

Mixedness and The Arts

Runnymede: Intelligence for a Multi-ethnic Britain

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Foreword

The increasing visibility of mixedness and mixed people has led to a great deal of reflection on the nature of ethnic identities and their significance for society at large. In the light of census data predicting 'mixed race' becoming the largest ethnic minority group within two decades, there has been widespread debate about what this means for race and race relations in the 21st century. However debates on this subject rarely engage critically with the complexity that discussions of identity, let alone mixed ethnic identities truly deserve. The statistic above has often been accepted at face value with little thought devoted to teasing out exactly what such a 'fact' assumes about the nature of race, and whether these assumptions are ones that a modern, multi-ethnic nation is comfortable with.

In order to address this lack of nuance, Runnymede and the Arts Council have commissioned this thinkpiece by Dr Chamion Caballero. The piece examines some of the assumptions that surround mixed identity in Britain today, and places them in a historical, political and policy context. Taking contributions from practitioners in the Arts, many of whom have engaged this issue directly; it lays out the three key topics that arise from reflection on the debates. Dr. Caballero argues that the first such issue is Recognition of Experience and whether the recognition of mixed experience is welcome or even necessary. Following on from this is the Negotiation of Complexity; many of the artists who commented stressed that representation of mixed identity must involve recognising the complex nuances inherent in that identity if it is not to become shallow, reductive, or irrelevant. The final issue, and perhaps the most loaded is the Politics of Ownership; who gets to define 'mixedness' and who gets to represent it, are sensitive issues that must be borne in mind, and many of the participants were wary of easy answers to these questions.

The debates identified by this think piece (and hopefully the ones sparked by it) are highly important to our understanding of racial dynamics in British society today. Questions of mixedness open up further questions not just about our concepts of race but of the nature of identity and its construction. Debates rage about the apparent failure of the multicultural project and its policy successors, about biological determinism and the role of genetics, about immigration and nationality, and about the role of art in a society facing economic strictures not seen in a generation. Deeper reflections upon concepts like race and identity, art and culture which underpin so many of these discussions could therefore scarcely be more timely. We publish this paper to encourage, rather than close down debate. We believe that it is important that we reflect on these issues and consider how best to ensure that policy and practice delivers for all if we are to become a successful multi-ethnic society.

Dr Rob Berkeley

Director, Runnymede

Introduction

The introduction of a 'Mixed' category for the first time in the 2001 Census has vigorously highlighted the contemporary presence of mixed racial and ethnic people, couples and families in British society. With almost 680,000 people choosing this ethnic group option, and 50 per cent of these being under the age of 16, according to official statistics the 'Mixed' population is now the third largest, and one of the fastest growing, ethnic groups in the UK (ONS, 2001; Salt and Rees, 2006).

The inclusion of the 'Mixed' category has further contributed to the emergence of 'mixedness' as something of a 'hot topic' in recent years. Whilst much of the discussion in academic and media circles in this area has centred on questions of 'mixed' identities and cultural diversity – at both an individual and societal level – there has also been a growing institutional interest in people, couples and families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, particularly in relation to what the increasing visibility of these groups means in terms of 'equality and diversity'. Indeed, within several public sector areas, such as education and social care, there has been a rising level of discussion on this topic, with policymakers and practitioners asking a number of similar questions: do we need to focus on the 'Mixed' population as a distinct group? If so, are there any needs that are specific to this population and their families? And do we need to introduce or tailor policies and practices to fulfil any such needs? (e.g. Tikly et al., 2004; Selwyn et al., 2010).

Recently, such concerns have begun to be shared more widely, including within the arts sector. In response to wider social movements, such as the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) and the Macpherson report (Macpherson, 1999), a commitment to supporting arts that reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Britain has been identified as a central value in a number of institutions' manifestos, including that of Arts Council England (Arts Council England, 2008). Race equality and cultural diversity has thus featured highly on the Arts Council England agenda over the past decade, as demonstrated through the authorisation of a number of key reports addressing the experiences and participation of different minority ethnic groups within the arts sector (Khan, 2002; John and Zahir, 2007). With the Council's remit to engage fully with 'the range of different cultures, communities

and complex identities that make up the face of contemporary England' through the development of policy and action measures (Bridgwood et al., 2003: 3), it is not altogether surprising then that the growing visibility of the 'Mixed' population has now attracted the Council's attention. Indeed, the inclusion of this group in the Council's own data findings has further prompted interest in the presence and experiences of this population within the arts (Bridgwood et al., 2003).

With its cultural diversity and racial equality responsibilities in mind, and in light of little substantive knowledge in the area, the Arts Council thus seeks to engage in discussion on mixedness and the arts, through a reflection on several initial questions it has asked itself, namely: is 'mixedness' adequately represented within the arts? Is it necessary to have a particular focus on mixedness and the arts, particularly in policy and practice terms? And what role can – or should – the Arts Council, or similar institutions, play in this area?

This thinkpiece has thus been commissioned to start this conversation. It draws on existing academic and social debates and incorporates views from a number of art practitioners around the country who have expertise in working within the cultural diversity field to kick start discussion on mixedness and the arts. As such it aims to act as a starting point for debate and reflection, rather than act as a commentary or guide.

A note on terminology

As this thinkpiece highlights, although mixedness has long been part of the social fabric and history of Britain, in recent years there has been a significant focus on this concept, from a myriad of perspectives, stances and positions. The multitude of discourses that have emerged from this focus has led to an interesting phenomenon in which meanings and definitions of mixedness are both commonly understood but endlessly rejected and challenged. Such tensions can be seen in the heated debates often provoked by the choices made around the 'terminology of mixedness' (Ifkewunigwe, 1998) which bring to the fore debates about the different social categories that are understood to be being mixed and in what forms – e.g. 'mixed', 'dual' or 'multiple' mixing of

'race', 'heritage', 'parentage', 'ethnicity', 'ancestry' or 'origins', etc. Although this thinkpiece frequently refers to mixedness in terms of race and ethnicity in response to current debates, it often employs the term 'mixed' without qualifiers to try to provide space for wider discussion of what mixedness is or might be, both within the piece and as regards later conversation and debate. Where there are any inconsistencies in usage, it is hoped the reader will be sympathetic to the difficulties of the discursive terrain as a whole; overall, all labels utilised to describe mixedness fundamentally demonstrate essentialist and bipolar thinking (Phoenix and Owen, 1996), since the notion of mixedness itself emerges from and largely inhabits an essentialist and bipolar state (Caballero, 2005).

1. Background: discussions of 'mixedness'

Far from being a new multicultural phenomenon, people, couples and families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds have long been part of the social fabric of Britain. And accompanying their longstanding presence has been an enduring and influential level of commentary, discussion and debate which has shaped conceptualisations of mixedness in Britain in particular and exacting ways. As Laura Smith of the Guardian vividly writes, *'picture the parents of a mixed-race child, and what do you see? If you believe the stereotypes, you will probably imagine a youngish white mother, probably on a council estate, pushing her frizzy-haired baby in a buggy, with the unreliable black father nowhere to be seen.'* (Article in The Guardian, 26th September 2007).

Such constructions of mixedness, which project assumptions and fears about gender, race, class and the transgression of social boundaries, are deeply rooted in British society. Over the centuries, where mixing and mixedness – particularly between white women and black men – is discussed, the same concerns or expressions of condemnation have endlessly reared their head in similar, repetitive forms:

The lower class of women in England, are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the laws permitted them. By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. [Edward Long, historian and man of property, 1772 (Fryer, 1984: 157-158)]

Similarly, those who are products of mixed relationships have tended to be viewed in recurring terms of marginality and tragedy:

'They [half-caste children] find their lives full of conflict both within themselves and within the family.' [Muriel Fletcher, Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other Ports, 1930]

There are merits in having an all-white or all-black child. In my view it is not right, but it is a fact of life that being half-caste is not as easy as being white or black.' [Dr Peter Brinsden, Bourn Hall fertility clinic, 1994 (article in The Independent, 1st January 1994)]

Although mixedness has been dominated by a framework of blackness and whiteness – which can still be seen in the media's recent discussions of mixed race populations as 'Beige' or 'Brown' Britain (articles in The Mail on Sunday, 8th December 2002; The Guardian, 22nd May 2007) – others have also been included in debates on mixing, depending on conceptualisations of them as different or transgressive. Thus in both the age and the decline of Empire came moral panic over the undermining of social boundaries and racial hierarchies through the relationships of white British subjects – again, mostly female – with Indian, Arab and Chinese populations, resulting in the presence of 'Anglo-Indians' and 'Eurasians', again conceptualised as marginalised 'half-castes' or 'broken blossoms' or exoticised as beautiful but doomed 'tragic mulattoes' full of 'hybrid vigour' (Caballero and Aspinall, forthcoming).

Consequently, when considering the form and focus of contemporary debates around mixedness, it is important to bear in mind how these have been structured and shaped by such previous discourses. In this respect, we should be careful when talking about mixing and mixedness today to avoid giving the impression that we are dealing with the emergence of a 'new people' or novel racial or ethnic group. More accurately, what we are seeing is the emergence – or rather the 're-emergence' – of discussions around mixedness and mixing.

Whilst much popular contemporary discussion of mixedness still plugs easily into traditional conceptualisations which pathologise mixed populations as marginalised and confused (for example, Trevor Phillips' comments in 2007 on 'identity stripping – children who grow up marooned between communities' (Phillips, 2007)

in recent years new discourses have attempted to challenge and redefine the old constructions. Spearheaded by American scholars and activists campaigning for the inclusion of a 'multiracial' category in the 2000 US Census, the early 1990s saw the emergence of an influential transatlantic network of academics and grassroots organisations interested in bringing mixedness back onto the late twentieth century agenda. At the heart of these discussions was a resituating of mixedness that positioned the fixed, linear 'either/or' identities traditionally presented as the 'mixed' experience as outmoded and inaccurate. Rejecting the 'impressionistic observation and popular myths' (Wilson, 1987; 16) that fuelled the existing orthodoxy of marginalisation and pathologisation, this 'new wave' (Caballero, 2005) embraced instead what it saw as the positive potential of the 'third space' of hybridisation and creolisation (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1995) through which it suggested mixedness could better be understood. Replacing the stereotype of the 'mixed up', marginal person with positive and celebratory perceptions of mixedness as recounted by the 'mixed voice', the work of the 'new wave' argues that those who are mixed (or mixing) race or ethnicity are far from inhabiting a pathological and problematic state. Rather, 'new wave' accounts of mixedness highlight the ways in which people of mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds can perceive their identities as fluid and multiple, yet stable and secure. For the 'new wave', that which Olumide (2002) calls the 'mixed race condition' – that is, the experiences and patterns common to people from racialised mixed backgrounds – is problematic not in terms of the state of mixedness itself, but rather in terms of how society views that 'mixedness'.

As we move into the 21st century, this new wave of thinking on mixedness continues to shape and challenge contemporary debate. At the same time, it has also begun to reflect on, explore and question mixedness from more multifaceted perspectives and standpoints. In particular, there is a growing turn to expand debate beyond the simple dualism through which mixedness is often understood; to recognise the diversity and multiplicity of mixing and mixedness; and to balance the focus on the personal experience of the individual with wider social politics. Increasingly influential in this continuing rethinking of mixedness, is the role played by the arts.

Whilst there is a long tradition of discussing and reflecting on mixedness in the arts, particularly in the States, much of this representation has centred

around traditional perspectives of marginalisation (e.g. Sollors, 1999; Brennen, 2002). As with the shift in scholarly work, however, mixedness is also being challenged and redefined within the arts and increasingly so from a British perspective. In recent years, we have seen a mixedness explored within a variety of forms and from a range of perspectives, angles and positions, whether it be theatre exploring social issues (e.g. Chickenshed's 'Mother of a Brown Boy'), photography exploring the ambiguity and multiplicity of mixed identity (e.g. the 'Hafu' – Half Japanese project) or fiction discussing personal experiences of mixedness (e.g. 'Decibel's *The Map of Me*). As the arts engage with this new wave of understanding mixedness in these ways, what similar or new issues does it provoke? What challenges are raised for audiences, artists and practitioners? And what role can or should institutions take in light of these debates?

From this initial round of reflection on existing debates as well as initial discussions with arts practitioners across the country, several key issues appear to be emerging when considering the relationship between mixedness and the arts. In the following sections, the thinkpiece will outline and reflect on these key areas as a starting point for further discussion, namely the *recognition of experiences; the negotiation of complexity; and the politics of ownership.*

2. The recognition of experiences

Whilst the scope of academic work on mixedness that has emerged over the last two decades is varied and wide-ranging, a central strand running throughout much of the literature has focused on the visibility of mixedness or, more precisely, addressing the invisibility of the 'mixed' experience within wider discussions of racial and cultural identities. Furthermore, such perspectives have sought to relocate the 'mixed voice' to the centre of these discussions from the sidelines it has traditionally inhabited. Certainly, when we look at the UK, this voice has historically been absent from debates, allowing the types of representations of mixedness highlighted earlier to thrive with little challenge. One has only to think of the pervasive nature of the methodologically dubious but influential research studies on racial mixing in Liverpool and Cardiff in the early 20th century which painted highly negative pictures of the

families involved, particularly those from mixed black and white backgrounds, stigmatising the parents as lacking in principles and responsibility and their children as marginalised and confused (Rich, 1986; Bland, 2007; Christian, 2008). Although these findings were furiously rejected by the communities they were conducted in, who were greatly observed but whose views were rarely sought (Christian, 2008), by the time of mass immigration in the 1950s, such attitudes were firmly established – and are still frequently present – in British popular and institutional thought (Caballero and Aspinall, forthcoming).

The foregrounding of the ‘mixed voice’ has thus begun to challenge conceptions of mixedness in numerous ways. Much of the early literature of the ‘new wave’ in the early 1990s worked to highlight commonalities frequently faced by people, couples and families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, particularly the negotiations and assumptions that these groups engage in or encounter around, for example, their perceived ambiguity, difference or marginality. Collections of voices, such as Camper’s (1994) *Miscegenation Blues or Gaskins*’ (1995) *What Are You?* highlighted shared experiences around the interrogation of mixedness from the ‘what are you...really?’ and ‘you don’t really look...’ line of questioning, to the pressure to ‘choose one’ identity, or the testing of cultural authenticity. In answer to such experiences, came Maria Root’s Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People:

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR RACIALLY MIXED PEOPLE

I have the right

*Not to justify my existence in this world
Not to keep the races separate within me
Not to be responsible for people’s
discomfort with my physical ambiguity
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy*

I have the right

*To identify myself differently than strangers
expect me to identify
To identify myself differently than how my
parents identify me
To identify myself differently than my brothers
or sisters
To identify myself differently in different situations*

I have the right

*To create a vocabulary to communicate
about being multiracial
To change my identity over my lifetime –
and more than once*

*To have loyalties and identify with more
than one group of people*

To freely choose whom I befriend and love
(Root, 1996; 7)

Whilst later scholarly work began to question the intensely individualised focus of this way of understanding mixedness and the lack of reflection on wider socio-historical structures and contexts (Small, 2001; Christian, 2000), acknowledging and engaging with the mixed experience nevertheless remains an important focus of contemporary social science research in this area.

The importance of recognising the types of experiences as pinpointed within scholarly work was also highlighted by many of the arts practitioners consulted. Certainly, most practitioners saw the arts as crucial means of exploring, examining and discussing these experiences, particularly as part of a wider arts remit to reflect the experiences of the culture and society in which we live.

*I think for me it’s about enabling the space for,
almost trying to figure out what’s going on. Giving
people the space to present the deepest kind of
wars that you have internally, but being able to
have that space on our stages and on our screens
and in our books and in our poetry, being able to
have the space to do it. [Jenny Williams, Take The
Space Consultants]*

On the question of whether mixedness was adequately represented in the arts, some practitioners suggested that there were different issues at play. On the one hand, there was a sense that the inclusion of mixed people in the arts, specifically the black and minority ethnic arts sector, was already there and that their experiences were incorporated under a general umbrella of diversity.

*For the Arts Council to ask the question, ‘do we
include [mixedness]...I mean, I am mixed race. I
have been running [my company] for [many] years.
So already they have included me in that. I have
been included.*

*You know, there are lots of mixed race people
already working – funnily enough, some of the
major people in the BME sector who are working,
are mixed race. I mean, already that’s there.*

On the other hand, however, there was also a sense amongst a number of practitioners that despite this inclusion, mixedness itself is not

always highlighted as a specific focus and, in fact, was often absent in discussion and even representation:

We should be exploring these issues on our stages and telling these stories far and wide and enabling these voices to come forward. But they are not there. They are not there. We are in the Arts and Cultural industry. Cultural. So if we're not reflecting what culture we is happening...we know that this is all going on, we know that interracial mixing, we know that it's happening. But what are we doing to capture it?

Jenny Williams

I mean, I don't see [recognition of mixedness] much, it's not happening anywhere. And I mean living in London [mixed race families] are everywhere. And I just think, why hasn't anyone explored this and why isn't it there, out there? And I can only think of a couple of things that are theatre pieces that people that I know did because they felt that their perspective was not one or the other but unique in terms of where they were coming from and how they were viewed so they looked into their mixedness.

Others, however, were less convinced that whilst a general focus on diversity and being outside the mainstream was important, a specific focus on the mixed experience was not necessarily useful or beneficial, beyond a general sense of inclusivity. Some practitioners felt that, in some respects, such engagement was less of a priority than a wider focus on the position of BME groups and their position with the arts sector overall:

I don't know if it's necessary [to have a specific focus on mixedness], I think it's interesting and it's part of finding this inclusivity around art so that people feel that their stories are reflected or they're acknowledged in some way.

There's a danger I guess of dilution of a stance, to primarily talk about mixedness when actually a lot of the time it's about taking a position on power structures – Tiger Woods for example when he talked about his mixedness. I'm not convinced myself that it would be a useful thing to concentrate too much on, certainly also for the fact that it suggests there is such a thing as a pure heritage and that mixedness is something out of the ordinary whereas of course all people – white and non-white – are incredibly mixed. So therefore I think it's a misnomer to think of anything as a pure heritage and therefore mixed or hybrid heritage I'm not really sold on.

At the same time, however, there was a sense that the recognition and representation of such experiences could provide a stimulating means of highlighting and challenging the complexity and multiplicity involved in the process of being othered, both as exploring experiences of belonging to and in monoracial and monocultural groups as well as highlighting the different and additional dimensions of mixedness:

I do feel that is part of the mixed race experience is how we can blend in. People look at you and see what they want to see, really. It's almost like they put a filter in front of their eyes and see what they want to see, because either they want to exoticise you or because you're different or because you're 'other' in the black community.

Such a focus was felt to be especially important by a number of practitioners in relation to providing a sense of inclusivity, in particular for young people to explore issues around their identities, histories and everyday experiences:

But because there are so many young people of mixed race coming up, being born and around and it's part of the future, isn't it, it's part of the next generation and it is important that it's acknowledged and that there is an understanding and that these people who are wanting to explore that area are supported.

Indeed, as the next section explores, there was a strong sense amongst most practitioners that the arts were extremely well placed to explore the complexity of mixedness, not only in terms of the diversity and multiplicity of experience but also as regards the intricacies of its social and political implications.

3. The negotiation of complexity

As previously discussed, mixedness in Britain has tended to be viewed through particular frameworks which, for the most part, have assumed a specific type of homogeneity in both patterns and experience. Even within the new wave of academic research on mixedness, such presumptions have often dominated the field, in part influenced by American models which have tended to focus predominantly on black/white mixing. Whilst such models have been useful for providing insights into mixing and mixedness in Britain, they are less useful for understanding the specificities of the British experience, whose minority and majority

populations and histories are different from their American counterparts (Model and Fisher, 2002; Caballero, 2005; Gilbert, 2005). As such, emerging academic work on seeks more and more to highlight and engage with the complexity and diversity of experiences of mixing and mixedness. There is then a turn to move beyond simple racialised binary models of mixing and mixedness to include discussions not only of ethnicity, culture and faith but also how these intersect with other social identifiers and experiences, such as gender, class, age and space and place (Ali et al., forthcoming).

This focus on the complexity of mixedness also emerged strongly as a critical and central point of engagement amongst arts practitioners. Indeed, where practitioners felt that recognition of mixedness within the arts sector – whether at a practice or institutional level – was important, such feelings were accompanied by a strong sense that such recognition must be accompanied by a strong focus on the diversity and complexity of experiences, including other social identifiers such as gender, class, age, nationality, space and place. Moreover, many practitioners felt that the arts were well placed to explore and reflect this complexity. In particular, there was much encouragement for the support of practices that investigated moving beyond binaries and the questioning of how mixing and mixedness is conceptualised, interpreted and experienced from different positions and perspectives:

Mixedness for me covers so many different things and it is an 'in', it's a way of people recognising what diversity is.
Jenny Williams

I would be loathe to say that all of us mixed heritage people have one experience. I think it would be a real, real danger to group all mixed heritage, mixed race people into one category and say that is what mixed race means, I really would be loathe...and that is the first thing I would like to say, please see the complexity.

A number of practitioners also felt that the arts could provide space to engage with the complexity of broader societal issues related to mixing and mixedness, as well as personal experiences. There was a general acknowledgement that mixedness sometimes involved difficult and painful experiences, related to social tensions both within majority cultures as well as minority ethnic communities, for example around authenticity and legitimacy, acceptance and rejection, and belonging and liminality:

I mean, there were, there still are people who question my loyalty. Having grown up in a predominantly black society, culturally that's essentially what I am. I understand the culture, I understand the literature, I understand the history of slavery and it's very much a part of my experience and so on but there are people who resented that and said, oh right, so we have another mixed race Caribbean person trying to run something so there is something about being mixed race that creates a lack of purchase.

It's really tricky. Because on one level I don't think it's great to section off a specific thing, I don't think that does anyone any favours. But I know certainly within some of the stuff that exists already, it doesn't feel appropriate for me to be part of the platforms that are already out there.

Several practitioners noted that exploring these complex issues through art often produced an intense response from audiences who were often wrestling with such complexity and were seeking forums to discuss these issues elsewhere, a move that chimes with demand amongst some sections of pupils, parents, educators and other practitioners for similar services¹. As such, these practitioners noted that such responses could at times be personally overwhelming.

What I thought was very interesting [from a theatre piece on mixedness], there was lots and lots of discussion, I mean I was quite overwhelmed and almost taken aback that there was so much interest. And that was by the white mothers who had mixed race children, who felt they wanted to do something but didn't know how, by the black father or the black mothers who had more or less the same question but from a different perspective. By teachers [...] I became tired of constantly talking about that experience and needed to actually back off because it became very personal and I felt I was being intruded on and I actually wanted to step back.

I'm actually kind of not that happy with the fact that I do identify and talk about mixedness in terms of heritage in the way I talk about my work and I'd love to not have to do that but it kind of feels important at the moment. I think there is going to come a point where I stop talking about it in my practice but it is important at the moment because otherwise people won't read it in there, it's really interesting.

¹ See, for example, Sheffield's Multiple Heritage Service, Devon's Planet Rainbow Project, Swindon's Mixed Race/ Dual Heritage Group and the Multiple Heritage Project, which serves schools in Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham and London.

Yet whilst practitioners felt that the arts sector had the potential to explore such complex issues in appropriate and positive ways, there were deep concerns, amongst all practitioners, that the 'wrong' kind of focus on mixedness could exacerbate and worsen these types of tensions:

I'm doing that thing of tip-toeing around, but as a brown person you don't want to be doing that thing of being seen to consider yourself above and separate from, that's a dangerous position to be in.

Interestingly, however, concerns that a focus on mixedness would cause friction or divides within communities, whether in terms of perceptions of separatism, ghettoisation or competition for resources were not linked to the exploration of these issues through practice, but rather to the ownership of this issue by institutions. In this respect, all practitioners had strong reservations about the implications of institutional interest in mixedness, particularly as regards the focus and direction of any policy-based work in this area. The next section thus discusses these concerns in the context and role of bodies such as the Arts Council.

4. The politics of ownership

As discussed earlier in the introduction to the thinkpiece, the growing visibility of those racialised as 'Mixed', in combination with legal responsibilities on the part of social organisations to address racial and diversity equalities has led to emerging institutional interest in policy and practice in relation to people, couples and families from mixed racial and ethnic populations. In particular, institutions with responsibility for the welfare of young people – such as educational and social care bodies – have been particularly keen to develop policy that ensures good practice in this area. Yet, as scholars have increasingly pointed out, in light of the vast complexity and diversity of mixed experiences, policymakers and practitioners need to be extremely wary of implementing initiatives on the grounds of 'mixedness' without careful and measured exploration and understanding. The use of ethnic group categorisations such as 'Mixed' need to be accompanied by an awareness that the ability of such frames of reference to identify those from or in mixed racial and ethnic families, to tell us who they are and what their experiences are, is limited.

Certainly, the restrictive nature of standardised census categories cannot fully capture the subtlety and complexity of the experience and patterns common to people, couples and families from mixed backgrounds (Caballero, 2005). As work on families from mixed racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds has highlighted, experiences, situations and patterns can vary greatly, even amongst those who initially seem to share a form of mixing. For example, whilst some studies of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children in Britain indicate high levels of racial and cultural literacy and embeddedness in family and community (McKenzie, 2009; Caballero, 2010), others demonstrate experiences of familial, cultural and social isolation and racism as well as lack of racial and cultural knowledge or awareness on the part of mothers (Twine, 1999; Harman, 2010). Assumptions of homogeneity of experience and situation may therefore result in inappropriate policy and practitioner understandings that are more harmful than beneficial in the delivery of services.

Such concerns around the appropriateness of institutional directives around policy and practices were also shared by arts practitioners. Indeed there was universal consensus on this issue, regardless of individual positions and stances. Even where practitioners were extremely interested in the recognition of mixedness and the exploring of this through arts practice, their enthusiasm was tempered by concerns about the role of institutions, such as the Arts Council, in this engagement:

One side says to me absolutely [there should be a focus] because it is a different experience, it is an additional experience. And then the other side says to me, mmm...because it comes from an institution....and what will they do with it? And especially if it is then coming from an institution or government or quango or what have you, what would be the impact and it could be then actually more harmful than beneficial. These are really my concerns.

Indeed, the overriding concern amongst such practitioners was that the strong drive towards complexity, which was generally felt to be the most appropriate lens through which to approach and understand mixedness, would be sidelined if institutions became involved. This was in part based on practitioners' previous experiences with the Arts Council and similar bodies in regard to institutional attitudes towards and support of minority ethnic communities and cultural diversity in the arts. Many practitioners felt strongly that

such institutions were often driven to engage with minority ethnic communities and cultural diversity through 'fear and obligation' in response to wider racial and diversity policy directives. As such, institutional engagement was often seen as more as a matter of fulfilling requirements to 'tick boxes' than a desire to explore, reflect and support cultural diversity in itself:

The complexity around race is something that I think is not something that we normally see in the media or in the theatre or...you know, we see 'a black play' or 'an Asian play' and as time goes by and these things shift and evolve, the Arts Council don't quite know how to keep up with it. You know, they're happy with, 'ooh, black plays are coming out about immigration in the 50s, great, ok we sort of understand that' and then an Asian play comes out about a particular thing they know happens to the Asian community. But anything that looks at complexity when race is involved, there's a level of people just not understanding.

So I think it is about looking at the various complexities and we are not typecast and we have to learn from our experiences that we don't do the same mistakes and that is where my fear is, around the institutions, 'ooh, we've got another group, we need to do X, Y and Z. All the mixed race people come forward now!'

Practitioners were thus wary about the focus on mixedness emerging through policy-led concerns around representing visible groups, particularly where this was driven by Census or other statistical data. As in academic work, there was a strong feeling that engagement with minority ethnic populations that was primarily led by responses to data could result in the overshadowing of complexity in favour of categorisations or definitions of the patterns or experiences of such populations and, consequently, lead to inappropriate and meaningless policy and practice initiatives.

This sort of slight knee jerk reaction, 'oh, it's coming through in Census data, do we need to look after them, do we need to do something?' I mean, it just shows the most staggering lack of care.

Yes I do think that the Arts and Cultural sector should do something about mixedness, but what I don't think they should do is actually define what mixedness is. Because I think that's where the Arts Council or the body of the Establishment will seek for it to go. And what I love about mixedness is that it enables us to have a true sense of diversity. And it enables us to have an in where everybody

can have a hook. Now the minute they start to box it or classify it, is the minute that it's lost. [Jenny Williams]

Furthermore, practitioners' concerns around data and policy-driven engagement with cultural diversity were not just centred on the fear that the issue of complexity would be lost, but also that such approaches had the potential to damage wider engagement with minority ethnic communities in the arts sector. As one practitioner pointed out, since 'lots of different ethnic groups aren't reflected either', who then decides when you are a sufficient majority within the category of ethnic minorities to have a specific box? There was thus a strong sense amongst practitioners that the Arts Council and similar bodies needed to think through any proposed focus on mixedness – or indeed on any ethnic group – very carefully in order to ensure a sense of inclusion of experience rather than one of fracturing, or sense of competition for resources. Such feelings were seen to be particularly acute in relation to concerns that in the current economic and social climate, diversity as a general focus would not be top of the Arts Council or other institution's agendas.

So the issue could be, so, you're just going to give mixed race people a pot of money and what does that mean? A kind of separation, an apartheid? [An appropriate approach] could be, we want to support the complexity of experiences, we want to support the varied backgrounds that exist in the black or diverse community. Because that I think would avoid the kind of lumping together that I think the Arts Council has done – oh, there's the black community, let's give them a sum of money and then we're done, we've ticked the box. That is what becomes disrespectful and causes tension and that is where I think the institutions misuse and misappropriate their powers and their resources.

I mean, it's like any ethnicity within the arts. I mean, the problem is that – and to some extent the Arts Council has tried to make interventions, so I would say that at the moment their heart has been in the right place and they have tried to make interventions and so therefore they have supported, you know, positive action around funding or this, that and the other but the problem as well with that is unless that is managed so terribly, terribly carefully, before you know it, you're ghettoised.

Though there was frustration that the Arts Council didn't always get its engagement with minority ethnic communities right, either in terms of listening to communities or communicating effectively with administrators, there was nevertheless an

appreciation of the efforts the Council had been trying to make around including cultural diversity in its agenda in recent years and recognition of good practice in this area. As such, practitioners did feel that bodies like the Arts Council could have a role to play in relation to the issue of reflecting mixedness in the arts. Overwhelming, practitioners felt that the Arts Council's strength lay in its potential to facilitate discussion and provide an area for debate and exchange around the concept of mixedness in the arts, using its resources to identify and bring relevant parties (e.g. academics, practitioners, administrators, policy-makers, audiences, etc.) together.

I mean, the Arts Council need to be leading conversations about complexity, about the complex issues when we put anything to do with race on the stage. And they need to be opening up those conversations. They don't need to be saying, 'should we be highlighting this?' 'Do we bring this group into the BAMER [Black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee] sector?' I mean, as far as I'm concerned, it's a really bad question.

They need to be opening up conversations and creating a space and a beginning for the complexity of these conversations. And that's what the Arts Council just can't seem to get their heads around. It would be really nice for the Arts Council to respond to it artistically and creatively, rather than policy driven, rather than rolling out a programme to get curators to do whatever, whatever, to actually commission think pieces, commission pieces of work. That would be much, much more appropriate. [Jenny Williams]

An approach which prioritised consultation, discussion and reflection over time was highly favoured and certainly seen as preferable to what were perceived as the rolling out of isolated, knee-jerk initiatives and programmes in response to policy demands, which many felt had been an unsuccessful strategy of the Arts Council in the past. For practitioners, the issue of mixedness in the arts was thus a conversation waiting to be had, rather than an initiative to be implemented.

5. Summary and concluding thoughts

As highlighted previously, the increased visibility in Britain of mixing and mixedness in social perceptions has led to a renewed interest in these concepts, not only in academic research and popular thought, but also within a range of public

sectors. With mixedness mostly understood in these latter arenas in terms of race and ethnicity, unsurprisingly there has been an increasing focus by institutions on how mixedness fits into their racial equality and diversity legislation, policies and practices. This think piece has sought to outline some of these issues in terms of the arts sector and specifically as regards the remit of the Arts Council. In particular, it has sought to explore approaches and attitudes towards mixedness within the arts in relation to practitioners, audiences and institutions by contemplating the following questions: in what ways is mixedness understood within the arts? What challenges are raised for audiences, arts practitioners and administrators? And what role can or should institutions take in light of these debates?

In considering existing debates around mixing and mixedness and drawing on the perspectives of arts practitioners, three key issues emerged on the subject of mixedness and the arts: the recognition of experiences; the negotiation of complexity; and the politics of ownership. Overviewing these issues, we can see that on the one hand there are clear indications from practitioners that the arts sector can, and even should, provide space for a recognition of mixedness as part of its wider remit of reflecting the cultural diversity and experiences to be found in the society in which we live. Arts practice in particular was seen as well placed to explore mixedness in a way which would bring its complexity as well as its positivities and difficulties to the forefront and allow practitioners and audiences – particularly young audiences – to express, reflect on and discuss these issues in a positive way. At the same time, however, there was an underlying level of concern around how such a focus would be perceived if it were not approached and managed with sensitivity on the part of institutions such as the Arts Council. Practitioners were worried that an inappropriate focus – such as the hasty implementation of policy and programme initiatives driven by data-led or equality directives – could lead to tension within the wider minority ethnic arts sector, in the terms of creating a sense of separatism or competition for resources. As such, it was felt that the strength of institutions such as the Arts Council lay in their potential to facilitate discussion and provide an area for debate and exchange around the concept of mixedness in the arts. Rather than knee-jerk reactions, practitioners felt that what was required was an approach that prioritised consultation and reflection to feel out the shape of the debate and to allow a picture to emerge, one which took into

consideration a myriad of viewpoints, perspectives and positions. Such a debate should be led by those with knowledge of and expertise in the area, but should also include other relevant parties. The management and organisation of this type of debate, as opposed to a hurried rolling out of programmes and events, would be a suitable and appropriate role in this stage of the discussion for institutions such as the Arts Council.

In highlighting these key areas, on the one hand this initial exploration of mixedness and the arts feeds into many existing academic debates frequently asked about mixedness in Britain and the ways in which we can understand this. For example, when we talk about mixing and mixedness, what is it that we feel is being mixed? Race, ethnicity, culture, heritage, parentage, faith, ancestry, origins? What is it that makes some forms of mixedness more salient and prescient than others and when does mixed stop being mixed? How do we best make sense and understand the extent of its multifaceted, multiple and nebulous nature and can this complexity and diversity ever be translated into workable and useful forms for policy, practice and procedure?

On the other hand, the discussion as it appears to be emerging from an arts context also raises questions that are given little space in a British scholarly context, namely in relation to mixedness as a fracturing and divisive identity. Whilst concerns about the emergence of mixed identities splintering communities have featured highly in, for example, contemporary American debate (e.g. Spencer, 1997), there has been little discussion of such issues in British academic or even popular mainstream debates. Such differences can be clearly observed by the differing reactions on both sides of the Atlantic to the proposed inclusion of a 'Mixed' category in the 2001 UK Census (included, with little opposition or social debate) and that of the proposed 'Multiracial' category in the US 2000 Census (rejected, in the face of intense lobbying pro and against the category from minority ethnic groups). However, with the issue of 'fracturing' raised in this initial arts discussion, there are important questions to be asked around the implications of recognising mixed identities in policy and practice on wider community relations that are only slowly being engaged with in scholarly work. For example, is mixedness a divisive category or identity – more so than others? If so, is it divisive in and of itself or only when linked to the fracturing of political stances? And is it possible to explore mixedness, particularly within

an institutional context, without evoking fears of separatism, apartheid or ghettoisation?

As these questions illustrate, the emergent terrain of mixing and mixedness is a complex one through which to manoeuvre yet, for all its challenges, it remains both fascinating and rewarding in its potential to highlight and question the racialisation and cultural processes that are often elusive or taken for granted. In presenting some of these challenges presented by the subject of mixedness and the arts, it is hoped that this thinkpiece will contribute to the further development of reflection, conversation and debate in this and the wider area of racial and cultural diversity in the arts and beyond.

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