the south of the city] had grown with their mother... I'm stereotyping... longing to have a connection with their father... grown in a decent place... the structure. These are a lot of girls that I knew... maybe because of the part of the city I'm from... I'm from south, so Balsall Heath, Moseley, Hall Green, Solihull. So the mixed race girls in that... are different from the ones in Lee Bank and... Winson Green and Ladywood – who were *road*<sup>40</sup> [...] I'm saying these girls on this [south] side, were finger waves<sup>41</sup> and pretty and big earrings [...] the ones over this side [...] were longing to connect with their Blackness, so [...] what would happen is they'd come from a structure... stable homes... but end up getting with rude boys. Real dargs, you know? [...] and they had excellent jams down [Ladywood]. The mixed race girls down there were – Black girls. [Ezra, 41]

Ezra's 'mental map' (Tonkiss 2005: 6) of the city differs from Chris'. Chris' depictions of Birmingham mirrors the Chicago School's conceptualisations of the modern city that sees its spatial organisation 'in terms of a series of concentric rings' that expand outwards from the business centre, to the zones of transition (i.e. inner city) and so on, towards the commuter zones (suburbs) (ibid and see Burgess 1925). In contrast, Ezra divides the city up around the cardinal points on a compass. He locates himself in the 'south', which he depicts as a conglomerate, despite the fact that the areas he names are in fact quite qualitatively different. Moseley, Solihull and Hall Green for example are relatively affluent areas, in comparison to his childhood area of Balsall Heath

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<sup>40</sup> Slang for 'streetwise'.

<sup>41</sup> A 1920s/30s hairstyle, in which the hair is moulded in to 'S' shaped curves. The style was popularised again in the 1990s by African American women and became a popular Black hairstyle. Well known hip-hop recording artist Missy Elliott, often donned the hairstyle.

that has a long history as the city's red-light district (Hubbard 1998). Nevertheless he bounds these areas together, highlighting the significance of shared borders and how localised lives converge. For Ezra, Balsall Heath's inner city status is not enough for it to be regarded as the same as other inner city neighbourhoods, such as Lee Bank or Ladywood. Instead he perceives these inner city areas as having distinct 'cultural norms' (Tonkiss 2005: 9); all of which he claims have particular implications for the type of mixed race identities that are formed in the respective areas.

His gendered descriptions of the disparate 'types' of mixed race subjects are of critical interest. In his portrayal of the supposed archetypal mixed race south side girls, 'the historical spectre of the mulatta figure looms large' (Mitchell 2013: 240). They are presented as attractive women from supposedly stable and strong homes, yet despite these demographics they are impacted by an internal sadness, which he attributes to their fathers' absence. In the excerpt, the 'father' descriptor serves as a euphemism for Blackness. Ezra seems to suggest that the way in which sadness regarding this issue is reconciled, is through the south side mixed race girl's sexuality. In a similar vein to the mulatta, her sexuality is constructed through discourses of deviance and tragedy (Mitchell 2013: 239; Mahtani 2014: 34; hooks 1992: 73; Camper 1994). It is rendered 'unruly' and 'undisciplined' (Mitchell 2013: 239), through her eventual union with 'rude boys', 'real dargs'; descriptors that invoke the 'ideological legacy that constructs Black-male heterosexuality through the images of wild beasts [and] criminals' (Hill Collins 2004: 102). In contrast to this, in his descriptions of mixed race girls in places like Ladywood, there is no reference to Black fathers. They are instead described through their attitudinal traits. They are perceived as 'road', once again a euphemism for Blackness. In light of this, their proximity to Blackness is not raised as an issue precisely because of their emplacement in their localities which racialises them as *Black* (mixed race) girls. In his depiction of mixed race masculinities in the city, he uses different criteria to describe their character. He does not racialise Balsall Heath mixed race men through their sexuality as he did with the south side mixed race girls; instead he racialises them through their cultural practices.

Over [in Balsall Heath] you'd have [...] you know mixed race man who were [...] like geezers... yeah... a pint... you know [...] we had those *geezers*, whereas Handsworth didn't have [...] the mixed race geezers culture. You know, over this side you'd have had Black, White and mixed race together in the same firm. [Ezra, 41]

The unique Black, White multicultural mix in Balsall Heath has been documented in earlier work that has more specifically focused on the ways in which White youth have borrowed from Black cultures in the area (Jones 1988); a transcultural pattern which has been found in the urban landscapes of other regions across the country (Back 1996; Archer & Yamashita 2003; Sewell 1998). However in this excerpt Ezra implies the reverse of this, that is, the transference of 'White' cultures onto Black mixed race subjects. In describing the Balsall Heath mixed race male subject as a 'geezer' and referencing a 'traditional institution of [White] working class leisure' (Clark 2006: 152) – drinking pints in the pub – Ezra invokes notions of the White working class 'lad' (Willis 1977). And in juxtaposing this cultural practice to Handsworth, he implies that those Black mixed race male subjects in the 'Black capital' might instead engage in traditionally Black drinking habits, perhaps favouring some of the Caribbean favourites, 'Dragon Stout' or 'Cockspur' rum, over a traditional English pint (Carrington 2008: 437).

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, three defining features of place; 'location, material form, and meaningfulness', were analysed collectively (Gieryn 2000: 466). The chapter presented descriptive detail on some of the residential patterns of mixed race populations in Birmingham, alongside detail on the material features of the city which were utilised by participants, such as schools, churches and youth clubs. It also presented an analysis of how these places were made meaningful by the participants in the study, emphasising how these sites were central reference points in mixed race lives. Furthermore, by looking at mixed race through a spatial lens, the chapter was able to 'step back and consider the larger, structural workings at hand' (Neely & Samura 2011) that implicate mixed race subjectivity. Generally, the chapter has emphasised the need to incorporate questions of place into the analysis of mixed race in future research. I briefly summarise the findings below.

Place was conceptualised at different levels to demonstrate how private (home) and public (street, neighbourhood, school) identities are continuously interconnected. Starting with a discussion of the home, it emerged that conversations in this space initiated by parents or carers about race, ethnicity and racism, were important resources in helping mixed race subjects cultivate positive understandings about their own ethnic identities. They helped raise

participants' awareness of, and ability to, cope with racisms and other prejudices they might be subjected to throughout the life course. It was also argued that explicit conversations from parents were not the only source of racial literacy in the home (Twine 2004). Other, more subtle, symbolic visual aesthetics as well as cultural practices such as food and music were also held up as significant resources. They emerged as effective toolkits that encouraged a sense of belonging in their immediate families and also to a broader diasporic Caribbean community. Within the chapter, attention was turned away from White parents, to consider what lessons can be learnt about the Black parenting of mixed race children. The presence of Black parents was an important visual cue for participants. However concomitantly, it was argued that Black presence alone does not always facilitate a deeper understanding of participants' Black identities and/or heritages. Further to this, it was argued that although an ostensibly private space, lessons about race penetrated the walls of the home through other outlets such as television programmes which centred racial issues, thus highlighting the significant lessons about identity that can be read through popular culture (Ali 2003).

In broadening the discussion out from the home it became clear that, although highly significant, lessons about race in that space (from parents or otherwise) did not happen in isolation from the street, neighbourhood or school. Therefore, although much is written on the *parenting* of mixed race, it was argued that lessons regarding race in the home are made legible, when they are contextualised in the broader spaces beyond that boundary which are loaded with racial symbols and racial histories (Keith 2005; Amin 2002). For many participants, their childhood neighbourhoods were the blueprint which they worked from to negotiate their ethnic identities and to make sense of others around them. To echo Anoop Nayak (2011: 552), race was 'brought to life' in these localities. This was especially evident in narratives regarding movement through different localities and in descriptions about participants' own neighbourhoods and their inhabitants, vis-à-vis other localities in the city. By this I mean that, racial identity became knowable through the places they inhabited and moved through. Participants often marked off their identity through describing the 'character' (Massey 1995: 196) of their localities. Therefore they engaged in a particular type of 'place-making' (Gieryn 2000: 4680) that helped them to draw up imagined boundaries to distinguish their own localities (and correspondingly themselves) from others. It was through this act, that place was often used as reference point, to distinguish between 'us' and 'them'. Thus, local identities frequently emerged as dominant

identities, especially in those cases where locality was used to distinguish between the disparate characters of the mixed race subjects dispersed throughout the city. Although place in this sense, was a useful tool in which to negotiate their positions, it could also at times be quite restrictive. When race was 'concretised in place' (Nayak 2011: 552) in this way, so too was identity. This was especially the case for young mixed race males in inner city areas, such as Bradley, who felt compelled to perform the 'code of the street' (Anderson 1999) once he became a full time resident in Handsworth. Thus the 'cues' in how to perform racial identity could at times become 'pressures' in cases like this, because of the influence of the persistent racial symbolism of the inner city, that attached itself to its inhabitants (Archer & Yamashita 2003; Reay & Lucey 2000).

The chapter also evidences how place can be used as a tool by which to explore broader social questions and processes relating to mixed race identity and minority identities more generally. Firstly, the discussion on school highlighted the disjuncture between observed identities in institutional settings and expressed identifications. An emergent theme was that despite sharing many commonalities with their Black counterparts in regards to the experience of institutional racism in the school setting, mixed race pupils might experience other prejudices that are unique to them. Although data from the 60s and 70s-born cohorts were mostly presented in this section to argue this point, the few contemporary studies that have explored the Black mixed race experience in schools, highlight that this is a continued trend (Tikly et al. 2004; Haynes et al. 2006; Caballero et al. 2007). This highlights the longevity of some of the weaknesses in public policy and the need to implement change. In addition to the evidence base, it is argued that school policy should work better to recognise the heterogeneity of the Black pupil population in schools, to respond to differential needs appropriately.

Finally, throughout the chapter references were made to change over time in regards to the use of place and the materiality of neighbourhoods to unpack how mixed race identities have been organised and cultivated in place over time. It was evident from the gradual disappearance of community spaces like church and youth clubs in the youngest cohorts' narratives, in agreement with other research on the use of social institutions (Bruce 1995; Evans 1994), that the significance of these social places in young people's lives has reduced over time. Others have specifically highlighted the political consequences of the disappearance of (funding for) grass-roots community groups over time for

minority groups' self-organisation against oppressive racist state practices (Elliott-Cooper 2016). For this study, the critical question is: what is at stake for identity formation when these community spaces go? The following chapter continues with the theme of change over time and within it, issues relating to the intersections of place, space and identity continue to be addressed through the central discussions. It situates mixed race voices in the historical socio-political climates of Britain, starting with the 1970s, through to the contemporary moment. It builds on this chapter that has situated mixed race in place, by situating mixed race in time-specific cohorts.

## 5 Cultural and Racial Categories: The Manifestations of Mixed Race over Time

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how mixed race identity is constituted in place. It unpacked how movement between places offered new mixed race identifications that were not necessarily something that participants had agency in choosing. When entering into a new place, identities were often ascribed and pre-determined. The chapter highlighted the contingent nature of a mixed race 'group' who should supposedly be bound by their Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage and further still by their regional location – Birmingham. This chapter builds on the previous one by situating mixed race identities within the 'structural contexts' (Small 2001: 117) in which they are constructed. Importantly, the chapter brings to light the cultural and racial categories that have been ascribed to, and chosen by, mixed race people in Britain through the 1970s and 1980s. As already noted in chapter two, there has generally been little research on mixed race during these decades, with the majority of scholarly work on mixed race being produced from the 1990s onwards (Parker & Song 2001; Aspinall 2003; Caballero 2005; Twine 2004; Zack 1995). This thesis seeks to work towards filling in some of this historical gap.

The chapter begins by charting mixed race experiences from the mid-1970s right through to the early 1990s in Britain. In its attempt to fill Britain's historical gap on mixed race, this section demonstrates how Black mixed race identities have been cultivated within Black cultural styles of the periods. It builds on the proliferation of literature on Black youth in the 1970s and 1980s (Hall et al. 2013; Gilroy 2002; Solomos 1988; Gilroy 1982; Hebdige 2006; Black 2011; Back 1988), by writing the Black *mixed race* experience into these histories. It particularly charts the influence of Rastafari and African-American hip-hop on Black mixed race identity. It explores how mixed race respondents have resisted some of the conceptualisations of Blackness that existed in these cultures, in order to carve out a space for themselves within them. And building on the previous chapter, it considers how these cultural activities were also indelibly shaped by Birmingham and particular localities within it. After presenting the accounts in this chronological style by centring generationally specific narratives, the chapter continues by drawing across *all* of the accounts, to interrogate the idea that we are in a post-racial moment. Using the high

profile mixed race figure, Barack Obama, as an entry point to the discussion, it demonstrates that race is 'something that we still appear to need to know about each other' (Byrne 2010: 2) and argues that mixedness is not indicative of any substantive move towards the post-racial (Song 2015a). On the contrary, many respondents were very conscious of a racial order, often contemplating their position in this structure as Black mixed race subjects throughout their life course. Generally then, this chapter engages in the critical work of historicising mixed race. By taking the long view and highlighting important generational effects, it takes account of the heterogeneity of the Black mixed race experience. It moves beyond the assumptions about contemporary mixed race experiences, to consider what has changed over time, and most importantly, what appears to have stayed the same.

## **5.2 Sound systems, reggae and dreadlocks: mixed race Rastas**

*'Just before my sixteenth birthday I left care and... I was fending for myself... I had a year or two... of just... breaking the law, getting into all kinds of rubbish. Then the Rasta ting came to me at seventeen and it straightened me out... the Rasta ting brought me back to my Black side'. [Assefa, 44]*

Chapter two briefly detailed the state and civic violence that characterised urban centres across the country through the 1970s and 1980s (Solomos 1988; Fryer 1984; Hall et al. 2013), and how significant structural inequalities through the period manifested themselves in a myriad of ways in the social lives of many ethnic minority groups. Much has been written about how non-White Britons responded to these oppressions in the form of uprisings, strikes, supplementary school movements, protests and anti-racist community groups, to name a few (Brah 1999; Ashe et al. 2016; Elliott-Cooper 2016; Sivanandan 2008; Andrews 2016). This chapter considers the power of Black cultural 'stylings' as a form of resistance (Gilroy 2002). Literature suggests that Caribbeans are 'one of the most politically aware ethnic groups' but that their involvement in societal issues tends not to occur through participation in party politics (Reynolds 2006: 279). In keeping with this, what emerged from the data was that the majority of the 60s and 70s-born interviewees responded to their structural positionings in their youth, through practices that were not 'political' in the traditional sense of the word. Tales of their youth were littered with references to two distinct 'black expressive cultures' (Gilroy 2002). For

many of the 60s-born cohort, coming of age in the 1970s, it was the tenets of Rastafari which defined their social practices, physical appearances and cultural tastes, and for the 70s-born in the late 1980s it was African-American Hip-Hop. These 'black cultural modes of resistance' were structural responses to structural racisms (Back 1996: 88; Sabelli 2011; Hebdige 2006). As will be shown throughout the chapter they provided leisure spaces when access to White social spaces was restricted, they provided alternative education when institutional racism meant they were not able to equally access the curriculum at school, and for the most part instilled in them positive Black identities during periods when positive representations of Blackness were not often readily available (Cashmore 1983; Connell 2012; Jones 1988). Perhaps most importantly, they also afforded them agency. Interviewees told me how they continuously fed into and replenished these cultural spaces through their active participation in the building of sound systems, the organising of discos and growing of dreadlocks, to name a few. Beginning with Rastafari, the forthcoming sections explore how these two popular Black expressive cultures were utilised by the older mixed race subjects in the study to help them in forming their identities, paying attention to what difficulties and/or privileges came with being a Black *mixed* race youth in these networks.

Gilroy has argued that many analysts have failed to write Rastafari women and their 'specific relation to the [Rastafari] movement' into their research (1982: 291). Even fewer have written on the positionality of *mixed* race Rastafari (men and) women in the movement. Over half of the 60s-born cohort reported being a part of this Black interpretive community (Gilroy 2002: 251). These respondents all engaged with Rastafari during their youth and a few had remained Rastas into adulthood. For the majority of those who were involved, it was the reggae music that transmitted Rastafari's political messages, that was central to its appeal. The sound system was the major cultural institution that transported this politically conscious protest reggae music to Britain. It came with the second wave of migration from Jamaica in the mid-1950s, which unlike the first wave, 'included a larger proportion of urban, working-class' people from the island (Jones 1988: 34). By the 1970s, the burgeoning recording industry in Jamaica ensured that the music and political influences gaining momentum there transcended the boundaries of the island (Jones 1988; Hebdige 2006; Cashmore 1983; Jan Van Dijk 1998). During the period, the oppositional sounds of Rastafari inspired reggae were increasingly consumed on an international scale by the Caribbean diaspora and soon became 'established in all of Britain's major black communities' (Jones 1988: 39). It was around this

period that many interviewees from the 60s-born cohort were entering secondary school. Building on some of the themes explored in the previous chapter, schools were often cited as a key point of entry to the music and to Rastafari more generally because they increased participants' social networks and friendships with other Black youth. I use 60s-born Lucien's account as a case study example below. He grew up in a single parent household headed by his White mother, along with his two brothers and sister.

About the age of twelve or thirteen [...] I discovered reggae music [...] conscious music. Erm and I think that was a turning point for me [...] I suppose you go into high school then and you meet a different circle of friends and yeah it was around that time, yeah [...] I remember the album [...] by a guy called Tapper Zukie and he had a track on there about Steve Biko and it just opened up [...] that inquisitive side of me. Erm... who's Steve Biko? What's this about? What's he about? And then that led from one thing to another and I still use music very much in the same way now, as an introduction to various, erm, subjects and things to go and look further on yeah. [Lucien, 50]

As briefly noted in the previous chapter, the Rastafarian influence on Black youth in schools did not go unnoticed. Followers were regarded as a deviant sub-group (Mac an Ghaill 1988) and Rastafari as an ideology, was perceived by teachers as a potential threat to students, and one that they needed protecting from (Tomlinson 2008). It is perhaps unsurprising then that Lucien's attempts to utilise the knowledge he had gained through his alternative reggae education in the official school setting were met with hostility. By the time he was fourteen, he told me that he had developed an archive of 'cultural information [...] which was very Afro-centric and pro-Black.' Therefore, when the opportunity to do a school project presented itself in his third year (late 1970s) he and many of his friends requested that they do something on slavery or another Black-related topic. Lucien decided Angela Davis should be the central feature of his work. The Rastafari symbols of Pan-Africanism and its sounds of liberation, provided the foundations that linked him into a collective Black consciousness (Gilroy 1991: 115). His music had taken him to the apartheid struggles in South Africa and the Civil Rights Movement in the USA; Davis was an inspiring figure who he had learnt about and had come to admire. Despite this, his teacher Mr Hamilton denied his request, arguing that Angela Davis and the messages she taught were not 'our history'. This particular incident and the

general oppression Lucien felt at school caused him to devalue the education he was receiving; he left school at fifteen with no qualifications.

Although his formal education had ended, his informal education through music had not. Listening to sounds<sup>42</sup> became his regular leisure activity outside of school, as was the case for many of his peers. The curators of a recent exhibition in Birmingham in 2015, called *Sound System Culture*, identified one hundred and twelve sound systems in the Birmingham area operating from the 1960s to the 1990s.<sup>43</sup> One of the curators informed me that this count only included the 'traditional bespoke' systems, suggesting that this number was only the 'tip of the iceberg' and that there were likely to have been over one thousand in operation, including the more modern systems. Sound systems were the conduit through which reggae music was received (Gilroy 2002). They brought together 'dub, DJ-ing, singing and dance' all at once and within that, the audience was 'able to exert some control over the music' (Jones, 1988: 30). Amplifiers and speakers were tuned to a particular style, and selectors<sup>44</sup> brought their individual creativity and improvisation, meaning that each sound relayed recorded music in a unique way, which gave them idiosyncratic quality (Back 1988). Within this culture, the labour required to deliver and perform the music, was of equal importance to the role of the original recording artist who made the track (Gilroy 2002).

By thirteen (circa 1977), Lucien had become drawn to one particular Birmingham sound system – Duke Alloy. Reminiscent of the 1950s rudimentary sound system culture in the form of 'backyard discos' in West Kingston Jamaica (Hebdige 2006: 119), youth in Birmingham would set up small speakers in people's back gardens or in local parks and sound clashes were a regular occurrence. By the age of fifteen, Lucien was following Duke Alloy to shebeens and blues parties<sup>45</sup> all over the city, to areas such as Sparkbrook, Handsworth, Small Heath, Moseley and Balsall Heath. Building on the discussion on the use of local social institutions in the previous chapter, sounds would be set up in churches, youth clubs and community centres. These practices were what De

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<sup>42</sup> Short form for 'sound systems'.

<sup>43</sup> See an interview with the curators of Sound System Culture here; <http://sabotagetimes.com/music/exploring-birminghams-sound-system-culture> [date accessed 16.05.17]

<sup>44</sup> DJs who would select the songs.

<sup>45</sup> Shebeens and blues parties were unlicensed establishments or private house parties that were set up in response to racist policies in public pubs and clubs which excluded Black people and Black music.

Certeau terms, 'spatial tactics' (1984), in that the spaces were created in response to structural constraints.

Every night I'd be out following this sound Alloy, I was just really drawn into it. It was just something [...] I could relate to and more so with [...] the Alloy sound is that [...] the two lead guys in the sound, the toaster<sup>46</sup> and the MC<sup>47</sup> and the guy who used to turn the music<sup>48</sup>... erm they were mixed race as well. So that helped me fit in to that, do you know what I mean? [...] I think there was an element of that there and I don't think [...] I was doing all of this consciously, not at the time. It's only upon reflection now that I look back and you're drawing the dots. [Lucien, 50]

Seeing mixed race men in these prominent positions in Duke Alloy gave Lucien a real sense of belonging, and made the sound particularly appealing to him. Generally across the sample, it seemed that mixed race respondents had no issues with 'fitting into' sound system culture as either consumers and/or producers. Brandon, 50, who grew up with his White British mother and Black Barbadian father until they divorced when he was eleven, also told me that he was heavily involved in sound systems. By the time he was sixteen he had built his own sound, or in his words; 'I made my own entertainment.' Unlike Lucien, Brandon travelled beyond the city with his sound, to nearby regions in the Midlands, such as Coventry and Redditch. The agency involved in both making these sounds (in the case of Brandon) and consuming them (in the case of Lucien) made the experience esoteric and all the more consuming for these mixed race youth.

The Rasta aesthetic was also significant in that it projected a clear pro-Black message (Barnett 2005). The entire 60s-born cohort who became Rastas wore their hair in dreadlocks at the height of their involvement in Rastafari. Many had intermittently sported the style throughout their adulthood – two still had locks at the time of the interview. The significance of dreadlocks in the British landscape during the period has been likened to the political symbolism produced out of the Afro in America through the 1960s and 1970s (Sabelli 2011: 141), in that the style was an outright 'rejection of white-oriented images of beauty and pride' (Tate 2013: 224). Despite these political underpinnings, none of the participants who wore dreadlocks spoke about their

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<sup>46</sup> The person who talks over the music and introduces the tracks to the audience.

<sup>47</sup> 'Microphone controller' or 'master of ceremonies', another term which also describes the role of talking lyrically over the music to engage the audience.

<sup>48</sup> Here, Lucien is referring to the DJ or 'selector' who chooses and plays the tracks during the set.

decision to style their hair with politicised rhetoric; it was simply one part of the overall aesthetic. For most, its dominant function was as a rite of passage into Rastafari. It was only in reference to this self-transition, that many spoke of the significance of 'locking up' their hair. Clothing was an equally important element of the Rasta iconography. Martina, 49, was able to recall the intricate details of one of her outfits.

So I had this [...] *bitter* chocolate brown double pleated skirt that I bought from Marks and Spencer's... I had a georgette...<sup>49</sup> beige brown with little dark brown polka dots that had a little pussy bow there and I had [...] my fake crocodile effect, high heeled shoes from K's, with the bit of gold at the back of the heel and just around the front of the toe [...] I thought I was *the lick* (clicks fingers). And I had [...] myself a brown crush velvet leather material to wrap my hair and then we used to go down the market and buy cheap gold chains and then weave the gold chains into the wrap and [...] I'd have my gold earrings. [Martina, 49]

At another point in the interview, Martina explained to me that the 'double pleated' skirt she referenced was so long that she found it difficult to get on and off the bus with it. Another female Rastafarian from the 60s-born cohort, Isabelle, also recalled wearing long styled skirts which covered her ankles and wrapping her hair so it was completely covered. Isabelle described the attire of a Rasta woman at the time as reminiscent of Muslim dress and Martina likened the clothes to something you might wear 'to go for a day at the office'. This modest dress presented a stripped down version of Blackness which conveyed the foundational spiritual core of Rastafari which had little interest in 'worldly possessions' or the products of capitalism (Jan Van Dijk 1998; Hebdige 2006: 116). Notably, the 'modesty' of clothing was an expectation for Rasta women, not men (Yawney 1994: 67), thus emphasising the significance of gender within Rastafari.

The running and building of sound systems in particular also emerged as quite a gendered process in that young males (such as Brandon earlier) often acquired these types of roles; this was only indicated by the occasional reference to the 'soundman dem' in some interviews. Aside from this, both the men and women from the 60s-born cohort recalled sneaking out to sound system parties around the city at fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years old, which

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<sup>49</sup> I think here, Martina is referring to a style of shirt/blouse.

as noted, was a collective esoteric experience for both the performers and audience alike. The consumption of the doctrinal and theological elements of Rastafari however, was more obviously gendered (Yawney 1994). Martina, 49, told me that she would often be given the role of preparing food in the kitchen and rolling 'spliffs'<sup>50</sup> whilst the Rastamen 'reasoned'<sup>51</sup> in other parts of the house.

So you'd have houses [...] where the man dem all lived together - houses of dread [...] the man dem would be sitting down [...] smoking... and the women would be in the kitchen. And so I wasn't feeling that at all [...] I would just roll spliffs in the corner [...] until either something was discussed that I found so objectionable that I'd pipe up and say something and then they'd run me out the room. [Martina, 49]

As noted earlier, the role of women in Rastafari has generally been side-stepped (Gilroy 1982: 291; Yawney 1994), meaning that male narratives have generally dominated the discussions (Cashmore 1983; Hebdige 2006). This limits what we know about the *holistic* nature of this Black interpretive community (Gilroy 2002; Cashmore 1983; Hebdige 2006). In much the same way, I argue that a better understanding of the heterogeneity of *Blackness* in Rastafari is also needed. Because this not only highlights what might be considered parochial narrow questions about the defining elements of the movement, but also, more pressing questions about competing perceptions of authentic Blackness. Although Rastafari provided the participants with agency, education and confidence, references were also made to some of the negative experiences they had. Interestingly, some of the 60s-born cohort who had become Rastas in the 1970s expressed feelings of discontent with particular aspects of Rastafari, unveiling how culture is a 'space of constraint and challenge' as well as a site of 'play and pleasure' (Alexander 2016: 1433). The upcoming discussion unpacks some of these grievances, to prompt a broader discussion on how Rastafari at times invoked essentialised notions of Blackness and considers what the consequences of this are for mixed race subjectivities.

For all of the 60s-born Rastas, their presence in the movement as mixed race subjects at times prompted internal arguments over how Blackness within Rastafari should (or rather should not) be conceptualised. These arguments

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<sup>50</sup> Marijuana cigarette.

<sup>51</sup> Reasoning sessions might have involved weekly meet ups between followers of Rastafari, which featured discussions about communal issues and also involved chanting, praying, singing, meditation, and possibly, the smoking of marijuana.

were upsetting for those participants as it put their legitimacy as members into question. One 60s-born respondent, Isabelle, recalled a Rasta telling her she couldn't be a Rasta because she wasn't Black, to whom she replied; 'you can't tell me what I can be and what I can't be'. In the excerpt below 60s-born Martina recalls getting in to a dispute with a Rasta at her friend's home. He presented an apocalyptic hypothetical scenario of a White versus Black civil race war, and suggested because she was not 'full Black,' she would take the side of White people. In her response to him below, she questioned the logic of Rastafari's heavy critique of Babylon<sup>52</sup> when Rastas themselves were living within it and were dependent on it.

I was like: 'you fucking idiot, if there was civil war I ain't fighting with none of ya [...] because whichever side of you wins [...] all of you will want to get rid of me... because I ain't *Black* enough for you and I ain't White enough for them'... and it's, you know, all of this 'chant down Babylon'... I says, 'that's fine, chant it down if you want to *but* if that's what you wanna do... move out of the flat that you've been given, stop going and signing on and living off the dole money, go and earn ya own money somehow, get on the fucking boat to Shashamane<sup>53</sup> and go and live your life... and if you can't do any of them things, you need to shut the fuck up'. [Martina, 49]

Essentialist conceptualisations of Blackness were often associated with the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF). Although not an official mansion<sup>54</sup> of Rastafari, it 'structured the Rastafari movement in Jamaica and worldwide' (Bonacci 2013: 73). Initially, it was set up in New York during the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1941) as a not-for-profit organisation to 'assist the besieged Ethiopians' (Jan Van Dijk 1998: 180). As a pan-African organisation that was officially endorsed by Emperor Haile Selassie himself, many Rastafari in Jamaica sought to be affiliated with the group and branches soon opened in Jamaica (ibid). The first British branch opened in 1972 in London and branches in the Midlands – Birmingham and Leicester – soon followed (ibid). Both Martina and Lucien described the EWF as an organisation which was about being 'Blacker than Black', which their mixedness inevitably troubled. As a

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<sup>52</sup> A symbolic term used in Rastafari, most often to denote systems of Western oppression/imperialism.

<sup>53</sup> Five hundred acres of land in Shashamane, Ethiopia, was granted to Black people of the diaspora by the then Emperor Haile Selassie, in 1948. It is regarded as a site of repatriation for many Rastafari.

<sup>54</sup> This refers to the official 'branches' or 'subgroups' of Rastafari which each have slightly different symbols, belief systems and interpretations of the religion.

result, many of the 60s-born Rastafari joined the Twelve Tribes of Israel; a mansion of Rastafari that formed in Jamaica in 1968. 'Effectively organised, yet liberal in its doctrines', it had 'in its membership many middle-class adherents, intellectuals, and leading reggae stars', and soon became very influential over the Rastafari movement in England (ibid: 181). In calling for the liberation and salvation of all people, not only Black people, the participants perceived the mansion to be mostly un-distracted by the skin colour of those who took on board its tenets (Barrett 1997: 230). Others, like Assefa below, regarded all of the mansions as limited. Assefa grew up in foster care in Cambridge from the age of nine and was introduced to Rastafari at seventeen years old after meeting an older Rastafari from Birmingham who was temporarily living in Cambridge. He told me elsewhere in the interview how much Rastafari positively impacted on his life: 'Rastafari... was about rebellion and... standing up strong as a Black you'... it turned me around and taught me manners, and taught me... respect'. However he did not align himself with any particular sect. In his excerpt below he suggests that disparate sects diffuse the overall project of Rastafari into smaller, less powerful groups. Instead, he looked beyond them towards Haile Selassie himself as a guide for how to consume Rastafari as a religion and/or way of life.

You have a lot of Rastafari dem whose Black binghi<sup>55</sup> eye [...] who *solely* erm... accept Blackness. So, you know, in other words, the Rasta ting is good, but it's only as good as the person who's looking into it, because they will get from it what's to be found in there [...] there's different denominations in Rastafari [...] but I don't align myself with any [...] that works against general unity you know? [...] I didn't join any of them [...] I looked at the man himself – Haile Selassie – [...] and found out that he only wanted nothing greater for me and for all, that we should be saved, and that we should know our saviour, and do what our saviour has instructed us what we have to do... and that's being baptised in the water and the spirit, so that's what I did [...] I didn't need to look at all the houses and of who's saying what. Some man say if you don't chant loud enough, if you don't smoke enough, if you don't have ten wives, if you don't eat only vegetables [...] I didn't join any of those things, I just looked to Haile Selassie himself, for what him ah teach me. [Assefa, 44]

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<sup>55</sup> I think Assefa here is using an abbreviation for the Nyahbinghi Order, which is the oldest mansion of Rastafari, generally regarded as the most orthodox one (see Barnett 2005). It emphasises the repatriation of Black people to Africa.

I quote Assefa's excerpt at length because it emphasises what Gilroy (2002) calls, the 'interpretive' nature of this Black cultural movement. As Gilroy (ibid: 251) notes, Rastafari was not only a religious subculture but a 'popular phenomenon' that had global reach and allowed for 'flexible' levels of commitment from its followers. This analysis of Black mixed race followers of Rastafari reveals what happens to ideas of Blackness and pan-Africanism when they travel and *mix* at their given destinations (with other ideas, politics, and in these cases, with other ethnic groups). The examples above of the Black rejection of Black mixed race people of African-Caribbean descent in the name of Pan-African influenced politics and religion is quite ironic. This irony is lost on some, such as the Rastas who rejected Martina and Isabelle,<sup>56</sup> as the basis of the rejection for them was quite obvious. The impact of this type of rejection from Black people more generally is unpacked in the following chapter but for now I draw attention to Martina and Isabelle's militant responses to that rejection, as they make clear how (essentialised) notions of Blackness can be resisted, reconfigured and rearticulated.

### **5.3 African pendants and breakdance: the ideological clash**

*'We're coming out of assimilation, we're now in multiculturalism'.*

[Ezra, 41]

By the 1980s, a new generation of mixed race youth were coming of age and they were going through these developments in 'Thatcher's Britain'. Following her election in 1979, the Conservatives would stay in power for a further eighteen years (Tomlinson 2008: 43). The period was characterised by repressive state action and an economic recession (ibid); some of the fallout of this was large scale deindustrialisation, mass unemployment and a decrease in government funding for grass-roots community groups that were created to deal with these very issues (Elliott-Cooper 2016; Solomos et al. 1982; Solomos 1988; Rowbotham et al. 2014). All of these developments presented new structural problems that would negatively impact on the new generation of working class Black British youth. Numerous changes also took place in Jamaica through the 1980s, which negatively impacted upon the production of Rasta

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<sup>56</sup> The experience of the women in the sample is particularly interesting as it seems that they were simultaneously fetishised and rejected by Black Rasta men on the basis of their mixedness. A more in-depth discussion of mixed race as it intersects with gender features in chapter six.

inspired reggae music. In 1980, the Jamaican socialist government led by Michael Manley whose 'populist socialist politics had been guided by the semantics... of Rasta reggae', were defeated by Edward Seaga's regime that had been backed by the USA (Gilroy 2002: 251, 252). Gilroy notes (ibid) that under this new government the ideology of Rastafari was seldom supported. Advancements in new technologies had also meant that more upbeat, faster dancehall tracks were beginning to be produced (Jones 1988; Cooper 2004; Hebdige 2006; Gilroy 2002). The themes in these songs were no longer solely about African unity and Black liberation. In the UK, the 'role and content of reggae' (Gilroy 2002: 252), had also shifted around the late 1970s and early 1980s. Notably, the Midlands and Birmingham were significant regions in these processes, playing an important role in these musical advances. A new generation of significant British reggae and 'two-tone'<sup>57</sup> ska bands emerged from the region during the late 1970s, such as The Beat and UB40 in Birmingham, and The Specials and The Selecter in nearby Coventry; all of which had a mix of Black and White members (Gilroy 2002: 226; Black 2011). The urban unrests in 1981 also served as a catalyst in the development of a new Black *British* consciousness which was concerned with the plights of inner city living throughout the decade. Reggae music could not adequately respond to these localised issues, as new priorities and sites of struggle developed (Gilroy 2002: 261; Jones 1988: 5). The African-American hip-hop that proliferated throughout Britain in the late 1980s however, which raised issues specific to urban metropolis life; such as poverty, alcohol, drugs and unemployment, did speak to the experiences of the 70s-born cohort who were entering secondary school throughout the decade (Gilroy 1991).

Having discussed the significance of racialised inner city zones on mixed race subjectivities in the previous chapter (Burgess 1985; Nayak 2011; Tonkiss 2005; Connell 2012), it is clear how (and why) these urban specific problems in hip-hop resonated with the experiences of mixed race youth. For example, Ezra grew up in Balsall Heath when prostitution was an epidemic (Hubbard 1998), and Chris' nickname for his childhood area, Lee Bank, was 'Vietnam' because of the violence, gang activity and shootings in the area. Despite these shifts, many of the political messages in conscious reggae music were also present in African-American hip-hop and so the music retained its pedagogical value (Gilroy 1991). Similarly to 60s-born Lucien, who discovered references to pan-Africanism and transnational Black unity in reggae, 70s-born Malcolm found

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<sup>57</sup> Two-tone music had roots in Caribbean ska, a musical style which it borrowed from and 'rearticulated into distinctively British styles' (Gilroy 2002: 226).

references to Malcolm X and the Black Panthers in hip-hop. Music propelled him into formal education, whilst also acting as his informal education.

Public Enemy were the first place I ever heard about [...] Black power [...] Black as a reason to be proud, you know notable Black people [...] who did things and achieved things. I heard about Black Panthers, I heard about Malcolm X, I heard about the Nation of Islam, I heard it all here. That was my internet right there, that was my Google, that was Google for all of us [...] our music is where we got it from. I went to college based off the fact that a very famous rapper – Big Daddy Kane – he had a song called *Lean on Me* and [...] one of his lines was [...], 'go to college and get an education'. And people said, 'why you going to college?' And I'd [...] repeat that line, you know? [Malcolm, 42]

A key point of disjuncture between the two social generations however was their aesthetic. Using this as a starting point, I argue that this change was indicative of a significant shift which saw the 70s-born Black mixed race subjects enjoy access to discreet forms of cultural and social capitals which the 60s-born cohort had not enjoyed through the 1970s.

We have a very large character, and I think that we are always compensating because we are socially poor, and we are economically poor, and we are historically poor. So we make £5 look like £500, and there isn't any other culture or group of people that does that the way we do. We can be *dead*, but we will look sharp, it's what we've learnt to do and other people are attracted to that [...] how we are as a people. We're very bolshie, we're very upfront, we're very forthright but that comes from a history of having to be this way. [Malcolm, 42]

Despite being raised by his White mother and having little knowledge of, or connection to, his Black father and Black extended family, with great ease and much confidence through his repeated use of the personal pronoun 'we', Malcolm claims full membership of the Black community and enters himself into the iconography of the sharp Black cultural aesthetic (McMillan 2016; Taylor 2016; Tulloch 2010). However, in thinking about the 60s and 70s-born cohort, his invocations of a 'flashy', bold and brass aesthetic only resonates with the 70s-born narratives. For example Karen, born 1971, below describes how her fashion combined bold jewellery with African symbols, a shell tracksuit and Nike Air Max trainers. Her symbols of Blackness were draped in symbols of inner city living.

It was very significant, I *loved* the music and [...] for me that sort of brought out a bit more – if you like – my Black heritage. So yeah I’ve still got that pendant upstairs with the African Nefertiti head [...] and [...] we used to wear like our chains... so Nefertiti, the holograms... I had a big fat sovereign, I had a clip on gold tooth and I had like a... what were those little caps called? Like a skull cap, we used to call them. And, so I had like a beautifully embroidered African skull cap, and erm I used to wear that with my shell suit. So it was all part of the music culture really, and of course, your Nike Airs, erm, back in the day (laughs). [Karen, 43]

Although her aesthetic displayed symbols of African lineage and Black pride, it differed remarkably from the Rastafarian iconography of the 1970s, in that there appeared to be an element of conspicuous consumption involved in creating her look. Karen came from a traditional working class background. She grew up in a council house with her parents, younger sister and older brother, until her parents separated during her time at secondary school. She told me that her mother ‘didn’t really work for many years but did do cleaning and care work’, and that her father had been in the British army upon his arrival from St Kitts at sixteen. He later had a brief stint as a boxer and then worked as a taxi driver for many years. However, despite her modest background, Karen’s ‘look’ was much more ‘label conscious’ and in search of ‘opulence’ than the 60s-born cohort before her (McMillan 2016: 67). Ezra, below, also described how Black hairstyles were rearticulated through the late 1980s and early-to-mid 1990s.

I was going out with a Black girl [...] very pretty, *very, very* pretty [...] she came to the youth club [and] when I saw her, she’d hot combed [her hair, then] the week after [...] she came back *braided*, and I was like, *naaaah*. That can’t work [...] I didn’t like it [...] I don’t think I told her. But I finished with her [...] it’s the same thing now isn’t it – self-hate [...] just... *braids, natural*. You know, remember it’s Michael Jackson<sup>58</sup> in now. Do you know what I’m saying? I hate myself for that [...] you know [...] it’s... it’s that whole soul thing. [Ezra, 41]

Ezra’s assertion that his decision to break up with his childhood girlfriend because of her natural hairstyle was the result of ‘self-hate’, emphasises the ‘symbolic currency’ of Black hair and how it is intimately bound up with assumptions about the psychology and morality of those who wear and style it

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<sup>58</sup> Through his career Michael Jackson often wore chemically treated hairstyles which made his hair straighter and wavier than it would have been if left natural.

(Mercer 1994: 102). The coupling of hairstyles and morality in this way renders natural styles, such as his girlfriend's braids (and dreadlocks, a key visual marker of Rastafari faith which many of the 60s-born cohort sported), as radical, defiant and authentic expressions of Blackness. Mercer suggests that this logic is limited as it emphasises self over society and does not acknowledge how natural styles such as locks, were 'stylistically *cultivated* and politically *constructed* in a particular historical moment' and were never 'just [simply] natural [and] waiting to be found' (ibid: 108). Mercer (ibid) asserts that the momentary nature of dreadlocks as 'radical' can be seen via its gradual incorporation into mainstream fashions.

Whether perceived as 'radical' or not (by external actors, or by those who sported the style), undoubtedly for the 60s-born cohort who were coming of age as Black subjects in 1970s Britain, the wearing of dreadlocks symbolised their ability and desire to speak back to Britain's (White) dominant ideologies of race and culture (Joseph-Salisbury 2016). However by the time the 70s-born cohort were coming of age in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Black culture was influencing and 'shaping... urban Britain as a whole' (Gilroy 2002: 203). For this younger social generation, there was less of a requirement to speak back to or resist Britain's dominant culture, simply because Black culture was increasingly becoming a significant part of it. Especially in urban areas throughout the country, Black youth like Ezra were the 'defining force in street-oriented British youth culture' (Hall 2000: 128). Unlike the 60s-born cohort who spoke at length about times when they felt they had limited access to Rastafari, the quotes from Ezra and Anthony below, suggest that the 70s-born cohort had gained much more bargaining power both within Black youth culture networks and outside of them.

Hip-hop and breakdancing was in... popping – and I was good [...] those things were seen as social capital [...] when I look back on it [...] the mixed race people within our community [...] had the social capital. Whether it be through garms<sup>59</sup> and clothes, dancing... fighting... they weren't kind of like a minority. They were *name brand* [...] there was an era where being red<sup>60</sup> was... *a badge of honour* [...] in my generation [...] *White girls loved you, Black girls loved you*. Because Black girls wanted that kind of RnB type bruddah [...] *You get what I mean?* You see what

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<sup>59</sup> Slang term for clothing.

<sup>60</sup> A Caribbean term that refers to fair skin complexion (usually connotes a person of mixed heritage).

I'm saying? And then White girls were like, 'well Black might have been a bit too rough so let's meet half' (laughs). [Ezra, 41]

When I started to go secondary school, at the time it was MC Hammer and Bobby Brown. I was the one that was up to date with these fashions, so I used to go school with MC Hammer trousers, imagine that? *My gosh*, do you get what I mean? School disco, *I am* MC Hammer, I could do all the Hammer moves. Do you know what I'm saying? So [...] it was like, teachers did, 'oh you know he's a confident student', you know, 'he's quite trendy' [...] 'he's quite popular.'  
[Anthony, 36]

Black heterosexual men have often been configured as innately strong and powerful, rendering them objects of sexual desire to women. However, there is also a subtext to this notion, which configures their mythical strength as dangerous, uncontainable and primitive (Hill Collins 2004). It is these Black pathologies which Ezra is able to avert. This is because his mixedness, like that of the popular soul and RnB music he references, is regarded as slightly 'softer' than the dark skinned excessive Black masculine heterosexuality. As a result of his 'red' skin being discursively linked to this musical culture in this way, he becomes an object of desire, for both Black and White girls alike.<sup>61</sup> Although he does not specifically capitalise on (or recognise the potential use of) his mixedness in the same way, Anthony is also able to enjoy an element of social capital through his involvement in this Black popular musical culture. Interestingly, he enjoyed this capital in school, which denotes a level of increased agency in that space in comparison to the 60s-born cohort.

In the excerpt below, Ezra, in a similar fashion to Anthony, was able to practice and share his cultural interests within school. However in this example, it seems that he and his friends had slightly more agency than Anthony; they were active agents in that they contributed to the environment by revolutionising the school discos. He and his friends, who had organised the school disco he mentions below, were part of a self-made crew. Following on from the success of the disco, his crew started to regularly host hip-hop jams. These involved performance pieces such as breakdancing alongside the playing of music by DJs. The creation of a crew and the development of musical performances in personalised spaces are very much similar to the construction

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<sup>61</sup> The following chapter deals more explicitly with the intersections of race and gender and how mixed race desirability has roots in Caribbean colonial formations. Here, the point is to signify the significance of popular culture in reproducing these ideas.

and consumption of sound systems. Therefore, in many ways Ezra, like many of the 60s-born cohort who engaged in sound system culture, not only consumed the music, he also performed it. However, although the 70s-born cohort may have practiced music in the same way, it was clear that the options of where to, and how to, 'do' music, had broadened since the 1970s.

So historically... you'd have [...] the teacher who's bringing his decks in – you know the kind of scenario – and play some madness [...] I remember going to them and saying, 'look, I'm not listening to no gothic music and we're not listening to no *Final Countdown* or *Living on a Prayer*.' You know... I said we want hip-hop [...] so what happened was we had, half and half. So they played all that rock and all that... so you had us hard faced on the side and then the other half of it was our spot. Then what happened through that is [...] I used to organise the discos and [...] they went from discos to jams... a lot of people from outside used to come, to *our* school. [Ezra, 41]

This section finishes by emphasising how much the generational consciousness of the 70s-born cohort in this study was impacted by hip-hop culture. It provided the language to accurately express 'localised urban rage', which laid the foundation for a new form of mixing across disparate groups who were held together by a shared ideology and a shared locality (Alexander & Alleyne 2002: 545; Back 1996).

We've got break dance which is bringing cultures together, which... The Selecter started... but hip-hop and break really brought it together. Erm... and then you've got a kind of big surging of all these children from the seventies who are mixed race [...] we're coming out of assimilation, we're now in multiculturalism. [Ezra, 41]

Ezra's use of policy language stems from his varied career involving education in prisons, advocacy against youth violence, and work relating to youth behavioural management. However, what is most significant from Ezra's quote is how he implicitly links this language –in particular 'multiculturalism' – with the growth of a new mixed race generation. In doing this the 70s-born mixed race children he describes are configured as embodying that new multicultural. Through this, they are almost constructed as what Ifekwunigwe (2002: 337) calls 'exemplary metaphors for the (post)modern diasporic condition'; a positionality that appears to have extended a level of capital to *some* aspects this birth cohort's lives. The final sections of the chapter continue charting the

mixed race experience over time by reflecting on mixed race subjectivities in the contemporary moment, with a particular focus on how mixed race intersects with colour-blind, post-race rhetoric. Thus far the chapter has moved chronologically through the accounts. There is a slight shift in these final sections, as the chapter draws from *all* of the interviews, to explore how the participants in the study construct their ethnic identities in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

## **5.4 Mixed race agency and identity politics in the 'postracial' moment**

*'I think, therefore I am.'* [Matthew, aged 26]

Lentin (2008: 495) argues that, in the post-WWII period, European nation-states have been hard at work banishing race from the agenda and rendering the racisms that constitute it a thing of the past. This labour is partly responsible for the constitution of a contemporary postracial discourse which according to Goldberg (2015: 22) provides a particularly special place for mixed race; 'squeezed between the projected binary – White against Black – the multi- and the middle, the mixed and the hybrid assume the romanticized value of "all getting along"'. Elsewhere, Goldberg (2013) asserts that these discourses of postraciality resonate with discourses of neoliberalism. The postracial, he states, 'in good neoliberal spirit, is committed to individualising responsibility... it renders individuals accountable for their own... expressions, not for their groups'. The latter note on accountability and to whom one should be accountable to, resonated with some of the narratives of the youngest cohort. The youngest group of respondents were more likely than the other two cohorts to use language that did not include specifically 'ethnic' references to describe themselves. Below I present examples from three respondents that evidence the themes of individuality and non-groupism which Goldberg (2015) identifies. The first example is from 21-year-old Amelia. In a conversation about her experience of university, she expressed her disapproval of the African-Caribbean Society (ACS) that was active on campus.

I've had a lot of people [...] say, 'oh you should join the...' erm what is it? The ACS, Afro-Caribbean? [...] I disagree with that on principle [...] I don't think [...] African and Caribbean people should be banded together and put in a group and say here you go. Like, there are major culture differences between Africa and the Caribbean [...] like I understand that it's for people of a similar background to get together [...] but I think it's

a bit reductive, I don't think it's encouraging people to mix [...] I have my views but I don't feel the need to join a group to [...] promote them. [Amelia, 21]

In Amelia's quote her interpretation that the group essentially facilitates self-segregation signifies her desire to detach from any such project. Further to this, she asserts that her views are her own and that her preference is to express them independent of any groups that are organised around collective ethnic identities, signifying her desire to be non-accountable to that group. Another 80s-born participant Matthew echoed Amelia's desire for an individual, independent expression of self. He quoted Descartes, 'I think therefore I am', as he explained to me the reasons he thought 'pigeon-hole' identities (distinct ethnic categories) were reductionist. Nicholas, 26, also used language that aspired to a transcendent state beyond ethnicity. He told me that his identity had evolved into a 'humanistic type' that was not driven by ethnicity alone. These accounts above from the 80s-born cohort reflect postracial discourses but they also signify the general shift towards identity politics that occurred through the 1980s and 1990s that has been discussed elsewhere (Crenshaw 1991; Modood et al. 1994; Alexander & Alleyne 2002; Bendle 2002; Hall 1993; Gilroy 1991). For Amelia, Matthew and Nicholas, within this 'politics of difference' (Alexander & Alleyne 2002: 543; Gilroy 2000), race is regarded as one of their many characteristics and does not dominate their overall identity claims. And for 70s-born Malcolm below, race(ism) has lost its place as the overriding power that defines our social experience.

I think that colour isn't as relevant today now as so many other things are, I think that we are probably the generations to know how it was to be really singled out just for your colour. You see what I mean? Now it's as much to do with your gender or your sexuality or your faith. Your colour is still part of that, but [before] you're raw being pulled up here just for being Black but then again, I don't know if young people still feel that today. [Malcolm, 42]

Malcolm's quote is particularly interesting; firstly he implies there has been an increase in multidimensional modes of oppression. Secondly, it seems that he perceives this 'change' as taking away from the significance of race(isms). However the former, is not a prerequisite for the latter. The following section emphasises the continued significance of race in mixed race lives, paying attention to how the participants deal with its omnipresence.

## 5.5 The postracial paradox: mixed race in a Black and White world

*'They just see colour... they don't see anything in-between and all of this swishy-swashy swirly stuff'* [Patricia, aged 42]

The perception that race is not the overarching characteristic that defines one's life experiences and chances, gives credence to the myth of meritocracy. When experiences are not limited to ethnicity and race is not rendered an obstacle, the possibilities for racialised subjects are regarded as endless. For many, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 demonstrated the breadth of these possibilities (Slate 2014; Bonilla-Silva & Ray 2015). It is at this juncture, that Goldberg (2013) asserts, the postracial was truly born, or at least the point in which it firmly 'went public'. It is for this reason that I utilised Obama in the interviews to interrogate participants' (across all cohorts) perceptions of the contemporary moment and mixed race positionalities within it.

The Obama case, could most definitely be perceived as what Goldberg (2015: 1) terms the 'postracial paradox', which in short translates as 'the postracial... is the most racial' (Oblowitz in *ibid*: 1). Byrne's (2010) analysis of Obama's self-positioning and his external racialised positioning during his initial campaign for the 2008 presidency, exemplifies how this paradox comes into being. She particularly highlights examples of how he drew on postracial repertoires, whilst also demonstrating some reliance on 'public perceptions of race as a kind of genetic inheritance, as something "in the blood"', in his *A More Perfect Union* speech in March 2008 (*ibid*:14). In it, he references his wife Michelle Obama's mixedness – which is not visible to the eye – to centre mixedness at the heart of America and challenge notions of purity (and by extension race). This idea that there are no (distinct) races speaks to notions of post-race, however in explaining Michelle's mixedness he references her biology; 'I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave-owners' (*A More Perfect Union* in *ibid*: 11). Thus in Obama's aspirations towards the postracial in the USA (in which ideas about race are reconfigured but not necessarily 'fixed'); race is still inevitably invoked. The postracial paradox is further evident in Obama's self-positioning. Despite being hijacked as a post-race pin-up (Bonilla-Silva & Ray 2015), he utilises strategic essentialism to situate himself 'much more clearly in the black community' (Byrne 2010: 12). Thus, whilst in his speech he calls for a reworking of race in which the centrality of *mixing* in America's history is realised, he is

simultaneously unable (through a complex combination of agency and structure) to loudly assert his own mixedness. As a major mixed race figure having to negotiate his mixedness and Blackness in this way on such an international stage, I wanted to see how respondents might use his subjectivity, as a way to talk through their own.

Barack Obama could never be a mixed president. I know if I was to sit and speak to Barack Obama like this, he might tell me a whole different story. So I understand that who we are, is not always what we proclaim, depending on the situation. [Anthony, 36]

Anthony's perception that Obama is unable to claim his mixedness moves the section on towards the final discussion on agency and structure in identity making. Similar to Anthony above, respondents across all three cohorts were conscious of a racial structure that often fixes Black mixed race subjects as Black (Thompson 2010; Song & Aspinall 2012; Rockquemore et al. 2009; Joseph-Salisbury 2016). Anthony referred to this hierarchy of race as a 'racial game' and told me that his phenotypes (or what he referred to as his 'shell'), dictate the strategies, tactics and movements he makes as a player within this metaphorical game.

I like the saying we're not humans having a spiritual experience, we're spiritual beings having a human experience. So this is my shell but ultimately while I'm in this shell, this is the game that's being played, these are the rules that are set out, both physically and socially, yeah? [Anthony, 36]

Although Anthony's shell is attributed less value in a spiritual sense, and does not necessarily reflect his authentic self, he is aware that there are real consequences that arise from wearing it. He suggests that whilst in the shell, he has to play a particular 'role... a strategy' in order to play the 'racial game' correctly and not break the rules. For Anthony, to negotiate his way through the game successfully, he navigates it as a Black player - his shell is that of a Black man. The power of this external marker is evident in Anthony's later utterance in the interview; 'I can formulate my own identity but then what does it matter? What does it matter in a structure that's unbendable?' Like many other Black mixed race people, he is designated as Black by others (Caballero 2005; Khanna 2011; Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001; Song & Aspinall 2012). He decides to avoid the hard labour that might be involved in trying to self-construct a more intricate ethnic identity, in anticipation that the potential

outcome is that that identity will not be accepted anyway. His 'strategy' in dealing with his racialised structural position is not unlike Obama's, in that they both utilise strategic essentialism as a tool by which to externally negotiate their mixed identities. By drawing on 'dominant (essentialist) discourses' of race that perpetuate a Black/White binary, Anthony effectively erases his mixedness which is the grey area in-between (Joseph-Salisbury 2016: 55).

In addition to prompting discussions about how dominant Black/White discourses might racialise mixed race as Black, the topic of Barack Obama also prompted respondents to reflect more specifically, on what was to lose or gain from him (and Black mixed race people more generally) self-asserting a Black identity, or being externally claimed as such. When I asked 60s-born Lucien whether he thought references to Obama as the first Black President were incorrect, he re-phrased it and posed it as a rhetorical question back to me; 'would I rather him call himself someone of mixed race and what would I gain from that? Would that make me feel better about myself? I'm not sure it would no.' Maya from the 80s-born cohort echoed Lucien's response. 'I don't know... if it would be helpful for him to be like seen as mixed race [...] I think it's more important to the Black movement, Black cause, that he is considered Black and that we move forward in that way at this time'. According to Maya, in this context and in this 'time', the racial assignment of Obama as Black (by himself or external actors) was unproblematic. On the contrary, she perceived it as beneficial, in that it served as a resource within the (more important) broader Black resistance struggle. Here, 'the centrality of struggle to black identity' is clear (Slate 2014: 230), and it was often within the face of anti-Black racisms<sup>62</sup> that participants would retreat towards Black identities over mixed ones.

I'm not conscious that anybody ever raised mixedness as being an issue, you know what I mean? Or that we were... disadvantaged in some way over and above our Blackness. [Olivia, 47]

There's nothing unique enough about being mixed race... that [...] it needs to be a separate struggle. I think it can be considered as part of the Black struggle. [Maya, 27]

These 'struggles' and 'disadvantages' they speak of form part of the smaller battles that are situated in a broader metaphorical 'Black and White war' that

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<sup>62</sup> I separate out anti-black racisms from anti-mixed race, racisms and/or prejudice on purpose. Although they simultaneously impact upon mixed race subjects' lives, they function differently. The next chapter explores anti-mixed race prejudice in more detail.

many respondents found themselves drafted into. Many, at some point in their lives had been posed with the question, 'who would you fight for in a Black and White war?' This question came from Black friends and parents, all of whom had clear cut roles in this metaphorical war and suggested their mixed race family member or friend took up that same position on the Black side. Therefore, although mixed race is co-opted in post-race rhetoric that claims a progressive non-racial society has been reached or at least is within our grasp (Bonilla-Silva & Ray 2015; Goldberg 2013; Cashmore 2008; Song 2015), the underlying threat of a race war forcefully pulls mixed race subjects back towards the law of the colour line (Du Bois 2007), which indicates that it never really went away and that it 'continues unabated' (Tate 2015: 186).

For many, to negotiate their positions within these metaphorical 'wars'/ very real structural struggles as Black mixed race subjects, they conceptualised their Blackness as their 'public identity' and their mixedness as their 'internalized identity' (Khanna 2010: 97). For example, 70s-born Assefa told me, 'in the greater sense I am a Black man [...] but in actual, actual, actual terminology [...] I can say Jamaica and Scotland [...] only half of each'. Assefa constructs his Blackness as his consistent conditional state, which he distinguishes from his actual lineage. Anthony, 36, also explained to me how he distinguished between mixedness and Blackness.

So I can have debates with somebody and we're talking about race or racism and I can talk very much from a Black point of view, a Black narrative because that's my standpoint on it, that's my experience, that's where I'm at on that debate. But then I can have a debate with someone about identity [...] and I won't come from a Black standpoint primarily because ultimately I know I'm in a different game where [...] my thoughts, my feelings are based on [...] you know different, experiences, so therefore I [...] stand from a different point. So it's interesting now you say it, I'm only thinking about it now myself [...] because now [...] I don't feel like I am Black in this debate. Why? Because the Blackness we're discussing is very set in stone, it's very set in a format and I don't come from that set format, I come from [...] a variation [...] of that format. [Anthony, 36]

Unlike Assefa, Anthony is not Black in the 'greater sense' but more specifically, he 'becomes' Black in conversations about racism. Interestingly, Anthony does not nuance his definition of Blackness; instead he tells me it is 'set in stone'.

This is also evident in Assefa's quote, where he elaborates on his mixed heritage, but treats his Blackness as a standalone category. In both of these examples, Blackness emerges as a 'fixed' category – a conceptualisation that has been problematised in the past (Hall 1993). Interestingly though, in these cases, strategically conceptualising Blackness in this way appears to have a particular function in the self-creation of mixed subjectivities. It is not done with the sole intention of homogenising Blackness, but as a way to simultaneously de-compartmentalise and hyphenate Blackness and mixedness, and strike a good balance between the two of them. In these examples, Blackness is perceived as a structural concept, a readily available politicised racial category, with a long historical narrative that can be drawn on. Mixedness however, is constructed as their racial *reality*. It is conceptualised as their biology, their genes, their blood, and their internal subjective *identity*. Notably however, not all participants were able to easily regulate their mixedness and Blackness in this way, like 80s-born Maya below.

I think, like, society has double standards about it. Because [...] I feel like being mixed; you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't sometimes. If you claim Blackness, some people might be quick to say 'you're not Black,' but then when it suits people, then you're Black, but you definitely are not White, that's one thing I'm sure of like (laughs).  
[Maya, 27]

Anthony and Assefa described the balancing act they performed in regards to their structural (Black) and personal (mixed race) identities. However Maya's quote raises significant questions about how those Black structural identities might then be received by external actors. As noted, Black mixed race people are often racialised as Black (Khanna 2011; Aspinall & Song 2013b; Caballero 2005; Sims 2016; Song 2010b). Given this fact, some have argued that Black mixed race people should therefore perceive their identities as Black because it is how they will be seen by society anyhow (Twine 2004; Small 1986; Rockquemore et al. 2009: 17). Others have suggested that it is important that mixed race people identify in this way, in order to effectively support, and be a part of, broader Black social justice struggles (Sexton 2008; Spencer 2010).<sup>63</sup> However in reading Maya's perception that she is 'damned' either way, what these claims assume is that Black mixed race subjects have agency to make these allegiances to Blackness, and also, that there is no colour line in

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<sup>63</sup> Although it should be noted that this latter argument appears to be stronger in the US debates. See Caballero 2005:191 for a longer discussion about this.

operation *within* Blackness that might (on occasion) rupture Black solidarity once they are 'in'. The final data chapter critically explores these questions, relating to mixed race within Black spaces, in more depth.

## 5.6 Conclusion

After considering how mixed race subjects are emplaced in chapter four, this chapter has continued to chart the external structural positionings of mixed race but through a specific focus on how participants have experienced their subjectivities in time-specific periods. By documenting change over time this chapter has done the important work of making mixed race visible, during periods when it was not, particularly through the 1970s and into the 1980s. It has sought to provide a more complete account of the mixed race experience in Britain by accounting for the periods in between the *Age of Pathology*, and the *Age of Celebration* (Ifekwunigwe 2004), as discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, by moving away from the 'present-tense' approach to analysing mixed race (Mahtani 2014), it has emphasised the impact of social generation on mixed race identity.

Building on the previous chapter, it was evident that the Caribbean diasporic cultures that participants from the oldest cohort engaged in were indelibly shaped by occurring in Birmingham, and particular neighbourhoods and spaces within the city. This was perhaps most apparent in discussions regarding the consumption of reggae music. Those from the 60s-born cohort explained how the music was transmitted through an intricate network of underground sound systems. The sound system parties and networks were 'racialized events and spaces', which undoubtedly generated 'ethnic group solidarity' (Twine 1996: 218), for the oldest participants in the study. The 70s-born cohort, armed with cultural tools like their 60s-born counterparts, in contrast seemed more able to freely use these and showcase them through hip-hop culture. More generally, they perceived themselves to have a certain level of cultural capital, in that they represented the mixedness of the increasingly multicultural 'cool Britannia' (Alexander 2002: 560). Overall, the impact of Black expressive cultures emerged as a key theme in the data with the 60s and 70s-born cohorts. These cultures had significant pedagogical value in mixed race lives, particularly pertaining to lessons about Black culture, history and pride. It is argued that the significance of these lessons were pertinent for mixed race subjects, particularly those who might have had complicated connections to Blackness by

virtue of their mixed race situation. More generally, it is argued that these cultures and spaces were not only a resource in regards to ethnic identity development but in regards to self-esteem more generally. Having the space for individual self-creation was an imperative part of participants' coming of age stories. In contrast to the older cohorts, it was evident that the youngest cohort's structural positioning in the contemporary *Age of Celebration* (Ifekwunigwe 2004), meant that they were less likely to make race central to their overall identity.

Despite clear cohort effects, as the chapter progressed from generational accounts to drawing from across the interviews in the final sections, it was evident how discourses of race from the past eat into the present. The telling rhetorical question that was referenced across all of the birth cohorts which indicated the longevity of race thinking was; 'who would you fight for in a black and white war?' The civil race war question that hung over many participants' heads, shows how the 'the ghost of Muriel Fletcher' (Nassy Brown 2005: 187-214) continues on its tract to haunt mixed race subjects. In being presented with a hypothetical 'choice' through the race war question, participants were located *in-between* Black and White, and with no easy answer to the choice presented, they were faced with a dilemma. This positioning, whether real or imagined, invokes past racialised stereotypes that are tied to the imagined 'half-caste' folk devil (Christian 2008; Aspinall 2013), which configures mixed race as prone to identity crisis and confusion.

The final discussion of the chapter highlighted how participants balanced their mixedness and Blackness by constructing Black as their public identity and mixed race as their private identity. Notably, this negotiation was not always a straightforward result of mixed subjects being able to assert agency over their identity. As Joseph-Salisbury (2016: 30) notes, the interpellation of Blackness as one homogenous mass owes to the 'reductive threat of the white gaze', which those with phenotypically 'Black' features, like Anthony, were vulnerable to. In being externally read as Black in numerous situations, he, like others, *responded* to this by adhering to what he perceived would be society's expectations of him as a Black person. There were other cases however, where participants appeared to assert their agency in regards to how they negotiated their Black identities. In these examples, participants talked about their *choice* and *willingness* to engage in Black struggles, and recognised the importance of mixed race people (at times) prioritising a Black identity in order to respond to these issues effectively. Generally, Black struggle seemed to be perceived as a

highly worthy 'cause' and one which needed their engagement, in order to strengthen resistance to anti-*Black* racisms. This sentiment was expressed across all three cohorts. It shows that, despite claims that the boundaries between racial and ethnic categories are blurring (Song 2015) the colour line persists in mixed race lives and implicates them in their everyday experiences. To echo Mark Christian (2011: 139), it is a 'postmodernist fantasy to correlate the growing black mixed heritage British population with racialised harmony.' The chapter highlighted that mixed race in and of itself is not a strong enough tool by which to pick apart race and uncover its fallacies and uselessness as an organising category (Ali 2003). The co-optation of mixed race in conservative post-race claims is simply a new insidious way of reconfiguring how race(ism) is done (Goldberg 2015) under the banner of 'liberal multiculturalism' (McNeil 2012). Moving away from spatial and temporal analyses that foreground the external and structural aspects of mixed race identity, the final chapter unpacks how respondents negotiated their mixed race *identities* within personal relationships with family, friends and sexual partners.

## 6 The Personal Politics of Mixed Race

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter unpacked the complex links between social context, culture, and identity. Concerned with the structural positionings of mixed race, it critically explored how mixed race subjects locate themselves in the social worlds they inhabit. It traced how these external positionings have taken shape in different periods in post-1945 Britain and particularly highlighted the significance of participants' cultural identities over time. By situating mixed race voices in different time periods the chapter highlighted the temporal nature of mixed race identity. It finished with a note explaining how some mixed race subjects successfully balanced their mixedness and Blackness by conceptualising them as two mutually existing categories. This balancing act of constructing Blackness as an (external) structural category and mixedness as a (personal) identity category aided mixed race subjects in forming their multiple identities. This chapter is concerned with the latter formulation of mixed race as *identity*. Unlike the previous chapters, it deals more closely with the private, backstage aspects of mixed race lives. It seeks to critically explore the *personal* politics of mixed race and how this identity is formed and played out vis-à-vis personal relationships with family, friends and sexual partners. It was evident throughout the study that what 'coloured' most of these relationships was *colour* itself. Therefore recurrent themes throughout the chapter are issues relating to privilege and colourism (both of which sometimes slipped into biological notions of race), as these appeared to heavily implicate perceptions of self, positions in friendship groups and decision making about their own families.

Section 6.2 details how the participants' sometimes reproduce the contemporary social representations of mixed race as 'superior' and attractive (Aspinall 2015) and more specifically, it unpacks their experiences of colourism (light skin privilege). There is a breadth of literature that documents how mixed race and light brown skin is often regarded as beautiful both within and outside of Black communities (Sims 2012; Lewis 2010; Tate 2007; Hunter 2004; Tate 2016). In light of this, the section unpacks how mixed race subjects negotiate this mixed race as beautiful trope. It argues that light skin privilege is a *gendered* skin-tone based discrimination that impacts mixed race men and women in very different ways and suggests that this form of privilege is not

unidirectional as it was not equally experienced across the group. A subsection of fair skinned (almost white appearing) respondents expressed they felt disadvantaged because of their colouring, as it effectively erased their minority heritage. Further to this, the section highlights that colour is a 'personal and social characteristic', in that self-perception of skin colour co-exists with how your skin colour is perceived in any given interaction or social setting (Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001: 230). Therefore in this discussion, the experience of light skin privilege is found to be context-specific.

Following on from this, section 6.3 considers how this privilege impacts upon mixed race relationships within ('monoracial') Black communities and friendships. What became evident from these discussions was that Black friends and strangers (in particular circumstances) engaged in forms of boundary making that reified participants' Whiteness and subjugated it. Although the issue of 'monoracism' or 'horizontal hostility' (Caballero 2005; Twine 1999) has been alluded to elsewhere in discussions of mixed race, this section critically highlights how these processes are inherently gendered and operate through a heteronormative framework. Whilst Black hostility is evidently found to be harmful to both mixed race men and women, it is overwhelmingly perceived as 'banter' and 'dissing' in Black/mixed race male relationships. This is in stark contrast to Black/mixed race female relationships, where the impact of Black rejection on mixed race women appears to be much more acute, informed by a form of patriarchal racism.

The final two sections explore how participants have negotiated their identities within their childhood and adult families. Building on the discussion regarding how issues of race were dealt with in the home in chapter four, section 6.4 begins with an analysis of participants' childhood families. Much has been written about differential techniques to parent mixed children, varied identifications amongst mixed siblings, and issues relating to the White (mostly mothering) parenting of mixed race children (Song 2010a; Twine 2004; Caballero et al. 2008; Edwards et al. 2010; Edwards & Caballero 2011; Crippen & Brew 2007). In the forthcoming analysis the mixed race voice is centred as a speaking subject to unpack how identities are formed within these intimate networks. In the analysis I foreground the indirect and subtle forms of racism that can occur within the family, and highlight how they create fleeting moments of visibility and a sense of double-consciousness for mixed race subjects. I also argue in this section that Whiteness is ubiquitous and show the ways it implicitly impacts upon mixed race family situations.

The final section of the chapter details mixed race decision making in regards to participants' own family continuation. Although it does not focus on *parenting* practices per se, this section goes some way in responding to Song and Gutierrez's (2015: 2) warnings that 'very little is known about *multiracial people as parents*'. It considers how mixed race people in the study have chosen their partners/other parent for their children, and how ethnicity impacts on these decisions. Data indicates that mixed people are most likely to be in inter-ethnic relationships (Office for National Statistics 2014) and furthermore it has been highlighted that most partner with White people. This is especially the case for the Mixed White and Black Caribbean group (Song and Gutierrez 2015; Office for National Statistics 2005). The section unpacks this quantitative data and suggests that there may be cohort effects that determine one's likelihood of having a White partner, as many of the 60-born cohort actively chose Black partners to start families with. In this final analysis, it is made clear how biological discourses of race continue to embed themselves in discourses around mixed race, even through the voices of mixed race parents themselves.

## **6.2 The lighter, the Whiter, the brighter, the better? Mixed race privilege**

*'Mixedies rule the world because we're the most beautiful people in the world, we can't help it'. [Patricia, aged 42]*

The quote above is an excerpt taken from the interview with 70s-born Patricia. I want to present a close reading of it for this introductory section. Firstly, I want to deal with her conceptualisation of 'beauty' as a factual characteristic of mixed race people. She constructs beauty as a supposedly naturally occurring trait and it is not treated as a social construct - which indeed it is. When thinking about perceptions of beauty worldwide, it is clear that the concept has intimate links to Eurocentric racial hierarchies that privilege Whiteness (Hall 2013), which have their foundations in colonialism and plantation societies (Hunter 2013; Tate 2013; Gabriel 2007; Hope 2011). Perhaps most important for this discussion is that 'beauty'/Whiteness in these societies also represented purity, which the Black-skinned Other was perceived in opposition to (Tate 2013). The position of mixed populations in this binary is somewhat complex because, as alluded to in chapter two, the nation-states that operated these economic systems of slavery developed different strategies to organise and

deal with race mixture in their populations. This has implications for how 'pure' and/or 'beautiful' mixed race has been perceived in the respective places.

In the Caribbean for example, the 'mulatto class' came to be 'the primary inheritors of the plantation legacies of their European grandparents and forefathers' and this 'inheritance meant real social and economic power' (Hope 2011: 167, 168). In the USA however, as noted in chapter two, the one-drop rule of hypodescent has meant that the 'mulatto' population has historically been (for the most part) folded into a broad Black category which has attempted to put a much larger social, economic, cultural and political distance between them and Whiteness (Morning 2005; Waters 1990; Aspinall 2003). Nevertheless, even in the USA, it is clear how Whiteness has elevated Black mixed people. For example, the slave characters in Abolitionist fiction were often Octoroons.<sup>64</sup> Caballero (2005: 51) theorises that the inclusion of *almost White* Black slave characters were used as an attempt to gain more sympathy 'amongst the White readership' for the Abolitionist cause. Therefore, even in places where mixed race has in the past been legally classified as Black, having proximity to Whiteness, makes the lighter skinned Black figure more worthy of sympathy and/or freedom. I explain these types of mixed race positions in colonial settings at length because they have had lasting effects that have diffused into the present-day mixed race as beautiful trope (or as Sims (2012: 64) calls it the 'Biracial Beauty Stereotype'). Further to this, it is becoming increasingly clear that the perception of mixed race beauty is not only a product of its perceived proximity to Whiteness. It appears that mixed race aesthetics are even beginning to be considered as '*atop* the hierarchy', i.e. *better* than Whiteness (ibid: 64), which speaks to Patricia's assertion that mixed race is the '*most*' beautiful. Some have gone as far to suggest this elevated position is the result of 'hybrid vigour'<sup>65</sup> (Lewis 2010). Joseph-Salisbury (2016: 87, 88) has highlighted that this research by Lewis (2010) which suggests 'biological' aesthetic advantage, although 'dubious', was nevertheless 'published in the popular press' which he suggests, 'highlights the popular discourse for a belief in innate superior mixed-race attractiveness'.

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<sup>64</sup> Persons with one-eighth of black blood, in comparison to half-Black, half-White mulattoes for example.

<sup>65</sup> The tendency of cross-bred offspring/individuals to display traits which are more superior to their parents.

The second close reading of Patricia's quote is centred on her perception<sup>66</sup> (or perhaps aspiration), that 'mixedies rule the world'. Perhaps on first glance this seems incongruous. However when read alongside Aspinall's (2015) analysis of representations of mixed race in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Patricia's perception that mixed race people may possess a particular skill set that can effectively 'lead the way', is in keeping with many social representations of mixed race as; 'Britain's largest ethnic minority',<sup>67</sup> 'the twenty-first century family', 'attractive [and] disproportionately successful' (ibid). Aspinall (2015) asserts that many of these representations are stereotypes and not statistical realities, but nevertheless he emphasises their ubiquitous power in fixing discourse around mixed race. Using Patricia's quote as a starting point then, the upcoming sections critically explore how mixed race subjects critique, accept, negotiate, experience and perceive various forms of privilege they are afforded because of their mixedness.

It begins by unpacking Patricia's idea that assumes the mixed race ability to lead. Self-perceptions of mixed race as possessing natural leadership qualities featured much less in the data than self-perceptions of mixed race as attractive. However, there were findings that were reminiscent of Olumide's (2002: 9), which concluded that mixed race subjects in her study at times 'occupied the moral high ground and offered skills assessments of themselves as 'bridge builders' or 'peace makers' in situations of prevalent race thinking'.

Maybe this has got nothing to do with being mixed race but I always feel like because I've been able to appreciate and understand [...] two different outlooks, I always feel like my sort of network of people has been quite diverse as well, and I think that's a beautiful thing [...] so in a way I think it's definitely a gift, because I think it's helped me to converse with people and it helps a lot in the job I do because I meet a range of people from all different walks of life and backgrounds, and I think from quite early on you have that implicitly instilled in you [...] you have that appreciation and understanding of people from different cultures and different backgrounds and I think that's got to be a positive thing [...] if you can understand and empathise. [Nicholas, 26]

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<sup>66</sup> This utterance was presented in what could be perceived as a sarcastic tone, but it accurately sums up Patricia's general perceptions of mixed race. Overtly positive constructions of mixed race similar to this were littered through her interview.

<sup>67</sup> Analysis of the 2011 census survey indicated that the 'Mixed' group had grown faster than most other minority ethnic groups since 2001. However it was not *the* fastest growing overall.

Whilst hesitant to relate the characteristics solely to his mixedness, 26-year-old Nicholas from the 80s-born cohort felt that his perceived ability to be empathetic, diplomatic and open minded in certain situations was in some way attributable to his ethnicity. His mixedness is perceived as a 'gift' – an articulation of tolerance which allows him 'to see behind the veil of racial ideology [and reject] its premises and its divisive effects' (Morning 2005: 4). A respondent from the 70s-born cohort – Robert – also explained to me that he believed being mixed race made him 'more open minded ...about other people and other cultures'. These positive self-perceptions of mixed race as reasoned, liberal and rational speak back to previous negative constructions of the mixed race 'character' as in a continuous state of conflict (Olumide 2002; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Christian 2008). The rejections of these historical stereotypes are progressive in that they debunk such myths. However, when stripped back, this logic is perhaps as problematic as the stereotypes that link Blackness with 'cool' (hooks 2004; Back & Solomos 1996), and fix Asian as 'meek and submissive' (Ashe et al. 2016), because in making presumptions about innate traits in this way, ethnicity is naturalised. Furthermore, it reproduces the mixed race body as the site of racial harmony and the condition for a truly colour-blind outlook. This potentially makes mixed race immune and ignorant to problematic racial histories, which makes it difficult to challenge the persistent legacies they leave. For the most part, however, those others who did refer to their mixedness as a 'resource' were less likely to suggest it was able to 'naturally' provide them with particular qualities. These other participants often simply reproduced the mantra that through their mixed race experience they were able to enjoy the 'best of both worlds'. In most cases, this was presented to explain participants' feelings of happiness and contentment in being mixed. Only some presented it as an 'advantage' that was unique to mixed race people that facilitated them in their everyday diplomacy.

The participants' conceptualisation of mixed race personality traits as inherently worldly and universal could also be read in their descriptions of mixed race physical aesthetics. Three respondents explained to me how advantages in relation to their aesthetic were attributable to their perceived physical *ambiguity*. Their ability to be ethnically unmarked was constructed as a resource and advantage and this was particularly evident in narratives about trips abroad, when participants entered new racial landscapes where they might be read as something other than Black mixed race. They quite literally became 'different races in different places' (Garner 2010: 4). Gabrielle told me that she felt like a 'chameleon' when she went on holidays and particularly

referenced her experiences in Spain. In that context she told me she was often mistaken for Cuban or Brazilian, which she felt was a 'positive thing'. Nicholas below had an almost identical testimony.

You go [outside of the UK] you could look Brazilian [...] further afield you know [...] like America ... South America [...] I think we look universal sometimes [...] which I think always is a beautiful thing. [Nicholas, 26]

Interestingly, similarly to Gabrielle, he particularly references the relative ease of being mistaken as *Brazilian*. This aesthetic is seemingly an attractive and desirable one to both respondents who would indeed most likely be quite easily 'naturalized in to the Brazilian landscape' (Mitchell 2013: 311), given the fact that at least 45% of Brazil's population is estimated to be mixed race and Black (Twine 1998: 1). Brazil's self-styled image as the multiracial nation, in which the Brazilian 'pardos'<sup>68</sup> become a symbol of 'racial democracy' has seemingly been captured and reproduced in the minds of mixed race subjects (Twine 1998; Daniel & Lee 2014). What is evident here is that phenotypical ambiguity has two different functions in mixed race subjects' lives. On the one hand it has been suggested that ethnically unmarked ambiguous faces prompt external actors to pose the '*what are you*' inquiries that can lead 'to a devalued sense of self' in mixed race subjects (Bradshaw 1992: 77). However, ambiguity in this instance is regarded as advantageous, in that it allows respondents to move freely between categories of race. Generally though this freedom of movement was quite clearly context specific and was only experienced upon departure from the UK<sup>69</sup>; therefore it did not tend to be perceived as the overarching advantage of being read as ethnically ambiguous. For the most part, respondents recognised that ambiguity (in themselves and others) was often perceived as attractive. This was perhaps the largest gain from being read as ethnically ambiguous, given the fact that people who are considered to be more attractive have been found to gain various forms of social and economic capital from this (Wade & Bielitz 2005). This attraction to ethnic ambiguity was evident in this excerpt below from 60s-born Olivia. She thought there was 'something aesthetically pleasing about mixedness' and referenced actor Orlando Bloom to explain her theory.

I just think when you mix things up... I suppose it's like Orlando Bloom is a good example for me to use of a non-Black person. He's definitely

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<sup>68</sup> A skin colour category in Brazil to describe persons of mixed ancestry.

<sup>69</sup> In the UK, respondents were often correctly read as Black mixed race, and as Black in some cases.

White, but he's got jet black hair and bright blue eyes... which gives him a certain... yeah? So... I think with that kind of... '*what is it?*' Makes somebody attractive and there's more [...] that element of '*what is it?*' in mixed people... ergo – mixed people are more attractive. [Olivia, 47]

In other cases, the perceived advantages in relation to aesthetic were more directly attributed to physical *colour*. In these examples, references were specifically made to the significance of having light *brown* skin which explained how colourism (and/or shadism) operated in the participants' lives.

Colorism is a form of discrimination based on skin tone that routinely privileges light-skinned people of color and penalizes darker-skinned people of color... although all people of color experience discrimination, the intensity of that discrimination, the frequency, and the outcomes of that discrimination will differ dramatically by skin tone.

Hunter (2013: 247, 248)

Hunter's succinct description of the social phenomenon of colourism is written in reference to the US context, where there has been a wealth of literature that highlights the multiple advantages that light skinned Black people enjoy over their dark skinned counterparts in 'many different social settings' such as the judiciary system, employment and education (Hunter 2013: 249). The same is evident in literature on the Caribbean that shows real economic and social advantages for lighter skinned Black people (Hope 2011; Henry 2013; Tate 2007; Hall 2017; Reddock 2014). Comparatively there has been little focus on this specific form of discrimination in Britain and it has been argued that there is little evidence to suggest that colourism exists 'on the same scale within the UK, as it does in the USA and the Caribbean' (Gabriel 2007: 52). This seemed to be true for this study; although there were clear examples of how colourism positively impacted respondents, it did not necessarily result in the equivalent *material* advantages as can be seen for fairer skinned Black people in the USA and the Caribbean.

Some participants were conscious of the fact that skin tone hierarchies had been constructed through the White gaze and had racist foundations. In keeping with what has been found elsewhere, it was mostly mixed race women in the study who were implicated by the mixed race beauty ideal (Tate 2013; Song & Aspinall 2012; Mohammed 2000; Mahtani 2002), and so they were more likely to be attuned to its negative effects and were more savvy in their

disavowal of it than were the mixed race men. These women felt Othered by strangers who would stop them to tell them they were pretty.

When I meet Black guys that say I don't date Black girls that just makes my skin crawl [...] that's all kinds of levels of wrong (laughs) what's wrong with you? And when they try and say 'I only date mixed race girls,' [...] it makes me feel like I could be any interchangeable mixed race face. Like it's not about me at all, it's just about a skin tone. And so [...] yeah it's almost like you have to get past the stereotype, if you really wanna have a meaningful relationship with someone, you have to get past the image of being mixed race and whatever the people seem to attribute to that. Erm, but it's real and it's there and [...] you can't lie there is definitely something that people find attractive. [Maya, 27]

Eighties-born Maya felt uneasy about her perceived attractiveness and sexuality being the only indicators of her worth and forcefully rejected the 'Biracial Beauty Stereotype' (Sims 2012) on the basis that she felt that it limited her potential for achieving an honest and equal partnership. Although unable to directly relate to this *gendered* experience of light skin privilege, 70s-born Anthony below, also succinctly explains that it is the ubiquitous power of racism that forces particular ideas regarding race and beauty to take hold of our imagination.

Why is it the face of beauty? Is it because it's the acceptable medium [...] we know through a racist society. [We] have predominantly White culture [...] a White privilege, that deems anything Black as bad – broad noses, big lips, tight hair, do you get what I mean? It's a bad thing but ultimately now you've got this [mixed race] generation coming through and look at how beautiful and brown they are [...] so how do I feel about it? Well I do think, yes it's very beautiful... but it's about why are we so obsessed with this medium and why and how it's been spawned out of... basically it's an acceptance of what is considered not beautiful. Do you get what I'm saying? [Anthony, 36]

Despite offering up quite a critical account of how this colour-based beauty bias functions as a result of White hegemonic ideologies that privilege Anglicised phenotypes (Hunter 2013; Gabriel 2007; Hope 2011), at a point in the quote Anthony almost reproduces the type of discrimination he had just disapproved of. 'Ultimately' he explains, mixed race people *are* beautiful and brown. Jevon, aged 20, also appeared to uncritically accept the mixed race beauty trope when

describing his preferred type of romantic partner. He told me that he was not attracted to Black girls and specifically noted that 'brownings' were his type. Jevon's chosen language here is of critical importance as it demonstrates a linguistic connection to racial terminology in Jamaica (Mohammed 2000; Brown 1979; Brown-Glaude 2007; Hope 2011; Tate 2013). '*Browning*', 'is a popular term used in Jamaica to identify people of mixed race who occupy the middle strata of its racialised class system, positioned between the majority black population (roughly ninety percent) and a tiny white minority' (Brown-Glaude 2007: 39, 40). The 'three strata' colour hierarchy system that Brown-Glaude (ibid: 35) describes, has roots in the country's historical plantation society. Present-day brownings are historically linked to the mulatto population of the slavery period who, as noted earlier in this chapter and in chapter two, held a more privileged social and economic position in society in comparison to their Black counterparts (Heuman 1981). Thus the contemporary *browning* connotes not only colour but a *class* of people in Jamaica (Thomas 2004).

The respondents who had taken trips to the Caribbean explained to me that on entrance to the region, they were treated as people of high status. All were certain that this was due to their colouring. Some described a feeling of *awkward* visibility whilst on these trips and generally felt uncomfortable that their colour, which 'could be read at a glance', was the 'salient determining factor' in how they would be perceived (Hall 2017: 97). Therefore although their social selves were geographically constituted *outside* of these historical complex social structures in the UK, 'the 'language of [their] skin' nevertheless spoke to these Caribbean racial schemas (Lewis 2009) and thus they were entered into the hierarchies accordingly; their position strengthened further still by their perceived Britishness. This was certainly the case for 70s-born Robert who went to live in Barbados for a couple of years in 1988 when he was eighteen years old. His father had wanted to 'go home' for many years and when he and his mother decided to sell the house and leave the UK, Robert jumped at the chance to move with them and his two younger siblings. During his time there he worked as a water sports instructor. 'My cousin was like, "Rob you got the pick of the island, redskin".<sup>70</sup> [...] I'd put on my English accent for the native girls and my Bajan accent for the tourists (laughs), so it was good in that way yeah'.

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<sup>70</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, 'red', or, 'redskin' in this example, is a Caribbean term that describes persons of fair skin complexion. More specifically, it connotes mixed race.

The women's experience of privilege in these Caribbean racial landscapes was much more intense in comparison to the men's. The anecdote from 60s-born Olivia below perhaps most succinctly reveals the potential economic and social capital the *browning* elicits, and most importantly, it highlights the critical role of gender in this racialised and classed category. She told me, 'ain't nothing like an ego-trip [than] to be a mixed woman in Jamaica', and explained that one of her numerous trips to the island had come about through a friend in the UK, a Jamaican man whose Caribbean food shop she was working in at the time, in London. He was close to opening up a shop in Jamaica and asked her if she would go out there (all expenses paid) to head up the shop and be front of house for six weeks. She told me his request was a result of her good track record and competence in the shop, but mostly down to the fact that he knew an 'English browning would draw crowd', and according to Olivia that is exactly what happened. What is evident from this example is how Olivia's colour as it transfers to Jamaica provides her with real economic gains. She gains this 'front office appearance' job as a direct result of her brown skin (Hunter 2002). Therefore, although the contemporary *browning* denotes a historical colour-class, it also particularly describes a quintessentially *female* 'Jamaican beauty ideal' (Tate 2013: 220). Further to this, the *browning* emerges as a potential tool for 'social and economic elevation' (Hope 2011: 169), in much the same way mulatto women had done for Black men historically in Jamaica (Hall 2017; Henriques 1953 in chapter two). In Olivia's anecdote, this history plays out in her friend's attempt to use her brown body to elicit business. Some of the implications of this positionality on relationships with Black *women* are explored more thoroughly in the next section.

Not all participants in the sample could be read as 'brown' skinned in the same way Olivia was; some were very fair skinned and almost White in appearance. Taking into consideration the discussion thus far on the significance of *brown* skin (particularly in Jamaica and its diaspora) (Henry 2013: 160), this last section concludes by critically exploring how White-appearing mixed race participants in the sample were implicated by colourism. It uses 80s-born Janice as a case study example. Respondents like Janice were particularly vulnerable to identity policing and had high levels of insecurity regarding their identity. They did not perceive their light skin as beneficial or advantageous and closer physical proximity to White appearance did not predicate liberation from prejudices. When Janice, 33, came to meet me for her interview, her first comment as she sat down was, 'I'll explain the complexion to you'. Prior to the interview she had been worried that I would be confused as to why she had

volunteered to take part in the study as she did not have an archetypal Black mixed race aesthetic. In light of this she felt the need to almost immediately explain that she did in fact fit the criteria for the study, even though she did not have (what she described as) 'nice brown skin' like mine. Janice's anxiety is unsurprising given the fact that she had been continuously interrogated about her identity throughout her life.

I like being... you know... having both sides, but sometimes when I tell people what my background is, they do look a bit shocked [...] they look at me as if to say I don't believe what you're saying and it's given me a bit of a complex actually because it feels like you have to *explain* [...] and you just think, what am I explaining for? [Janice, 33]

She presented numerous scenarios of how her being read as White effectively erased her minority identity heritage throughout her life course. Examples ranged from being questioned about whether her father was in fact her biological parent (there was also an example of her being questioned on whether he was 'really' Jamaican), to a college teacher ticking her ethnicity as White on an enrolment form, to being the only person in amongst a group of Black friends to not receive a promotional flyer for a 'Black' party event. Many more situations such as these had the accumulative effect of giving her a 'complex', which was something she told me she had continuously struggled with. Janice was the only (and youngest) child of her White mother and Jamaican-born father. Both parents had children prior to her with different partners, but had remained together until her father's premature death in 2001. She had very close relationships with her father's two other Black mixed race children and eventually developed a relationship with his eldest daughter and her extended family in Jamaica, all of whom she has visited since his death. Despite her consistent contact with her minority family, who she told me continuously validated her 'membership' in the family (and her kinship with an imagined transnational Black ethnic group more generally), her identity was developed through the 'reflective appraisals' of others (Khanna 2010).

Her skin served as a primary marker of her ethnicity (Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001), and despite the fact her almost-White skin would most definitely have afforded her privileges (Dyer 1997), she did not *perceive* it as such and so her position as a straightforward 'benefactor of... white privilege' is questionable (Joseph-Salisbury 2016: 72). Unlike other respondents, Janice did not appear to internalise the 'Biracial Beauty Stereotype' in her perceptions of herself

(Sims 2012) and her mixedness certainly did not give her an 'ego-trip' in the same manner in which it did for Olivia. This section has detailed how the ubiquitous power of racism forces particular ideas regarding race and beauty to take hold of our imagination, which ultimately divides and fragments Blackness. The following section further unpacks how these fragmentations take shape and considers the critical role of gender in these processes, paying particular attention to participant experiences of rejection within Black friendship groups.

### **6.3 'Horizontal hostility' and precarious mixed race positions**

*'If you was a field slave... you're gonna start to resent the house slave because ultimately they've got more than you, they're living better than you, they look better than you, in your mind'. [Anthony, aged 36]*

*'If one feels part of a Black community and is committed to that, then rejection from that home is felt to one's very core. Rejection is felt so deeply because our identification possibilities are brought into question'. (Tate 2013: 230)*

In Caballero's (2005) study, she analysed minority ethnic views on mixedness via readily available ethnic minority media sources and via mainstream media which reported ethnic minority voices directly. She noted, that the focus of mainstream debates concerning ethnic minority views on mixedness, were centred on 'interracial relationships [rather] than on mixedness *per se*' (ibid: 181). Alongside her analysis of minority monoracial voices on mixedness, she presented the voice of a Black mixed race journalist, Clare Gorham, who conveyed her personal experiences of monoracial resentment of her mixedness in a Guardian newspaper article in February 2003. In the article she recalled the time a Nation of Islam member told her that she was 'the embodiment of plantation slave-master rape' (Gorham 2003). In comparison to the USA, Caballero (2005: 184) concluded that UK examples of resentment akin to what Gorham experienced, only occurs in 'pockets', and that overall there was no widespread 'scepticism' or minority monoracial 'resentment' of mixedness as she found there to be in the USA. Despite the infrequency of this type of resentment in the study, the impact of it on participants was very significant. I

mostly borrow the term 'horizontal hostility',<sup>71</sup> throughout the section, to describe this type of resentment (Twine 1999a: 203). However, I wanted to be sure that the term I chose to use would not mistakenly convey mixed race people as 'victims' of Black oppression. This assumption is reductionist and has no use in explaining the complex processes that might lead to tensions between Black and mixed race subjects. Instead, the examples presented should be read as forms of boundary making that Black communities occasionally engage in to block mixed race people off from entering the imagined Black space. Gaining an understanding of the factors that give rise to these processes is critical to the theorising of mixed race. It was a lengthy point of discussion across the majority of the interviews, and these experiences of horizontal hostility had a profound effect on respondents' feelings of self-worth and belonging.

For many respondents, memories of these interactions with Black friends, family or strangers were 'felt rather than known' (Ali 2012: 97). They were all able to recall and recognise their feelings of discomfort and unease but were unable to accurately name what it is that had happened, and had difficulty conceptualising what the interactions *meant*. Many simply described their experiences of horizontal hostility as examples of 'bad vibes', 'bullyish behaviour' or 'aggression,' to name a few. Some, however, such as 70s-born Malcolm below, charged their Black interlocutors with racism. He recalled an incident in his school playground to convey his point.

I can remember very clearly a girl who did it one time in school and I can remember running past her in the school and she shouted it to me; 'you think you're Black?' [...] Erm but I can remember that and it kind of made me feel a bit like stupid. I felt stupid at that point, right there and then as I was running to do what I was doing, I felt stupid. Erm and she'd put me there and she'd did that because *her* colour now gave her power over me and that's true racism right there because yes racism is power and it is about collective numbers – we get that – but you had power that day because you thought that you were in a position of strength because you were a *full* blooded Black person, and you can pop at me for only having a little bit of what you enjoy so much. [Malcolm, 42]

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<sup>71</sup> The term has its roots in the 1970s feminist movements. It was used to describe infighting and factionalism that could sometimes occur. It seemed a fitting term for this discussion on tensions within and between two ethnic minority 'groups' who share similar experiences of oppression, for the most part.

Malcolm articulates this interaction as racism by isolating the moment and separating it out from the broader systems of race thinking which positions Black people, and most certainly Black women, as inferior (Crenshaw 1991; Tate 2013; Hill Collins 1989; Weekes 1997). Therefore in actuality, her perceived superior position is questionable and instead it is perhaps more useful to think of how this type of horizontal hostility is damaging for both subjects. In the Black girl's attempt that day to police the boundaries of Blackness, she was working from a 'blueprint which was not designed by [her or black people more generally]' (Henry 2013: 157). Her attempts to uphold a binary of race that has been designed by Whiteness and *for* Whiteness helped do 'the oppressors' job for them', and would therefore have been detrimental to both herself *and* Malcolm (ibid: 158). Nevertheless, in that momentary interaction he describes genuine feelings of powerlessness.

As noted throughout the thesis, it is often the mark of *Blackness* that tends to be the determining factor in the lives of Black mixed race persons. Evidence shows they have similar social locations to their Black counterparts in areas such as education (Caballero et al. 2007; Tikly et al. 2004), and employment (Gabriel 2007; Bradford 2006). Malcolm's quote above signifies a momentary subversion of this fate; it is his Whiteness that becomes salient in that it determines his position and bargaining power in this particular interaction. His reference to his lack of Black 'blood' to explain his point is particularly interesting. It is quite ironic in that this logic relies on the same reductionist biological conceptualisation of race which his Black peer also likely used as the basis for her decision to reject him from Blackness; the general conclusion being that his fractional, 'half-blooded' mixed race body is unable to compete with the ostensibly pure, authentic, Blackness of the girl in the playground. Malcolm's perception of the interaction is important for the upcoming discussion as it makes clear how mixed race people are vulnerable to both Black and White prejudices/racisms, which is a unique positionality that neither their Black or White counterparts experience (Parker & Song 2001; Tate 2015; Johnston & Nadal 2010).

What became immediately clear from the analysis was that horizontal hostility was a gendered process. Many women across the sample spoke of how horizontal hostility impacted on their relationships with Black women. Although there were many examples of strong, loving and healthy relationships with Black women, over half of the women in the study reported experiencing some type of tension at various junctures in their lives. Four of these women told me

that they felt that the 'most racism' they had received in their lifetime was from Black women. Three respondents from the 60s-born cohort gave examples of how this tension played out in violent interactions. Two of these were Isabelle (49), and Audrey (56). Isabelle recalled living in Smethwick<sup>72</sup> for a short period, and told me that on her way to secondary school Black girls would sometimes spit on her. And below Audrey remembers going to blues parties in Handsworth in her mid-20s, with a group of mixed race female friends.

I used to hang around with a group of mixed race girls [...] the Black girls used to give us a *terrible* time. They used to wanna fight us and everything and that went on for years [...] they *hated* us with a passion [...] in them days you could smoke in clubs and they'd try and burn us with the cigarettes [...] You still get some bad vibes off Black women to this day sometimes. They still like look down their nose [...] even to this day [but] I wouldn't say anything to them because I'm too proud like that. [Audrey, 56]

These are extreme examples and likely cohort effects; as noted in chapter two, the racial climate in 1970s Britain was particularly tense (Sivanandan 1981; Fryer 1984; Solomos 1988). In most cases, clashes were not violent and instead, women gave examples of how they sometimes felt that they were 'disliked' by Black women. This feeling was often heightened in Black spaces, like the blues parties in the above examples. Other examples included a Black political meeting and a Black hairdressing salon.

The acute impact on female relationships is unsurprising given the fact that 'societies demand more physical beauty from... women than from the men [and that] physical beauty is associated with White features' (Penha-Lopes 2013: 339). To echo the discussion in the previous section, colourism is a gendered phenomenon which has roots in colonial plantation societies. More specifically, it is important to recognise the significance of the 'slave owning mentality' (Caballero 2005: 72) in those historical racial formations, and how the legacy of this impacts how colourism takes form in Black and mixed race female relationships. This logic, simultaneously believed that White male masters had sexual rights to their Black female slaves, whilst forbidding sexual relationships between Black men and White women (Rockquemore & Brunsma 2008). This system abused Black women's sexualities, rendering them 'the womb of slavery' (Tate 2007: 301) whilst protecting White women's sexuality from

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<sup>72</sup> A district located just four miles from Birmingham city centre that borders Handsworth.

contamination. These racist heteronormative structures positioned White men at the top, Black women at the bottom and sexually desired mixed race women somewhere in-between. Against the backdrop of these histories, horizontal hostility in female friendships, tended to arise out of mixed race and Black women's competing sexualities *in relation to men* – and in particular Black males.

Line up ten Black women and two of them are mixed yeah? And parade one hundred Black men in front of them... more than *half* of those Black men are gonna pick out the mixed women. [Olivia, 47]

In the case of 33-year-old Janice below, she contemplates whether the ongoing horizontal hostility she received was related to the fact she had married a Black Jamaican man. Although she appears unsure, she was more confident in attributing the couple's eventual break up to the issues and arguments that would arise from these ongoing incidents - 'that's what kind of finished us'. Below she explains the impact of these negative interactions.

I used to go to like [...] dancehall clubs or *wherever* [...] going with the kid's dad or whatever. There I could feel pretty uncomfortable. Not... not so much around the men [...] but in terms of... almost felt like I shouldn't be in there [...] that's a feeling off the [Black] women. Erm... I think they just have a way of making me feel... I don't know (laughs) I can't really... and it's hard because I've got a Black sister and I've met my sister and she's Jamaican (inaudible) but I think it's just... probably just me being paranoid [...] it's like... I don't... I can't explain it. Because they've definitely given me a bit of a complex. Erm [...] you know when you can just feel that... like an atmosphere... like a vibe... I don't know if it's because I was with my husband at the time.... you know 'oh, she's with him' blah, blah, blah. [Janice, 33]

The final comment signifies an element of competition. This theme of 'theft' and undeserved ownership of Black men was raised in numerous other interviews with women across the cohorts. From these accounts, it appears that mixed race women have inherited the stereotypes that the White mothers of mixed race children have historically been vulnerable to (McKenzie 2013; Edwards & Caballero 2011; Twine 1999). The way in which Janice continuously stumbled over her words and struggled to deliver an overt critique of these women also signifies the unique positionality of mixed race women. She felt that she had developed a 'complex' but does not go on to explain what this was

in relation to. After disclosing that her sister is Black, she momentarily attempts to retract her critique of these other Black women's behaviour. She seemingly recognises either a contradiction or betrayal in what she is saying and dismisses her interpretation of events as paranoia, which is questionable since she appeared to have given this topic much thought, both during her relationship, and following its ending.

Unlike the mixed race women, the mixed men in the sample were more likely to have identified as Black at points in their lives and wanted to be accepted as such when they had done so, and this was especially in the case in their youth. Many told me that they had predominantly Black friendship groups as young people (Tikly et al. 2004; Tizard & Phoenix 1993). For some of these respondents, the horizontal hostility came through 'reminders' from their Black male peers that they were not in fact Black.

I'll never forget it – it was carnival time, I must have been about fourteen right? And some of my friends were going up to Handsworth, to go to a café or to go to somewhere [...] and the one boy's turned around to me and goes, 'nah, nah, *you* can't come because you're not Black,' yeah? And I remember sitting there at the time thinking *yooo*, is this geezer for real? Yeah? But it stuck with me and that's... *that... that* phrase there stuck with me, it stuck with me until this day, you know. And I always remember thinking, I'm not Black? But I'd took this Black identity on for all these years [...] and now you're telling me [...] on my Black side... [...] you're now saying actually you can't come there because you're not Black, you know? [...] and I started to question then [...] when I was fourteen, fifteen, that's when I started to realise actually I'm not Black, yeah? [Chris, 40]

In this excerpt Chris' membership in a Black group that he had felt a part of throughout his youth, was suddenly closed off and made inaccessible, presenting him with a major conflict. His friend did not permit him 'entry' to Blackness and although only a brief interaction, it had a lasting effect on Chris. His allegiance to a broader collective category that he had nurtured through his youth was weakened and thus he was stripped of his group power (Tate 2013: 230). This interaction prompted him to reconsider how he would construct his ethnic identity from that point onwards.

Often these reminders by Black male friends that the mixed race respondents were not Black were described as 'banter' or harmless jokes; one respondent

recalled being referred to as an 'undiluted drink' and another as a 'bounty'.<sup>73</sup> The function of 'verbal interplay' in Black male friendship groups as a method to play out tensions and deal with in-group divisions has been noted before (Alexander 1996: 145). Joseph-Salisbury (2016) has specifically noted how divisions can sometimes be formed along skin tone in Black male peer groups, and that it is darker skin that emerges as a form of capital. In the example below from 70s-born Anthony, these two characteristics of the Black friendship group are clear, in that divisions along colour are playfully acknowledged through verbal sparring with his friends.

Growing up as a teen, banter [...] dissing... was a *big* way of formulating your position in a group [...] it was about how well you was able to defend it. So it could be about anything... so about you know if your trainers were bruk down from if [...] your dad slapped up your mom, how many years ago. We'd cuss anybody about anything [...] But racially then... the racial aspect for me was always [...] it was a bit like hold on, like I don't like that and it was like little things like [...] my Black friends used to tell me like... that my mom cooks egg and chips [...] you know... it's considered a [...] diss basically [...] I always shied away from it [...] because [...] I was always fearing that [...] backlash, the light skin thing, yeah the dissing about my race, do you know what I mean? Where I felt almost like, for a group that, you know, I did want to be in... you know [...] on the outside I would just laugh it off but internally I knew that, nah that hurts [...] this was a group I felt a part of for so many years and now it was almost like they was ostracising me or they was separating me outside the group, saying, 'no, you're not one of us'. [Anthony, 36]

This ritual of 'dissing' in Anthony's friendship group is reminiscent of the African American game – the Dozens. Often played by Black males in particular, it is a verbal contest that requires participants to engage in a back and forth of creative wordplay that incorporates insults (Abrahams 2009; Wald 2012). Each side must attempt to out-do their protagonist with slurs, until one side gives up. On a surface level this might appear as a mundane characteristic of immature adolescent male friendship groups, however it is in fact an African diasporic tradition and scholars have identified numerous links back to African rituals and American plantation societies which show its 'psychological and

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<sup>73</sup> Slang term used to describe a Black or mixed race person who 'acts' White. I.e. they appear Black on the outside but on the inside, they are White.

social functions' (Lefever 1981). The significance of this history is of critical importance when thinking about Anthony's experience. It shows how the legacies of plantation societies play out across the African diaspora in contemporary UK Black male friendships, just as they appear to do in Black female ones. The maternal 'dissing' that Anthony received, reified his Whiteness and his mixedness, which would momentarily devalue and weaken his position in his Black male peer group. Despite the triviality of such remarks, the consequences of them for Anthony were serious. He often chose to exclude himself from these playful interactions in his friendship group because he was aware of his vulnerability in those contexts, and anticipated his inability to make himself immune to the effect of the remarks.

The effect of horizontal hostility is critical for theorising mixed race. Numerous respondents told me that this type of rejection was more painful than the structural White racism they had received (Tate 2013). Malcolm explained; 'I struggled with that a lot, and I think it hurt me more because in some way I'd expect no less from [...] them White boys, to try and go there [...] them 'Black bastards, niggers' [...] But when Black guys used to go there and Black girls used to go there...' The detrimental effect on feelings of belonging was acute in all of the cases. Lucien described the feeling of anxiety around group membership as akin to having one foot in the door. Respondents' positions were conditional and the fear of being 'outed' left them in a state of uncertainty. The section finishes by presenting a reflection from 70s-born Anthony. It echoes the introductory discussion to this section on horizontal hostility, in order to re-emphasise that the process is indicative of both mixed race and Black subjects' vulnerability to structural racism. The following section highlights that even within their intimate family relationships, mixed race subjects are not necessarily shielded from the pernicious effects of racism.

At one point I thought like why does that happen then? [...] why would my Black peers, why would they want to out me, or put me on the fringes, or make me feel a way? And it was because at the time they was identifying their own racial culture, do you get what I'm saying? They was going through what I was going through, in a *Black* way, do you get what I mean? In their way, and a lot of their way was to... was to say, '*I'm Black and I'm proud of it,*' was to define anything that *wasn't* Black. And anything that wasn't Black at a certain point [...] was kind of met with conflict and that was just a way of dealing with their

own Blackness, in a world which you know, discriminates and puts you at the back of the pile. [Anthony, 36]

## **6.4 Positioning in a mixed race family**

*'I'm the only mixed race one out of the two families... I'm the bridge, as I like to be called'. [Levi, 43 years old]*

As noted in chapter three, all but one of the participants in the sample, had a White mother and Black father. This is representative of the general pattern of Black, White interethnic partnerships in the UK, that shows that Black Caribbean men are more likely to partner out than Black Caribbean women (Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Platt 2009). Aside from this common pattern regarding the participants' parents, there was much diversity in the make-up of the families. Many participants had siblings with ethnic backgrounds which were different to their own. Some grew up in single parent households that had either started off that way since their birth or formed following their parents' break-ups. Others reported having step-parents in the home (some of whom were White, Asian, mixed race, Black), which significantly altered the ethnic make-up of their family unit. Nuclear family set ups were evident across the cohorts but there were cohort effects regarding marriage within these families. All but two of the 60s-born cohort reported that their parents had married. A significantly lower proportion of the 70s and 80s-born cohorts reported this to be the case in their parents' relationships. This mirrors the general pattern in the Caribbean migrant community in Britain throughout the 1960s. During the period 'they joined in the British celebration of the nuclear family as the universal and ideal model' (Goulbourne 2001) by engaging in formal marriages. Bauer (2010: 51) asserts that this has not been the case among 'the younger generations'.

Generally, participants' Black extended families were significantly larger than their White extended families. Many reported having numerous cousins, aunties and uncles both in the UK, the Caribbean and America (Bauer 2010). Despite the smaller size of participants' White families, Whiteness was central to their family lives in many ways. This was especially the case for participants who grew up in single parent households. In keeping with the general pattern that women are more likely than men to head single parent households (Edwards & Caballero 2011), for those participants in these family structures, it was their

White mothers who were their main carers and thus Whiteness was always physically present. As noted in chapter four, many of these White mothers effectively practised explicit anti-racist behaviours in their parenting to coach their children in dealing with the harmful impact of racism (Twine 2004). In a minority of cases, White mothering practices transpired in less positive ways. Again, there were clear cohort effects that determined how this played out. Those in the 60s-born cohort gave the most extreme examples of racism that would sometimes be directed at them from their mothers. There were also numerous examples of White grandparents disapproving of their mothers' relationships with their Black fathers. In some cases this hostility declined when participants were born but some grandparents had already 'disowned' their White daughters prior to the births of their grandchildren (Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008; Ali 2012b; Harman 2013). In the upcoming examples I eschew from these explicit versions of White racism and consider how Whiteness enters mixed race families in more implicit and indirect ways. Below, 80s-born Maya recalls a time that she felt the local family GP had treated her unfairly during an appointment. When she told her mother this, she found her experience difficult to believe and could not empathise.

Sometimes [my mom] forgets that I am not her. Like, I don't look like her, I don't sound like her, I'm not, maybe, treated like her. Erm, I remember one time like I went to the doctor's [...] when I told this story to my mom [that] I feel like I've been patronised by my doctor... my mom was saying, 'oh, he's never spoken to me like that.' And then I had to kind of say to her 'but you're not me,' you know what I mean? For different reasons... not just because she's White. She's older, you know, she's more middle class and stuff. But [...] there's been a few situations where I've explained things to her and she's just gone, 'oh I don't see why that would have happened like that', and I have to say, well there could have been like another undertone, another layer to it. But I think [...] it's always been quite hard for my mom to see that and to understand that [...] she just sees me as her miniature doesn't she? So like... everything that she's taught me and whatever... all these skills to go out in the world, it's because she thinks everything should be [...] as easy as it was for her. It's just not... I don't think it's the same. [Maya, 27]

In the example above, Maya does not directly suggest that her doctor's attitude was the result of his underlying racial prejudice. Nevertheless she raised the

conversation with her mother with the pre-assumption that there would be a mutual understanding that his attitude had an undertone that *could* be related to his underlying race-based prejudice. It is her mother's White (and likely class) privilege that makes her unable to see this possibility (Dyer 1997; McIntosh 1990). Thus in this case, Whiteness enters the family implicitly and momentarily ruptures their closeness. Just as Gail Lewis (2009: 19) and her mother had done, Maya and her mother had to navigate the 'external landscapes of racial difference', and this was not a journey they could necessarily take *together* as a collective united front. In the excerpt, Maya explains there has been 'a few situations' similar to this one and that as a result she has had to always 'be that person that's [...] defending something' in her family. In this mixed race family situation, Maya engages in a type of ongoing labour that requires her to work a double shift, which challenges external racism and prejudice and internal familial misunderstandings *of that racism*. Anthony, 36, also provided an example of how Whiteness sometimes operated subtly when he was in the company of his maternal White grandparents. Although it is worth briefly noting that Anthony's grandmother was Irish and his grandfather Scottish, and so they represented a particular type of Whiteness in the English context (Rhodes 2013). Both his White *and* Black grandparents shared a history of migration to England.

My nan was [...] the nurturing one [...] my granddad was a hard Scottish man [...] they loved me, you know they gave me positive reinforcement but it was always like an air of fascination or misunderstanding. Even just... yeah about... just who I am... like I say, little things like my hair, little things like you know, when I started to get a bit older and fashion sense and you know like... because obviously it was predominantly Black in that. So you know it was always that air of you know... they didn't quite get it and they'd always ask questions like, 'why do you turn your jeans up like that?' 'Why do you put them lines in your hair?' Do you get what I mean? Like it was those little things where I had to explain to myself, well this is fashion, this is Black fashion. But ultimately I didn't have to do that with my dad's family because they knew it, they understood it. [Anthony, 36]

Despite being a different 'shade of Whiteness' to their White English counterparts (Dyer 1997), the force of his grandparents' 'white gaze' is clear (Joseph-Salisbury 2016; Du Bois 2007). Anthony stresses how loving his grandparents were and does not read their curiosity and intrigue as rejection

but it nevertheless made him feel slightly uneasy by prompting a fleeting moment of visibility for him within the family. Anthony's final utterance about his father's (Black) family is also of critical interest. Although they undoubtedly 'understood' his Blackness, it was evident in the study, that Whiteness also implicated Black families too. Although Whiteness was not necessarily always a *physical* feature in Black family spaces (in the form of White family members for example), it nonetheless seemed to continuously emerge as an 'ever present non presence' (Henry 2013: 152). As Henry (ibid: 157) notes, Caribbean people have historically had 'a colonial mentality burned into their psyche'. It is this mentality which made 60s-born Olivia's Jamaican father think marrying a White woman was a 'prize' (chapter four), that made 70s-born Joanne's Jamaican granddad shout at her to, '*come outta di sun*' on her trips to Jamaica, and encouraged 80s-born Matthew's Nevisian grandmother to 'love England... aristocracy... and the Queen'. There were many other examples like these that evidence the ubiquity of Whiteness and how it permeates mixed race families from various directions.

When participants did explicitly speak about Whiteness, in keeping with Caballero's (2005: 148) findings, it appeared that it was the 'white rather than the minority heritage that [was] under pressure to be denied'. As has been evidenced throughout the thesis thus far, participants' Whiteness, in comparison to their visible Blackness, has had no significant impact on their everyday interactions, and furthermore for many it has been an impossible identity to claim anyhow. In light of this, Whiteness appeared to be an optional identity to many, in that it was something that they felt they could opt in and out of. It emerged as a 'symbolic', rather than salient aspect of their identity (Brunsma & Rockquemore 2001: 225). Further, participants' Whiteness was materially different from their racial sense of self because they were more able to pick it up and put it down when they wanted to; it was information that could be volunteered, unlike their Black heritage that would be read off their skins whether they liked it or not (Gans 1979).

Despite this, it was clear that Whiteness was not a straightforward 'choice' or 'option' because it carried a lot of maternal weight. In speaking about Whiteness, it was repeatedly obvious that participants were often talking about their mothers. Their Whiteness was anchored to this aspect of their identity and so to not 'choose' Whiteness or render it unimportant, was effectively to deny their mothers. The final section of the chapter explores how race and colour has

impacted on participants' decisions about making their own families and becoming parents themselves.

Because even though like growing up [...] my Jamaican culture definitely resonated to me a lot more and definitely means a lot and it has been a massive making of who I am as a man and what I've grown into and what I've become but also in the same respect, I wouldn't wanna dismiss my White side. Because that would be sort of letting your mom down and my mom's been a massive influence. [Nicholas, 26]

## **6.5 Making more mixed families – the next generation**

When I was thinking about my own continuation, my own family, my own children [...] I knew because I was mixed, I didn't want my children to be lighter than me [...] Maybe it's because I wanted to be accepted more as Black, than I did anything else, do you get what I'm saying? So like I said, it happened at the same time when I was going through all of this with my peers and the cussing [...] So yeah, I said to myself consciously [...] from now on I'm only going out with Black or mixed girls – simple as that. Now, I think over the years (inaudible) that changed for me because you know, I'm growing up [but] I know that it's still important to hold on – sounds mad – hold on to my Blackness. And [...] I know that's not the way love works. I want my family to be born out of love, so it's interesting that I'm trying to control how love works. [Anthony, 36]

The 2011 census data for England and Wales shows that people in the mixed/multiple ethnic groups are most likely to be in an inter-ethnic partnership (85%).<sup>74</sup> The Mixed White and Black Caribbean group (out of all the mixed groups), were most likely to contain people in an inter-ethnic relationship (88%) (ONS 2014: 3). Out of the top-10 inter-ethnic partnerships generally, relationships between Mixed White and Black Caribbean and White British people, were the fourth most common (ibid: 8). This is in keeping with the broader pattern that indicates 'most mixed people in Britain partner with

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<sup>74</sup> Although in these official ONS statistics, any person in a relationship with somebody in an ethnic group other than their own is marked as a mixed couple. Therefore, a Mixed White/Black Caribbean person partnered with a Black Caribbean person would be counted as in a 'mixed' couple. Partnerships across shared ethnic groups like this example, may not be perceived as 'mixed' by those within them, and further to this, measuring mixed relationships in this way might slightly exaggerate the overall picture.

White Britons' (Song & Gutierrez 2015: 3). Although it appears that Anthony does not fit this particular demographic pattern of Black mixed race and White partnerships, his back and forth in regards to partnership preference/choice throughout his life course unpacks the complex decision making processes behind these statistics. Anthony linked his decision as a young man to only date Black or mixed girls directly to his experience of receiving horizontal hostility from his Black male peers because of his mixedness. A Black or mixed partner he imagined would have reaffirmed his own Blackness, and served as a buffer against his friends' jokes. For Anthony, a Black or mixed partner could be used as a tool to reconcile his grievances and solidify his membership in the Black community. Although the question of his White heritage is never directly named in his discussion about dating as a young person and thoughts about having children, he deals with it implicitly when he states that he knew he did not want his children to be lighter (Whiter) than he. Building on the previous section, Whiteness again emerges as an invisible, yet highly significant force, in this case in its potential to 'dilute' (Song & Gutierrez 2015) the next generation. Whiteness can be seen functioning in this way through a number of the accounts in this final section of the chapter.

Although the partnerships that the statistics above represent, were likely created 'out of love'; there were numerous examples throughout the cohorts of participants strategically negotiating the ethnicity of their partners, with their future children in mind, as in the opening example from Anthony. The most common ethnicities of past, present or future partners were Black, mixed race or White. Ethnicity was often the most significant criteria used to select potential partners but this was especially the case for the 60s-born respondents, many of whom told me that they actively sought out Black partners to have children with. I present these examples first, as they speak back to the current statistics that show high levels of Black mixed race partnerships with White people and go some way in revealing the generational impact on these types of partnerships.

The 60s-born participants came from varying family structures but all had grown up in a hostile racial climate in 1970s Britain, and most had engaged in Black cultural movements that stressed pan-African politics and pride. It is likely that that the partnering practices of the 60s-born participants were implicated by their locational practices and the social networks they formed in the racialised spaces and neighbourhoods in the city that they frequented, both as young people and adults (chapters four and five). Their Black partnerships

and children seemed to be an expression of Black solidarity and pride, echoing their political outlook and mentality as youths. It was also evident that many of the 60s-born participants wanted to have a Black family as a strategic way to shield their children from the uncertainty that sometimes plagued their own mixed race experience. Generally though, the decisions regarding partners were intricately tied to thoughts about family continuation. Many wanted their children to be Black and this was often cited as the overall rationale for choosing Black partners. Furthermore, a Black family secured *continued* membership in a broader Black community beyond respondents' own lifetimes. For Olivia, 47, having children with a Black partner helped with the broader project of maintaining a Black population.

For me [...] I've definitely [...] verbalised it as that. You know, I'm gonna wash the Black back in to my family, I don't want Black people to be extinct, you know what I mean? I'm proud of... my Black heritage and if we keep doing what we're doing, we will be extinct. [Olivia, 47]

Ironically, Olivia's prophesising in the mid-1980s about the decline in 'monoethnic' Black populations when thinking about her potential partners, seems to have materialised somewhat. For example, the Labour Force Household Survey indicates that those who 'define themselves as singularly Caribbean are likely to decline over time, as increasingly complex heritages emerge among those with some element of Caribbean descent' (Platt 2009: 7). Although the outcome of Olivia's prediction is of less significance, than the language she uses to explain it. The excerpt is littered with biological notions of race and mixing which has historically produced derogatory ideas of mixed race (Aspinall 2013; Stonequist 1935; Christian 2008; Fryer 1984), which many respondents themselves had actually tried to eschew in the interviews when talking about their own ethnicity. She constructs the Black population as a race which must be replenished, and the making of her own family is presented as her voluntary labour to achieve that end goal, in what seems like an attempt to almost reverse the work of her Black father's partnering out.<sup>75</sup>

Martina, 49, also told me that she 'knew' that she would 'not have had children with [her first boyfriend] Jerome Brown' because he was mixed race. After Jerome, she vowed that she would never 'fuck anything lighter than [herself]'. As with others, contradictory conceptualisations of race were evident in Martina's interview. These were revealed in an exchange regarding her

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<sup>75</sup> I use this term in this section to describe partnerships with people who are not Black mixed race or Black.

children's racial identities. She was clear in her opinion that they were Black and most definitely not mixed. However at another point in the interview, when I pressed her to tell me whether or not she identifies as mixed, she replied 'everybody's mixed', as though to dispose of any reference to a terminology which could potentially speak to the notion that there are distinct races that can be mixed (Ifekwunigwe 1997).

K: What about your kids, do your kids see themselves as mixed or Black or –

M: They're not mixed.

K: Do you talk to them about their –

M: But my children aren't mixed. My children are Black.

K: Is that what you've... is that how they see themselves –

M: Yes.

K: Or is that how you see them?

M: Because that's what they are.

K: Okay, okay. Because obviously mixed people are having kids, who are having kids, who are having kids –

M: Yeah but at what... at what point... you see you have to be careful when you phrase that question. You have to think about it, because at what point do... do we decide that being more one thing than the other is the important thing? My children are three quarters Black – *they are Black*.

I suspect the question had irritated Martina as her replies cut short my utterances at various points. She talks about her children's identities in *racial* not ethnic terms. It appears that she perceives her statement on their identity as a truism that should already be known, as it is self-evident from the information she had already presented about their fathers' ethnicities. My prompting for further discussion seemed to be perceived as unnecessary and nonsensical. In this exchange she re-affirms an idea of race which she had challenged at another point in the interview. Her last utterance also offers up a clear contradiction. She shifts between a social constructionist idea of race where she questions who has the right to decide on race (i.e. do the constructing of it) and then presents her children's racial identities as fractional, which are reminiscent of historical scientific discourses regarding blood quantum and race (Thompson 2010). Again, what is most evident from this is that biological discourses are seemingly irresistible when talking about mixedness. The same rhetoric is evident in Assefa's excerpt below, where he

explains how race is sometimes used as a weapon in arguments with his Black wife. He told me that he 'consciously' took 'the Black route' for his partner. He felt that 'the White wife choice' would have inevitably been more problematic than the 'Black wife choice', but explained that the latter was 'not all smooth and plain sailing'.

My wife a [...] beautiful Black woman, would have issues with me as a... as a half-caste. [...] the White side of me was predominantly in the array of armour against me, when she's ready for it [...] So in other words it's quite personal, that I can be rejected by Black in *my own life* [...] you know [...] under pressured circumstances, but it shows that, your true heart will show itself [...] eventually it will come out and you will say, 'but hold on [...] you're not feeling what I feel, you're not living what I'm living, you don't know what I know, therefore, you're different.' [...] If I was Black and the same colour as my missus, there would be utter harmony, just like if two White folks are together, there's utter harmony in terms of the race situation. [Assefa, 44]

In his relationship with his Black life partner and mother to his children, he felt rejection at times. His emphasis on the fact that the rejection occurred in *his* life suggests his surprise at the fact that it could occur in a family unit that he had opted into and created; a space he anticipated would be free from the external politics of race. He felt that his wife emphasised their differences and excluded him from her Blackness in times of disagreement. To counter this he told me he would 'always refer back to the *married bed* and the former choice, and say [...] look at our children'. Reference to his Black children and his marriage to her were used by him to signify his commitment to Blackness and to close down any suspicion. The biological discourse of race is evident in his flawed racial logic which anticipates that ethnically matched relationships are harmonious, which speaks to the negative stereotypes that construct mixed relationships as inherently destined to fail (Edwards & Caballero 2011). His same-race harmony argument is an over-simplified imagined ideal that presents ethnicity as a singular identity, rather than an intersectional one (Crenshaw 1991). Ethnic identity is implicated by social class, citizenship status, gender, sexuality, place, phenotypes, to name a few (Crenshaw 1991; Brah & Phoenix 2004; Yuval-Davis 2012), all of which have a bearing on how ethnicity is read, performed, constructed and experienced in partnerships with others.

Rhian and Chris (both participants in the study), had partnered other Black mixed race people. They were in a long term relationship and had a child together. By Assefa's theory, their relationship should have been free from any grievances related to ethnicity. This was not the case, as numerous variables such as the areas in which they grew up, their gender, and contrasting phenotypes, produced two different mixed race subjectivities which prompted nights of 'bickering' over how each of them should perform their ethnicities (Tate 2005; Byrne 2000). Rhian's childhood in Northfield, a White area in the south of the city, coupled with her light skin and loose curly hair meant that she was not only often read as White but also 'felt' White in her culture and identity, something that Chris found difficult to come to terms with.

Although much less of a feature in the data, there were a few examples of respondents who actively sought out White partners and the rationale for this decision varied. Two of the women had opted for White partners as a result of their own negative lived experiences of Black or mixed race men in their lives. These women tended to believe the negative stereotypes regarding Black and Black mixed race men's behaviours in relationships (hooks 2004) and worried about potentially becoming their 'babymothers' (Song & Edwards 1997). See 70s-born Karen's excerpt below.

When I was younger, I thought because I was mixed race, I should date mixed race, so I only dated mixed race – I had one Black boyfriend [...] then over the years and experience of just... this is gonna sound so stereotypical now (laughs) but I just thought, I'm done with being cheated on, being messed around [...] my mixed race friends at the time, my Black friends, my family members, it just seemed to just perpetuate [...] that was the norm. That no one wanted to settle down and get married if they were a Black or mixed race person. Which is ridiculous because... there was plenty of Black and mixed race people out there that – men – that wanna get married [...] but I just didn't seem to find them. So then I just decided that I'm just gonna start dating White guys because I'm done with the relationships not moving on and things not being taken seriously and just being seen as someone's *girl* and babymother [...] I just thought that's not for me [...] because my family was so fractured, I thought that's not what I want. [Karen, 43]

To summarise this final section, it is important to note that generally, preferences about partners with regards to ethnicity were most strong when participants were in their younger years. The process of coming of age instilled more confidence in respondents' own ethnic identities and therefore the yearning to manipulate their children's ethnic identities through partnerships, declined in parallel with this. Furthermore, for those who had already had children, the ethnicity of their partner featured as less significant criteria because they were no longer partnering up to 'reproduce', so to speak. It is argued that these questions, that prompt reflections regarding second generation mixed race children and family continuation, speak to the inherent cause of the anxiety and worry around mixing. Often the concern – both historically and now – is less about mixed relationships per se and more about reproduction, about what mixing produces and how this alters our definitions of race and our future populations. In light of this final discussion, the anxiety it seems, does not lessen for the people who are the products of mixing.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

This final empirical chapter moved the analysis on from mixed race as a structural identity in place and period, towards a focus on mixed race as a private identity category, with a particular focus on how it is experienced and constructed vis-à-vis personal relationships. Many of the recurrent themes in the chapter centred upon issues relating to privilege and colourism. The chapter began by mapping the general responses to some of the present-day tropes regarding mixed race as a beautiful, emergent, high achieving ethnic 'group' (Aspinall 2015). In a few cases, participants seemed to have inherited and reproduced some of these ideas. For the most part, they tended not to root these sentiments in biological notions of mixed race superiority, as has been done elsewhere (Lewis 2010). Instead, for those who did regard their mixedness as advantageous, they tended to think of it as a useful resource in life. These participants felt that their mixedness enabled them to understand competing arguments in times of conflict (Oluide 2002). This self-perception as 'mediator', is a reversal of previous pathological ideas that suggested mixed race subjects would be damned as a direct result of their inability to successfully negotiate their disparate racial backgrounds (Oluide 2002; Tizard & Phoenix 1993; Christian 2008). The chapter argued that although these self-perceptions are positive self-descriptors, they have dangerous slippage into reductionist stereotypes based on biological notions of race, in that they

assume this is an inherent mixed race character trait. Building on the conclusions of the previous chapter that highlighted weaknesses in the linkages between mixed race and post-race, it was clear that despite these self-perceptions of mixed race as saviour from conflicting situations; race differences can, and do, emerge as a point of contention in mixed race lives, even within the most intimate of relationships.

Many participants spoke about their experiences of the skin-tone based discrimination – colourism. The chapter argued that this was an inherited social position from colonial plantation societies where mixed race populations occupied a specific social location in the systematic colour hierarchies (Mohammed 2000). It was argued that women ‘enjoyed’ (then as now) elements of social capital that colourism exuded in their lives more frequently than their male counterparts. This capital did not tend to result in actual material gains, as has been found in Caribbean and American contexts. *Enjoyed* is enclosed in scare quotes above because it was clear that the cost of occupying this social location were rather high – especially for the women in the study. Poignantly, a significant sub-section of female participants identified tensions between themselves and Black women at various points throughout their lives. These experiences were referenced as highly significant. Again, these contemporary tensions were linked to the persistent legacy of patriarchal racist heteronormative plantation structures which often afforded mixed race women privileged positions over and above both Black men *and* women. Men also experienced Black rejection but this was often done in jest, which was starkly different from their female counterparts’ experiences. Although the impact of these horizontal hostilities have seldom been the focus of research on mixed race in the UK, it was argued that it has great potential in helping to theorise the mixed race experience. It incorporates concrete theoretical concepts of colour, class, gender and sexuality which help towards forming a more holistic theory of mixed race, as they usefully locate mixed race as a complex intersectional social identity.

Throughout the thesis Whiteness can be seen as operating a system of oppression that has, at different junctures, rendered mixed race as impure, Other and in-between. Although many participants recognised its pernicious effects, Whiteness was also representative of the maternal closeness they shared with their mothers. Therefore it entered their lives in quite complex and contradictory ways. The dilemma of *what to do* with Whiteness seemed to continue in the final discussion on having children, which in many ways was an

exploration of how that Whiteness is passed on and/or reconfigured through family 'bloodlines'. The discussion was of critical importance given the fact that statistics show that the Black mixed race group is mixing 'out' with the White group at quite a significant rate, raising new questions about second and third generation mixed race identities (Song & Gutierrez 2015). Despite this contemporary pattern, some (especially from the older cohorts) explained how they 'washed' the Black back into their families when making partnership choices as young people. In these discussions there was a clear intention to 'preserve' Blackness. What was clear from this finding is that the biological discourses of race and the burden of colour that had influenced mixed race lives before having children, also heavily impacted on their decisions about their own future family making. Ethnicity was often a consistent salient factor in partnership choices (to varying degrees) across the three birth cohorts, especially during child-rearing ages. More generally, these findings add to broader discussions regarding interethnic relationships (Muttarak & Heath 2010; Caballero et al. 2008; Voas 2009). They contribute to queries about what in fact constitutes a mixed relationship for mixed people themselves, which raises important questions about how inter-ethnic partnerships might be accurately measured in the future (Song 2015b).

## 7 Conclusion

From the outset, this thesis has sought to respond to some of the critiques that have been levelled at the field of mixed race studies, by conceptualising mixed race as a social, historical, political and emplaced category, as well as a personal identity choice. It endeavoured to do this by rooting mixed race subjects in place and period, in order to widen the analytical lens and take account of the broader historical and contemporary social processes that inform how mixed race identities are made (Christian 2000; Small 2001; Caballero 2005). By engaging with questions of place, the presumption that race is the salient determining identity for mixed race subjects, was brought into question. Mixed race was found to be a profoundly localised identity, which is articulated *through* and *within* places. Place emerged as a site through which to gain a type of racial knowledge, that provided a toolkit for participants to articulate their own racialised identities and those of other people. By this I mean that, race was often *given meaning* through place. By historicising the topic, the thesis also importantly dislodged mixed race from the current moment. This approach, it is hoped, will have provided some critical insight into the changes and continuities in racial and ethnic inequality that have implicated the mixed race experience over time. For example, throughout the thesis, the persistence of dominant discourses of race was brought to light and it was shown how particular elements of our social histories are inherited over time and through the life course. The stability of these discourses was not a straightforward indication of their *unchanging* continuity however. Rather, it was shown how discourses travel and resurface in mixed race lives at historical junctures, taking slightly different forms as they go. Finally, by accounting for the social generational locations of the participants, the study was able to highlight the different methods that Black mixed race people have engaged in, to comprehend (and in some cases) respond to, and resist, their structural positions.

By taking a slight step back from the individual, present-tense, mixed race narrative as a central unit of analysis, a lot of ground has been covered in this thesis. Importantly, mixed race has been highlighted as an identity which is reproduced and articulated, not only by the individuals who are racialised as such, but by the places and histories that they are intricately tied to. This raises important questions about who/what it is that owns, controls and defines mixed race identity and experience. Aside from the central conversation regarding

mixed race, it is also hoped that the discussion raises some important questions in relation to the various other 'race' related topics that have been evoked throughout the thesis; pertaining to geographies of race, Black youth identities, colonial legacies, intersectional identities, colourism and the racialisation of space. In the forthcoming sections I elaborate on the key findings presented above, by considering how these new insights contribute to the current debates in the field, and what their implications are for the study of race and ethnicity more generally.

## 7.1 Place

In thinking about the function of place and geography in the study of mixed race, it seems that we are too often tempted to relate the discussion to the topic of heritage and lineage. These are the key responses which are invoked by the *where are you from* and the *what are you* questions, which mixed race people are so routinely faced with (Gaskins 1999; Sims 2016). The answers to these questions require an archaeological excavation of family trees and racial pasts. These conceptions of place certainly help us to comprehend how mixed race identities are forged in relation to diasporic communities and complex family migration histories. Furthermore, they uncover other important questions about the 'rootedness' of mixed ethnic identities and issues regarding ethnic group consciousness and membership. However, what this study has shown is that it is also necessary to look at different 'scales of belonging' (Mahtani 2014: 48) when talking about place and mixed race (chapter four). In particular, the study has uncovered the significant identification processes that occur as mixed race intersects with *immediate* environments, such as the private spaces of the home, and external spaces like school and within local neighbourhood networks.

Within the personal space of the home, when cues about racial and ethnic identities were presented by families, these mostly related to questions of heritage and/or included lessons about racial and ethnic inequality. In participants' movement through the local and other areas of the city, ideas about race in the home were elaborated upon. As participants moved through these external spaces, they were entered into dominant, structural, racial schemas. Often, it seemed that they were required to respond/conform to these with more urgency, than they were to the cues received in the private space of the family home. Therefore, despite the weight that is often put on

familial roles in teaching mixed race children, 'race' per se, it was local geographies that often emerged as significant 'vehicles of power' (Nassy Brown 2005: 8) in mixed race lives. Although the study was set in Birmingham, 'city identities' were rarely ever expressed. Allegiances were not to Birmingham, but to local neighbourhoods such as Handsworth, Small Heath, Balsall Heath, to name a few. Thus, to echo Nassy-Brown (2005: 32), I demonstrated 'localization as racialization'. Participants' attachments to the local *and* their departures from it, into unfamiliar locales and routes through the city (De Certeau: 1984), were particularly transformative for their racial selves.

By linking place to the question of change through time, it also became apparent that localities can function as a 'laboratory for exploring issues in depth' (Massey 1993: 148). It was shown that particular spatial relations that form in the local, although unique to that space, can have implications for further social processes. For example, the significance of youth clubs, churches and sound system spaces in mixed race lives through the 1970s and 1980s, were shown to have deteriorated through time. Drawing on the example of sound system culture in chapter five, I suggested that the 60s-born cohort's participation in these racialised spaces, had implications for their initial identification processes in youth and the formation of their social networks. I later suggested that these processes would also likely have impacted upon their future partner choices and subsequently, second generation mixed race (chapter six). In light of these findings, the thesis has emphasised that mixed race does not function independently; rather, it is inextricably cultivated in place.

## **7.2 Face to face with Blackness**

Throughout the thesis, the contentious space between Blackness and mixedness frequently emerged as a dominant (and at times problematic) dichotomy in the lives of the participants; as opposed to the dichotomy of Blackness and Whiteness, which has often been upheld as the foundations of the central dilemma in Black mixed race lives. A discussion that has been revisited at points through the thesis, relating to the interplay of Black and mixed race identity, has emphasised how the latter is often folded into the former. This is reminiscent of the global pattern finds that Black mixed race subjects are often 'misread' as Black in various situations and places (Aspinall & Song 2013; Caballero 2005; Sims 2016; Song 2010; Brunsma & Rockquemore

2001). This has been found to be a rather frustrating experience for those mixed race people who wish to assert their 'whole' *mixed* identity (Song & Aspinall 2012). Furthermore, despite being externally perceived as part of a Black homogenous mass, other debates have signalled that this does not necessarily prevent Black mixed race subjects', Black 'authenticity', from being brought into question (Joseph-Salisbury 2016; Tate 2005; Ifekwunigwe 1997). The findings in this study I hope might help to further this conversation, regarding how mixed race people relate to Blackness. Firstly, by highlighting the centrality of Black struggle as a significant variable in defining the relations between Blackness and mixedness. Secondly, by paying closer consideration to the impact of discourses of authenticity on Black mixed race identity, when they specifically materialise through incidences of Black rejection.

### **7.2.1 Responding to the question of Black struggle**

The persistent push and pull between mixedness and Blackness was particularly evident through the metaphorical question – *who would you fight for in a Black versus White war?* This question was posed to many participants in the study, across all of the birth cohorts. In the conclusion of chapter five, a surface reading of the race war question was presented. It suggested that the question was a manifestation of the historical pathological stereotypes that emphasised the problematic position of mixed race subjects as stuck *in-between* two (or more) ethnic and/or racial categories; marginalised as a result, and unable to align with, or reconcile these competing aspects of their racial selves (Christian 2008; Aspinall 2013; Stonequist 1937). However, upon closer inspection, this question should not solely be read as a (metaphorical or real) request for respondents to choose between categories or sides – in this case Black or White. This is because, firstly, as has been evidenced throughout this thesis, Whiteness simply was not an option to choose for (the vast majority of) people in this study. The second point, is that for all of those who had been posed with the hypothetical question, it had been Black friends, relatives (and in some cases strangers), who had asked it. This is indicative of how mixed race subjects in the study (irrespective of their age, phenotype, social class, gender, social generation etc) were often required to respond to and in some way *deal with* the question of Black struggle. It was this call to arms which meant that for many, throughout their lives, their mixedness was seemingly played out in the face of Black struggle, whether they wanted it to be or not. In some cases, this struggle was perceived as a rather burdensome issue to have to deal with

but for others, there was a clear willingness to engage in it, in very meaningful ways.

### **7.2.2 Defining Black identities and negotiating Black rejection**

Throughout the thesis, Blackness was attributed a plethora of meanings in the participants' lives, including but not limited to; historical struggle, politics, community, culture, style, masculinity, diaspora and lineage. The extent to which they reproduced these multiple conceptualisations of Blackness, and/or felt connected to them varied, and was often dependent on variables such as locality, gender, family structure, and age. Drawing on age in particular; there were quite obvious cohort effects in how people conceptualised Blackness, indicating its temporality. Following on from the discussion regarding 'Black struggle' in the above section, it became apparent throughout, that the 60s and 70s-born participants, had strongest engagements with, and investment, in these 'struggles' (chapter five). Indeed, the significant context to this was that 'Black', had been reclaimed as a positive, racial and *political* identity, through the 1960s and 1970s (Gilroy 2002; Marable 1984).

The 60s-born cohort engaged in the Black political ideas of the period, by presenting themselves through pro-Black aesthetics, by replenishing Black diasporic art forms, by forging alternative routes to learn Black history, and by participating in and creating Black community musical spaces (chapter five). Interestingly, the findings also indicated that the links to these complex terrains of Black identity were achieved even in cases where there were no parental (Black or White) 'gatekeepers' so to speak, to signpost participants towards it. Building on the earlier reflection regarding the significance of the local, this finding also emphasises the need to look beyond parental/familial roles, in relation to mixed race identity development (Twine 2004; Harman 2013; Caballero et al. 2008). Evidently, Black mixed race routes in to learning their *roots*, was not always as a familial responsibility, as the possibility for cultural translation lay beyond the boundaries of the family.

Despite the fact that Blackness emerged as a 'protean notion' throughout the study (Carrington 2010: 379), the fact remains that the most dominant discourses of Blackness which participants were faced with (and at times reproduced), were often rooted in biology. It was under this condition which their rejection from Blackness was most acutely felt. These discourses drew a boundary around Blackness, which naturalised it, making Black mixed race

trajectories 'into' it rather tentative, as it positioned them as inauthentic. In numerous cases, participants gave examples of Black rejection they had experienced, which explicitly indicated their precarious positions in relation to Blackness. This was termed, 'horizontal hostility' (Twine 1999), and again, the impact of this on mixed race subjecthood emphasises the significant function of the mixed race/ Black duality in their lives. Before elaborating on this, it must be emphasised that the power of White rejection and/or White racism was profound in mixed race lives. For example, it was shown how the White gaze disrupts family intimacies in chapter six. In chapter four, the hegemonic power of Whiteness in the structural institution of school, was shown to historically restrict mixed race youths' access to an alternative Black pedagogy. Further to this, it was argued that structural White racism even negatively impacted upon the White mothers of mixed race children, in that it historically rendered them as undeserving recipients of particular types of housing in Birmingham.

However, in addition to these examples, the thesis has raised some pressing questions about how Whiteness, as a dominant way of 'looking and knowing' (hooks 1992: 128), controls how Black people might sometimes gaze, or rather, look upon mixed race people. It was evident for example that Black looks and perceptions are 'profoundly colonised' (ibid), in that the colour hierarchies of plantation societies seemed to prevail. It was this poignant fact that resulted in fleeting moments of horizontal hostility (chapter six). Notably, these moments of horizontal hostility were infrequent in mixed race lives and they did not result in the types of structural disadvantages like the ones named above resulting from White racism. Despite the significance of these structural racisms as an oppressive force in the lives of Black *and* Black mixed race people, it was shown that Black hostility was very real in its effects, albeit in different ways. White hegemonic discourses of race were, at times, also made to work by their 'monoracial' Black counterparts to make the participants feel (ostensibly and momentarily) inferior but most importantly, to position them as *inauthentic* Black people. In some cases, dominant discourses of race were used by participants themselves as a way to 'reverse' or correct for, their supposedly inauthentic Black selves later in life, by having 'authentically Black' children (chapter six). Generally, what was acutely clear in these conversations regarding Black rejection and White racism, was that participants were more able to comprehend the 'panoptical' power of Whiteness (Joseph-Salisbury 2016: 51) and recognise how and why it impacts upon their lives in the way it does. In contrast to this, they lacked the ability to make sense of and reconcile Black rejection. Therefore, in many ways, it was this latter experience that

seemed to have the most *transformative* impact on *identification processes*, in that these experiences were often articulated as epiphanies in their lives. It was often within these moments when their *mixedness* was realised.

This is a topic that is seldom dealt with in contemporary literature on mixed race. Undoubtedly it might be perceived as a taxing, inconvenient issue to deal with, especially during a period where many scholars are engaging in the grand project of de-pathologising mixed race. By raising it as one of the concluding points here, I am not attempting to trouble the progressive inroads which have been made. Quite simply, this thesis has attempted to deal honestly with some of the inconvenient realities of the mixed race experience. Further to this, the discussion around horizontal hostility more generally, I purport has significant explanatory power in thinking through mixed race subjectivity. For example, the ways in which participants were reminded of their 'inauthentic' Blackness, was heavily dependent on their gendered identities (chapter six). Thus, this particular example of mixed race experience could not be understood without also framing it through an analysis of gender and sexuality. This highlights the imperative need for scholars to engage with mixed race bodies as intersectional subjects and also to consider how their subjecthood, is heavily burdened by the history of colonial formations, in which dominant ideas about race, sexuality and gender were formed. In addition to offering up some useful theoretical tools by which to make sense of a significant aspect of the mixed race experience, the discussion I hope, also provides critical insight into the formation and maintenance of ethnic group identities more generally; by questioning how their boundaries are defined and who it is that polices, and has ownership over them.

### **7.3 Black, mixed race, and their futures**

It seems that it is the ideology of race, which organises us into different groups by drawing on physical (and perceived biological) differences between us, that helps us to make sense of *mixing* in the first place. The very notion of 'mixing' relies on the logic of race, in that it works 'from a model that implies original pure societies, that later became 'miscegenated'' (Small 2001: 129). When thinking about some of the persistent conceptualisations of mixedness throughout this study, it is evident how mixed race people themselves relied on these biological notions of mixedness, to make sense of their own identities. In light of this it appears that it is nigh impossible to manoeuvre out of biological

discourses when discussing mixed race. Importantly however, the *function* of biological discourses in the narratives differed remarkably from the historical scientific stereotypes that have disparaged mixed race, by invoking metaphors of 'contagion and pollution to describe the dangers and consequences of 'racial' mixing' (Ifekwunigwe 2004: 33). On the contrary, the embodiment of multiple heritages/races was perceived by some as advantageous; a resource that allowed access to multiple world views (chapter six). Thus, the previous negative discourses were found to travel, but also changed shape over time, by being re-appropriated by the very subjects who were vulnerable to their original meanings. However, it is also argued that it is important to engage in a deeper reading of these types of mixed race self-perceptions. To reiterate the argument set forth in chapter six, although these ideas appear to be the direct inverse of previous derogatory notions, they rely on the same logic which naturalises racial characteristics and therefore uphold ideas about inherent racial differences. Second to this, the reproduction of these notions of mixed race abilities to 'bridge build' (Olumide 2002), puts personal responsibility on mixed race subjects to do the work of smoothing out the conflict that can occur at the intersections of racial and ethnic difference and inequality. It shifts the gaze inwards, which conveniently absolves structural systems of power from any responsibility – something which will contribute to the perpetuation, rather than eradication of ethnic or racial inequalities.

References to biology were particularly pertinent in participants' discussions about their own children (chapter six). In conversations about relationships, it appeared a rather difficult task for participants to think about potential partners, without paying due attention to the implications of these choices on their potential children's ethnicities. This discussion emerged in various ways, through narratives about past and present relationships. Generally, it seemed that the youngest cohort were the least preoccupied with thoughts over their children's ethnic or racial make-up. Nevertheless, biological references in relation to their children were present in their narratives. I recall one particular interaction with a 80s-born respondent who was worried about what happens when mixed race *mixes*. He told me that he and his brother had been worried over whether his brother's unborn child might turn out 'full black' or 'full white', by virtue of having two mixed race parents. Owing to the lack of space in the thesis, these narratives were not explored at any significant length. Instead, the narratives from the oldest cohorts were mostly presented, many of whom appeared to have a strong desire during their early adulthood to pass on their 'black genes' and 'replenish the stock'. Although this was evidently a

generational effect in relation to child-rearing approaches, the 60s-born cohort's narratives were foreground and are drawn on here because they succinctly demonstrate how the burden of race manifests itself in various stages of mixed race lives and how its impact is particularly acute in decisions about family continuation. Further to this, I contend that these findings provide some useful foundation from which to explore how this burden of race implicates *first generation* mixed race parents in particular, like the ones in this study.<sup>76</sup> In the main examples presented in chapter six, the burden appeared to lie in the fact that participants' choices in partner (and children) seemed to be perceived as *irrevocably* transformative for their family and for their own ethnic identities. Future research should contribute to the burgeoning questions that ask at what stage in mixed race families there is a perceived 'generational tipping point' (Song 2017: 11), and how this might impact on decision making about partnership choice for mixed race people. These questions will become all the more pressing as mixed race populations continue to age and have their own children.

A further interesting reflection from these findings is that being mixed does not necessarily result in a relaxed attitude towards further mixing. Mixed race people themselves are evidently impacted by anxieties over what that mixing will 'produce'. In thinking about the discussions throughout this thesis, it is this 'reproduction' of mixed race that has historically invoked the emotive reactions to it (Caballero 2013). The fascination, worry, angst, desire, disgust and intrigue about mixing have, and continue to be (even for some mixed people themselves) responses first and foremost to the potential outcome of *heterosexual cross-racial unions*. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that the field tends to analyse mixedness through a heteronormative framework, and that heterosexuality, for the most part, 'remains unspoken' in the analyses, functioning as a mostly 'taken for granted backdrop' (Haritaworn 2012: 90). It is likely that the general omission of same sex mixed couples/ families in the field is because they do not 'reproduce' mixed families in quite the same way as their heterosexual counterparts, and thus do not invoke the same emotional reactions. Future research might consider how discourses about mixing, reproduction and families translate into a same sex context. This will not only broaden the knowledge base regarding disparate mixed experiences but also encourages an intersectional approach to mixedness which recognises

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<sup>76</sup> I noted in chapter three that one participant in the study was second generation mixed race. He was twenty years old at the time of interview, and did not have any children.

(hetero)sexuality as a significant racialising force, that upholds ideas regarding racial purity.

## 7.4 Concluding remarks

This thesis has utilised a rich data set to provide what I hope has been, an in-depth documentation of the Black mixed race experience in Birmingham, through time. Owing to the relatively small sample size, the thesis provides just a small insight into mixed race subjectivity and thus cannot claim representativeness. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this thesis has successfully demonstrated the importance of accounting for the temporal and emplaced nature of mixedness, rather than relying on individualised personal day-to-day accounts. The insights gained through this theoretical and methodological approach to mixedness, are the key contributions of the thesis, to the field of mixed race studies. By taking this productive angle on the issue, the thesis has highlighted the critical absence of place in the field. Place has been shown to have great explanatory power in helping to conceptualise mixed race identity. It emerged as a significant 'axis of power' in mixed race lives (Nassy Brown 2005: 8), and a dominant aspect of mixed race identities. More specifically, the thesis has indicated the benefits of scaling down the unit of analysis from national comparative approaches, to also account for city and local identities. The local, it has been shown, has significant theoretical power in thinking through mixed race identity. In light of this, the thesis suggests that these nuanced approaches and conceptualisations of place, and how it intersects with mixed race, should be dealt with more attentively in future research.

In looking at mixed race through an historical lens, the thesis has also demonstrated the need to engage with the temporality of mixed race. This approach has shown some of the potential limitations of privileging present-tense, snapshot, everyday narratives of mixed race, in a number of ways. By looking *backwards* through time, the thesis uncovered the historical patterns and social inequalities that have implicated mixed race lives, and has also shown how these have impacted on future social processes, such as family making and second generation mixed race. Thus, by unpacking participants' personal, family and local racialised histories, the thesis was not solely gaining access to 'past' mixed race experiences, which are wedded to historical junctures and have no resonance in the contemporary moment. On the contrary, a historicised approach served as a useful vantage point, to unpack

both the pre-configurations *and* the potential reconfigurations of mixed race, in the future. Furthermore, by looking at mixed race through time, the thesis has shed some light on how race and its hierarchies continue to function as an oppressive force in mixed race lives; a finding which runs in parallel with the popular sentiment that hints at mixed race's transformative power to blur the boundaries of race and make all of its fallacies transparent. This thesis contends that this is a paradox which lies at the very heart of mixed race. Beyond this pathological/celebratory binary framework that so often encompasses mixed race, it is argued that it is perhaps most important to recognise when and why mixed becomes coded into broader discourses of race. In being able to identify when mixed race comes to the fore, we might better be able to trace not only the personal politics of mixed race but the wider social processes that make it emerge in the first place. By looking at mixed race through this lens, the field might become more progressive in a political sense, as it will allow for us to keep sight of the complex ways that race and racisms continue to function in *all* of our lives.

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## Appendix: Recruitment Poster

Mixed race male and female participants needed to take part  
in a research project



Do you have

**Mixed White** and  
**Black Caribbean**  
heritage?


Were you born between  
1955 - 1970 or 1980 - 1995?

Did you grow up in Birmingham ?

If your answers to the above are yes -  
would you like to take part in an interview  
exploring the experiences of mixed race  
people in post-1945 Britain ?

If you think you may be interested in taking part and would like  
to hear a little more information about the project through an  
informal chat then please contact me, Karis Campion.  
Details below:

Tel: 07850479436  
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The University of Manchester Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity