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Metisse **Narratives**

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Jayne Ifekwunigwe discusses the testimonies of women of 'mixed race' parentage in the English-African diaspora.

It is out of chaos that new worlds are born

Audre Lorde

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself

Frantz Fanon

Two little six year old girls have been separated from their peers for disrupting the Nando afterschool project on the outskirts of Thatchapee. Sandra has a white English mother and a black Jamaican father. She has blonde curly hair, hazel eyes and a complexion the colour of milky English tea. Her comrade Aneya has a white English mother and a black Libyan father. She has black curly hair, dark brown eyes and colouring reminiscent of roasted almonds. I am sitting at the table with them as they talk about their friends, various members of their family, as well as what they are going to do over the weekend since today is Friday. Aneya says to Sandra, who has been talking about her father who lives just outside Bristol, 'He's White isn't he.'¹ She knows Sandra's Mum is White English like hers, since the two families often play together. Sandra says, 'No, he's Bl...' She begins to say 'Black', and then says, 'I mean dark brown'.¹

Rather than representing a portrait of *metis* ('mixed race') girls as unruly, at age six Sandra and Aneya have exposed the major problematic of 'race'. Their

1. Thatchapee is the fictional name for the multiethnic community where from 1990-1992 I conducted ethnographic research on the politics of identities for multigenerational *metis(se)* ('mixed race') families in Bristol.

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discussion highlights the cultural paradoxes of 'race' and colour which multiple generations of women, men and children in England silently negotiate in their everyday lives. These individuals descend from lineages which cut across so-called different 'black and white' 'races', ethnicities, cultures, and classes. Their roots are both endogenous and exogenous.

In varied cultural and historical contexts, countless terms are employed to name such individuals - mixed 'race', mixed heritage, mixed parentage, *mestizo*, *mestiza*, *mulatto*, *mulatta*, Creole, coloured, mixed racial descent, etc. I deploy the terms *metis* (f), *metis* (m), *metisage* which more appropriately describe generations of individuals who by virtue of birth and lineage do not fit neatly into preordained sociological and anthropological categories. In England, at the moment, there are a multitude of terms in circulation which describe individuals who straddle racial borders. More often than not, received terminology either privileges presumed 'racial' differences ('mixed race') or obscures the complex ways in which being *metis* (se) involves both the negotiation of constructed 'black/' 'white' racial categories *and* the celebration of converging cultures, continuities of generations and over-lapping historical traditions. The lack of consensus as to which term to use, as well as the limitations of this discursive privileging of 'race' at the expense of generational, ethnic, and cultural concerns, led me to *metis*(se) and *metisage*.

In the French African (Senegalese) context, in its conventional masculine and feminine forms, *metis*(se) refers to someone who by virtue of parentage embodies two or more world views, i.e. white French mother and black Senegalese father. However, it is not exclusively a 'racial' term used to differentiate individuals with one black parent and one white parent from those with two black or white parents. *Metis*(se) also pertains to people with parents from different ethnic/cultural groups within a country: i.e. in Nigeria, Ibo and Yoruba or in Britain, Scottish and English. That is, the term recognises the specificity of ethnicities as they are maintained and redefined within national borders. By extension, *metisage* is a mind set or a shorthand way to describe the theorising associated with *metis*(se) subjectivities: oscillation, contradiction, paradox, hybridity, polyethnicities, multiple reference points, 'belonging nowhere and everywhere'. *Me'tissage* also signals the process of opening up hybrid spaces and looking at the sociocultural dynamics of 'race', gender, ethnicity, nation, class, sexuality and generation, and their relationship

to the mechanisms of power.²

The traditional stance is that this 'condition' requires theorising which is both psychopathological and victimising. Rarely are viewpoints articulated which frame *metis(se)* individuals' or families' lived daily realities from the vantage point of agency and empowerment. By demonstrating the myriad everyday ways in which first generation *metis(se)* individuals and their families in Bristol transcend and blur racial, ethnic, national, class, gender and generational boundaries, this article begins to crack the so-called 'mixed race' conundrum. The personal testimonies of project participants point to the many contradictions in state and popular 'thinking' about, 'race', nation, culture, and, most notably, family. Each of their stories transforms conventional British and English notions of place and belonging.

The rich marrow at the centre of this complex concern is the alternative identity narratives created by the recovery and reclamation of interwoven, multiethnic and multicultural histories. These reinterpretations run parallel with the master discourse of biological racism, which is predicated on perceived physical (phenotypic) differences rather than genetic (genotypic) inheritances. Moreover, within this master discourse, there is no scope for differential family forms which emerge from the convergence of different languages, religions, and cultures - that which is frequently subsumed under the heading of 'different races'.

This article confronts head on the 'bi-racialised' - one is either 'Black' or 'White' and never the twain shall meet - and lived challenges facing polyethnic, polycultural, post-imperial Britain and England as we limp towards the twenty-first century. I will be drawing on the project participants' narratives of identities, as well as theoretical developments in feminist/postmodernist theories. The testimonies signal the retrieval of cultural memory and identities. They also exemplify non-hierarchical discourses of differences and alterities which remain critical of the binary idioms of colour and the pseudo-scientific paradigms of 'race'.

I want to introduce the textual strategy of the *griot(te)*. In so doing I wish to acknowledge and work with inherent tensions in ethnography between the spoken and the written word. *Griot(te)* (*griot* (m) and *griotte* (f)) is a West African term which describes someone who functions as a tribal poet, storyteller, historian or genealogist. Their role is to recount culturally specific and provocative parables of

2. See Jayne Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Be-Longings: The Cultural Paradoxes of 'Race', Nation, Gender and Generation in the English-African Diaspora*, Routledge, London forthcoming.

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daily life. My claim is that, because of contradictory bi-racialised classification in Britain, metis(se) individuals' narratives both reflect the gender, generational, racial, and ethnic tensions of the society within which they live, and are located outside them in an imagined but not imaginary 'grey' space. And I argue that the women I worked with tell their stories as newfangled *griottes*. They simultaneously construct dual narratives, which embody individual and collective historical consciousness. They tell their own lived stories. At the same time, their memories preserve and reinterpret senses of past interwoven cultures. These recollections provide scathing sociopolitical commentaries and cultural critiques of contemporary English African Diasporic life, and its manifest bi-racialised problematics.

The *griottes* of Bristol

Collected and audiotaped over a two year period in Bristol, the personal narratives of twenty five women and men are the pivotal points on which this kaleidoscopic portraiture of An-Other Britain turns. Their evocative testimonies illuminate many of the cultural paradoxes in received thinking about 'race', nation, gender and generation in the English and British-African Diaspora.

However, in order to illuminate the intricate nuances between sisters, and the indelible impress of the mother or mother-surrogate, this text will shine the spotlight on six of the twenty five participants. The featured storytellers include two sets of sisters: Northumberland-Yoruba Bisi and Yemi; Scouse Irish-Bajan Akousa and Sarah, and two women who grew up in children's homes - Nigerian-English Ruby who grew up in London and German-Tanzanian Similola, brought up in Cardiff. Though the dialogic re-telling of these narratives of identities took place in Bristol over a two year period, the actual settings of the six featured narratives are urban working-class Liverpool and suburban London; the outskirts of Cardiff and middle-class post-independence Ibadan in Nigeria.

This is a very old story: recollected events reflect the decades of racialised folly in Britain, Barbados, Nigeria, and Tanzania. Historically in these regions, forced and voluntary mating between the black African and Amerindian 'hosts' (primarily women) and their white European/British 'visitors' (primarily men) spawned previous generations of metis (se) people. In sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, the 'bi-racialised' tables of gender turned when imported black servants (primarily men) consorted with the local English population (primarily women). It is by navigating these murky historical waters that one discovers earlier

generations of *metis(se)* communities in Britain, which pre-date the emergence of late nineteenth and early twentieth century longstanding sea-faring *metis(se)* communities in Liverpool and Tiger Bay in Cardiff. These former acts of 'transgression' are visible in the immense phenotypic diversity of Caribbean and African American people, and to a certain extent in continental African people (i.e. the coloured communities in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa or the Creole communities in Mauritius or Madagascar). This historical fact is tucked away in official accounts of so-called intercultural 'contact'.

Yet this oversight produces a profound paradox which underpins my entire intellectual project. That is, how can one talk about hybridity and so-called mixing, when the so-called black and white populations that are 'coming together' have not been 'pure' for centuries? I do not seek a way out of this quandary in the vagaries of 'race' science. Rather, plausible explanations are located within a postmodern logic which assumes that 'race' is an imaginary social and cultural construction. This invention of 'race' wields enormous power. 'Race', in its invidious operationalised form, produces racism, which as a mindset creates 'bi-racialisation' - power and prestige for some and disadvantage and discrimination for others.

This article showcases the lives of six extraordinary women - Ruby, Similola, Akousa, Sarah, Bisi, and Yemi. Through their black continental African (Nigerian or Tanzanian) or black African-Caribbean (Bajan (from Barbados)) fathers and white British (Irish or English) or white European (German) mothers, they claim rather than acquire both indigenous and exogenous roots. They belong both and neither 'here' and 'there'. By virtue of lineage, they can situate themselves within at least two specific and yet over-lapping historical narratives. However, rigid and irrational 'bi-racialisation' in Britain deems it possible for them to own just black - *not and white* - social identities.

Nonetheless, their powerful narratives of identities and families form the foundation for their individual constructions of place and belonging in post-slavery Bristol. In specific historical, social and cultural contexts, *each griotte* names herself as a dynamic agent actively engaged in the shaping and moulding of her identity. Within her repertoire, she describes strategies for resisting societal attempts to contain her, and addresses Diaspora(s)-driven tensions among being and becoming 'black', being and becoming African or Caribbean, and being and becoming English and/or British. In turn, by writing themselves back into the centres and not the margins of histories, their stories function as heightened representations of the

individual and collective angst facing all people living in the (African) Diaspora(s).

Ruby

Many factors influence the ways in which white women accomplish the task of bringing up so-called *black (metis(se))* children. The circumstances surrounding the birth of the *metis(se)* child, the prevailing attitudes towards *metis(se)* relationships, class background, all affect the uniqueness of experiences. Ruby is white English and black Nigerian and was brought up in a children's home outside London until she left at age sixteen, even though both her birth mother and other blood relatives were alive. Their rationale for placing her there was they wanted her to 'have a proper growing up experience'. However, there was an overwhelming shame surrounding her birth. Her father was married and black African, which made it impossible for Ruby's birth mother and grandmother to fully accept her. From childhood to adulthood, the consistent thread running through Ruby's narratives is the relentless search for a place to belong which resulted from this early rejection. In the following excerpt, she recounts the ways in which, within her own family, that is among her husband and children, she remains an outsider, branded by her 'Blackness':

The politics of 'race' is different for each of us. It's one thing to me, it's another thing to John, it's another thing to each of the children. Before John met me, I was aware that most of his girlfriends had been non-English. At that time I didn't really think much of it, but after I was married to him and had lots of years to reflect, I thought, I wonder what that's about? John likes black people. More than most people I guess. Now I know him very well, it would be very logical for him to marry someone non-white. He would be the first to admit that he gets a lot out of it. He probably gets a lot more out of it being married to me than I get being married to him, from that point of view.

At the time that I married him, I didn't know any black people anyway. So it wasn't the case that I knocked around with black people and white people and made a conscious decision to marry a white man. It wasn't like that. It was that he was in the circle I mixed in, which was all white. 'Cause up until that time, I had always lived in a white situation. I had always been the odd token black. So, I hadn't had any thoughts about making conscious choices about white men or black men or black communities or white communities. It just hadn't come up in my life.

When we had children, I fully expected my children to be black. At least to be dark, apparently non-white. My first daughter Pauline is about the darkest of them. She has Afro features, in as much as she has dark curly hair. It's not curly like mine though, it's much more like the perms Europeans go to have done - *pretty* little curls. She has very dark eyes, but in fact she looks more like John's side of the family. She doesn't have particularly negroid features, although people think she looks most like me when they don't look very closely. Just because of the colouring, that's all, because she's dark. The other two are fair, so they are not apparently like me at all.

She was born. First of all, she was my daughter, and that was the most important thing. I was surprised that she wasn't darker than she was. When the second one was born, she was outrageously fair - she had very blonde hair and looked very much like John - not a bit like me. When the third one was born, Jake, what I first thought when he came out, when I saw him, was 'Oh, it's me Dad.' Because he just had a very negroid face. He's as white as the rest, but he has a very negroid face. He does have curly hair, but it's fair hair. Well, in fact it's light brown now, but when he was little it was very blonde. But he has got negroid features.] suppose it's only as they have been growing up that *it* came to me. That I was the one black member in a totally white household. Even though it's my husband and my own children, it still left me as the only black person in the household.

Similola

Similola is white German and black Tanzanian. She grew up in a Welsh children's home wherein she was made to feel that being white and whiteness were the ideal standards by which she should measure her self worth. In the long run, she knew she could never be completely white and being white-identified always seemed *to* lead to disappointment and rejection for her. The following testimony addresses this pain:

When I was growing up, the main influence was the house mother in the children's home, who totally dominated my life up until I was sixteen years old. Her views were my views. She was a very strict disciplinarian, very very strong, and also very very racist, and she made me have a low opinion of myself. She had never had any black children in her care before. She had me when I was very very young.

Obviously they considered me to be very cute and pretty and I was spoiled. In

fact the other children used to hate me because I was so spoiled and always got my own way. As I got older - you know what children are like - they start being naughty. Then you get to be a teenager and you want to assert yourself. I couldn't do that. She'd built me up into feeling like a wonderful competent person. Because of all that attention I had been getting and because I was pretty and cute and did everything I was told. Then, when I started rebelling, probably from about the age of eight, she turned on me.

I'd never noticed before I was about twelve that I was that different from the other kids at school. It never occurred to me. I was always treated as being white. I don't remember being treated any differently until twelve, thirteen, and suddenly my hair was wrong, my lips were too big, my temper was because of the black blood in my veins. Everything that I did that was wrong was somehow related to my colour. I didn't have friends because people didn't like me...this is what I was told. I took all this in and it was very difficult to come to terms with. It's quite a shock when you're that age to suddenly realise you are very different from everyone else, and it seemed to be hitting me from all sides.

I'd realise that there were teachers at school that would pick on me for no reason and I'd think why, and of course it started falling into place, it was because I was different from the other kids. I wasn't white, and kids started calling me names. I'd be walking along the road and I'd get called 'Blackie', and 'jungle bunny' and 'chocolate drop'. These names cut through me. I was the only person in the whole town who was being called these names and I felt very singled out and couldn't understand it.

I felt very hurt and also humiliated. When I realised that was going on, I just wanted to crawl into a shell and die. Instead of seeing the positive advantages of being mixed race all I could see were the worst sides. I used to literally go to bed at night and cry and pray to god to let me wake up white. I used to do that because I was getting such heavy shit all around me, and I'd changed from being a happy outgoing child. I became very inward looking and detached.

One day I was coming down the stairs and heard my housemother talking to her friends. I noticed she'd stopped taking me out so much any more. I think it came up in conversation with her friend. Her friend said, 'Are you taking Similola?' or something. I heard her say, 'Oh no, people might' - she must have

watched a programme on TV or something because it suddenly came to her - and I heard her say 'I can't because people might think I'm married to a black man'. So, she made it sound so disgusting and she never ever ever took me out after that. She never did.

If I had been black rather than half-black I'd either have been totally crushed or I'd have known I didn't have to identify with white people and found my own identity, because I knew I was different. But because of that, she made me want to deny half of my identity. I did, I really wanted to. Why, why, why? I've been punished by god. Why do you do this to me? It's as if he said, 'You can have some of being white but not all of it'.

Akousa

Akousa is white Irish and black Bajan (from Barbados) and grew up in Liverpool amid a strong African Caribbean community, and with her white Irish mother and her brother and sister. She is a Rastafarian woman and yet not everyone sees her as a Rastafarian. She sees herself as a 'light-skinned black' woman, and yet certain members of both black and white communities refuse to accept her as black. Consequently, most of Akousa's commentaries on her emergent bi-racial consciousness bring to the forefront what I refer to as 'the social chameleon' phenomenon. In general, 'a social chameleon' has strategically adapted and adopted different 'presentations of "race"' to correspond to particular societal assumptions, norms and expectations. In particular, *metis(se)* people such as Akousa, with so-called 'ambiguous' phenotypes - i.e. very fair complexions, blue, green or hazel eyes, more 'pointed/sharp' facial features, light coloured or straight hair - can 'change colour' from one social context to the next. In light of contradictory 'English' and related 'non-English' attitudes towards 'race', colour and citizenship Akousa has described herself or has been described as *metis(se)*, white and black:

Gettin' into me late teens, I didn't think much about meself because of all these conflicts that were startin' to come up from the past. Also new ones that were comin' in from other communities - black communities - that were really shockin' me. I mean there were times when I wouldn't show me legs. I'd go through the summer wearing tights and socks. Cause I thought they were too light and too white-lookin'. There was a lot of pressure. I remember one day I was leanin' up somewhere and this guy said to me, 'Boy, aren't your legs white.'

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I just looked in horror, and felt really sick and wanted to just run away. I was thinkin', God why didn't you make me a bit darker? Why did you make me so light? It took me years to reconcile that.

Because of what happened in the 1970s in terms of the Black Power movement, especially in this country, if you weren't black like ebony then you just didn't have a chance basically. The other thing was the Marcus Garvey philosophy - at the end of the day Marcus Garvey was a man of his time, I could understand where he was coming from. But I'm sure he would have seen things differently now. It was the most difficult time of my life - trying to sort out who I was now. Whereas, before, I thought I knew who I was. My family comes from the Caribbean. I never brought me Mum into question. She seemed to take things in her stride. I kept comin' home and I'd say to her, 'I hate all white people...Tonkers, or honkies, or whatever.' There's me Mum sittin' there, and I just didn't think about it. It's hard work, but she's me mother. I don't think of her in terms of... 'me Mum, she's white, I shouldn't be sayin' these things'.

But on the other hand, me Mum never told me that I was 'half-caste' or 'half-breed' or anythin like that. She saw me as a whole person. She told me, 'When you go out in the street, they're goin' to call you "nigger", they're not goin' to call you "light-skinned" or somethin' like that. They'll call you "black bastard". No matter how light or how dark you are, that's the vibe'.

So, I didn't really think about it. I could think now, at a certain point in time, it really must have hurt her. She managed to deal with it somehow. I don't know. I think she sat back and waited for me to work my way out of that and begin to understand people more. She's got an understandin' of people, because of her own experiences. She kept savin' to me, 'People are basically all the same.'

In some respects, I can agree with that. But, as a black person, there are other issues involved. Her own experience was in terms of white people rejecting her; and certain sides of the black community. She'd go to a party with me Dad, and nobody would look at her, they wouldn't serve her a drink, wouldn't say nothin'. She'd sit there at this party all on her own. She had the experiences of the whites as well. To her, what's the difference at the end of the day?

Basically, you've got the same kind of attitudes except comin' from different standpoints. I could see what she said, but at the end of the day, with me

Mother and with the family, we've had more black friends in the family and more black people. One or two white women I would call Aunt. That was Aunt Celia, who was married to a black man, and another woman, who used to come and do somethin' with me Mum.

...School was an experience. School wasn't too bad. There were a lot of Chinese kids and black kids - everyone called each other 'Four-Eyes' or 'Fatty'. It wasn't so heavy, there were certain racist undertones, but because you had other black kids there, you had a bit of alliances with other people and things like that. But round the school, some of the streets we couldn't walk up. 'Cause the kids would come up, just particular streets, and call us 'nigger' or 'black bastard'. So we never walked up that street, we'd have to go two more streets down. Just avoidance, scared round it.

When I went to secondary school, it was like a horror story for me. I wouldn't go to that school again, I wouldn't do my school career over again. People reminisce a lot over their school days (kisses teeth). My Mum thought she was doin' a good thing, she was sendin' me to a girls' school - secondary modern school. Half of it was boys, half girls. We didn't mix, but we shared the hall, which was in the middle. I was the only black girl there. The whole area is a white area. They called you 'nigger' and 'coon' and 'you need to get back where you came from.' All those things were goin' on in school.

I remember in the first couple of weeks of school I missed the bus stop. It was only a simple thing, just one bus stop, but cryin' me eyes out. I was totally terrified to walk up any of the streets to get to school rather than the way that I normally walked. I was frightened some white people might come out and pick on me. I never told me Mum. I don't understand why it was never discussed with me Mum. Why I never discussed it with me Auntie. Me Auntie said to me -I talked to her a couple of years ago - 'Why didn't you tell us?' I can't figure out the reason why as yet.

You'd go in school and people would be tellin' you that your house stinks, you haven't got any good clothes, black people are this, black people are that, black people are the other. Basically gettin' called names, gettin' spat at. Stuff like that went on throughout the years of my schoolin'. I was standing next to this white guy and he started to call this black girl a 'nigger' and I said 'Who are

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you callin' "nigger"?' 'Oh, you're all right Akousa, there's nothin' wrong with you. You're fine.' I said, 'Listen love, if you're callin' her a "nigger", you're callin' me a "nigger"'. And I walked away.

Sarah

White Irish and black Bajan, Sarah is Akousa's younger sister, and her recollections of her childhood and adolescence in Liverpool are remarkably different from Akousa's. Many of her recollections are interwoven with vivid descriptions of the houses she and her family lived in, and they become signposts along her journey. In the following narrative, Sarah recounts the way in which she found solidarity and a sense of belonging among other young *metis* girls who did not fit in:

School... when we were young we went to primary school. All the schools my Mum sent us to were like mainly dominated by white people. But they were working-class schools; they weren't middle-class schools...they were very working-class schools. It was really awful at school because I never felt that I fitted in. I always felt odd - really odd. I was quite big as well. I wasn't like a skinny little girl who had knobbly knees...I always wanted to be like that and I was never like that.

So, I wasn't white and I wasn't like the shape that you know a little girl should be - knobbly knees. It was really hard. My friends at school -I had a friend who was white, and then she moved to Mobley, which was this new housing estate that they built. I had one friend who was Indian - Esther Pajit. She was really big, very big. She was mixed race as well. She was half Indian and half English. Her Mum was English. She had this hair that was really thick that went really down to her bum - really thick, thick, thick head of hair. She used to always have it in a thick plait going down her back. She's really big and she's quite like a...she was like a tomboy. Quite masculine; she wasn't, you know, like - huh ha hoh ('feminine' gesture) - she was very Uhhh ('masculine' gesture).

Then, I used to have another friend, let me see if I can remember her name...her father was Nigerian and her mother was English. I can't remember her name, maybe it'll come back. I saw her when I was in Liverpool -I hadn't seen her in years. Ngozi - that was it - Ngozi. She was really tall. You know, like somebody who's too tall for their age. Ngozi - and she was big as well (joint laughter).

And I was the smallest one among them (more joint laughter). So, we used to hang round together. 'Cause we were all just - we didn't fit in. Do you know what I mean? All three of us were from mixed race families, and the three of us were all funny shapes and sizes - for what little girls are supposed to be. So we used to kind of hang around and find solace...with each other. We did have our arguments...

Bisi

Bisi was born and grew up middle-class in Ibadan, Nigeria, with both her white Northumberland English mother and her black Yoruba Nigerian father, as well as two older sisters who were both born in England. The configuring of England in the colonial and postcolonial imagination is a dissertation in and of itself. However, here, Bisi presents dual conceptions of place and home which involve the natural world - the weather, landscapes, birds.

The landscape in England - in a way it was like hearing Doris Lessing talk about growing up in South Africa. She says, although she's there, where the earth is red, what she sees in her mind's eye is fairies, and little green fields and daffodils, because she's brought up with those fairy stories. England becomes the mythical prototype of land and country. Maybe it's the land beyond the rainbow. Right? You can only get to heaven if you're just like England. Okay?

Things my Mum said about being homesick, like, 'Oh, well, I have never heard the birds singing like they do in England.' I know they just make the same twittering noises. I try hard not to say to my children, 'You're calling this grass? Wait 'til you see the grass in Nigeria.' Because you're just going to give a reinforced impression. 'Call this rain? You haven't seen rain yet. Wait 'til you see hot rain, real lightning, like they have it in Ibadan.' So there was that sort of sense of expectation of coming to England - the Promised Land, where milk doesn't come out of tins, it comes out of cows. Where you can buy strawberries. Strawberries or things like that.

Where, actually, if you had ten odd years of looking forward to this fruit called a strawberry, by the time you get to the strawberry it's not going to be like you imagined. By that time, you imagine the strawberry like a quintessential mango, like a piece of ambrosia, not like the sort of rather watery taste - it has a good flavour but not a great deal of taste - that it really is.

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Yemi

Yemi is Bisi's older sister and recounts very different, and less joyful, experiences, growing up in their English-Nigerian family. The following extracts exemplify the differential and relative meanings of 'race' and colour. Her recollections of her 'dark skinned black American' friend's encounter with local Yoruba market women in Nigeria also raise interesting questions about authenticity and affiliation:

I went with an English girl to the wholesale market to buy haberdashery - sewing machine things. They started speaking in Yoruba. There was a girl there, a thin, very black young girl, and she said to the others, 'Let me show you how black I am. I am going to stand next to these white women'. They had lumped us together. She and I were both white. She stood next to us and compared her skin and 'You see now?'. It was unbelievable.

...I had a black American friend in college, who was quite dark. He was really, really dark. He was not black, very black. He was quite dark and he looked a bit like a Yoruba boy. His name was Anthony and he had a friend, William. William looked like a half caste. He was tall, had an afro and was yellowish. He was really tall and slender, like a basketball player. Anthony was short and squat and muscular, like abeketi man. Like a farmer man, muscles on his legs. They call it ishu - yams.

He and William would go to the market. They'd be asking 'How much is this? How much is that?' Asking questions like tourists or Americans would do in the market situation in Africa. 'Mama how much is this one?' The market women would be abusing Anthony. 'You stupid boy, because you are with this Negro (they called black Americans Negroes then) you are pretending you don't speak the language anymore. You useless boy, speak to us in Yoruba.' Anthony would almost be in tears. 'Mama, I'm from America.' 'You see, you useless boy.' Whereas William was okay, because William obviously was not a typical Yoruba boy...But poor Anthony. We're talking about the early 1970s. This great balloon of black consciousness. So they would wear tie-dye shirts or something like that to the market, instead of American clothes, and have maybe leather bags. You know proper African sort of thing. There's Anthony trying really hard to look like an African, but unfortunately the women think that he is one.

Overall, the six *metisse griottes'* remembrances, located in both colonial and postcolonial contexts, shed light on the complexities of African and African Caribbean Diasporic social and cultural life which are too often distorted by historians. They also successfully re-frame much of the racially polarised and essentialised negativity which usually dominates most depictions of our lived experiences. Their transnational identities represent their family constellations as well as their individual experiences. These transnationalities challenge the very notion of the English-African Diaspora as a static and unitary formation, one which does away with differences of culture, nation, ethnicity, region, and class, among others; and one, of course, which ignores inter-racial collaborations. Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity dovetails with this fluid notion of identities:

Cultural identity...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.^J

Similarly, by naming their gendered, class-bound, regionally specific and generation-centred experiences as those of *metisse* women, the *griottes'* personal stories become political testimonies. They re-insert themselves as active subjects, creating their own place in the re-telling of English-African Diaspora histories. A mosaic of cultures and histories is emblematic of their multiple reference points. This multicultural and diachronic scheme reflects, and cannot be separated from, the complex realities of all postcolonial, transnational people in the English-African Diaspora.

Akousa, Sarah, Ruby, Similola, Yemi, and Bisi are all products of history, the by-products of colonialism and imperialism. Their black fathers are from Nigeria,

3. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Rutherford (ed), *Identity*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990, 225.

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and Barbados, formerly under British colonial rule, as well as Tanzania, formerly under the auspices of Germany. Their white mothers are Irish, English, and German. The unresolved postcolonial struggles between Africa and Europe, blackness and whiteness, black man and white woman, are all permanently inscribed on the faces of these *metisse* daughters.

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