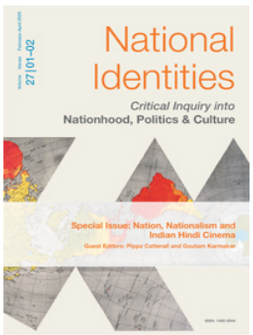

National Identities

ISSN: 1460-8944 (Print) 1469-9907 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cnid20

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Hussein Boon

To cite this article: Hussein Boon (05 May 2025): Not from round here – racial framing and the paradox of choice, National Identities, DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2025.2497405

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2025.2497405

NATIONAL IDENTITIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2025.2497405

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Not from round here – racial framing and the paradox of choice

Hussein Boon

Music Department, Westminster School of Arts, University of Westminster, London, UK

ABSTRACT

Starting with a piece of music that captures some of a life lived on the boundaries of race, national identity and belonging, this article discusses situations, themes, experiences and the continuing problems the author encounters as a mixed-heritage person. The article introduces novel conceptions such as being not-black-enough, the-believable-lie, and ideas like we-feeling, drawn from John Ogbu. In this article, I argue that even with the presence of solid roots such as military service and contributions to UK culture, these are insufficient in producing a stable and acceptable national identity for mixed-heritage children.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 16 August 2024
Revised 7 March 2025
Accepted 16 April 2025

KEYWORDS
Songwriting; belonging; cultural displacement; mixed-heritage; military service

Introduction

If you put some bleach on it then you'll be all white in the morning, won't ya! (Boon, 2022)

My background is in music. I started playing guitar around the age of seventeen (Figure 1). Prior to learning to play music was a life of listening to music. It was never quite clear to me whether I fulfilled my grandmother's prediction, which was made soon after my birth, telling my mother that I was going to be a musician.

During my secondary school years, when my interest in absorbing music reached that all-consuming teenage intensity, I was routinely told by music teachers that I was not allowed to be in the music classroom(s) and was not allowed to learn to play an instrument and, therefore, would always be asked to leave. Despite my desire and willingness to learn, it was clear that it would not take place in the school educational setting and, instead, would require my devising some combination of self-learning, from books or observation of musicians mainly via Television, gigs or music shops. Years later, music education researchers would begin to describe these sorts of learning activities as informal. However, informal, at least from my experience, does not have sufficient communicative power when dealing with ideas of rejection and barriers to learning encountered in the school setting that, at least in my estimation, run counter to educational principles. Therefore, despite my grandmother's prediction, music would prove to be a rather haphazard self-learning process.

CONTACT Hussein Boon h.boon@westminster.ac.uk

Figure 1. Me at a studio in South Norwood, London, in 1981, aged 18.

Music has also been a place where I have learned about the boundaries and issues of my skin colour and heritage. I have been told by musicians and band leaders that I am not really black. Yet, I have also learned the usefulness that my ethnicity serves for white-owned enterprises and institutions (Boon, 2023, pp. 3–4). Thus, music has been a primary means by which I frame and understand my experiences of the world. While music is the subject of a universalist discourse, which I will touch upon later, it is one that generally serves white interests.

This article explores encounters with, primarily, white British people and their perception and querying of my racial identity. These encounters often lead to feelings of not fitting neatly into black or white categories, illustrating the persistence of a 'colour consciousness' (Ifekwunigwe, 2001, p. 42) in the white British population. The overriding result, at least for me, is not being black enough but also not white enough. However, this not being black enough is also a point of concern with black people who have, on occasion, deemed me not to be black despite being first-generation African. Therefore, this not-black/not-white produces something that remains unidentifiable, both societally and ontologically. In the company of whites, any ability to pass as white 'in a Whiteness-centred society such as Britain, [means that] those who can pass for White face a different set of psychosocial challenges than those individuals whose non-Whiteness is visibly marked' (Ifekwunigwe, 2001, p. 45). The notion of not being black enough, for whites and blacks alike, suggests not only the lingering presence of a type of stratified differentiation, a desire for clear categorization of the individual, but also a type of battleground, a constant state of having to prove or qualify belonging. In effect, a status problem (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). Conversely, no one has

ever told me that I am not white enough, as there is always the assumption that I am not white and, therefore, not part of the home nation, therefore, it would be 'ridiculous' to entertain ideas of white membership. As Dyer suggests this type of 'white discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, not allowing her/him space or autonomy, permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self' (Dyer, 2007, p. 544). Waters's suggests that 'national identity is always contingent and relational, the product of boundaries drawn up to distinguish between the collective self and the other' (Waters, 1997, p. 207). As I am first generation Multiracial, using Pilgrim's term (2021, p. 2552), the ambiguity I experience is a contested identity configured around race and national identity both as not-white and not-black.

My aim with the song 'Not From Round Here'[1] (Boon, 2020a) was to document living on the boundaries of race and ambiguity. Therefore, the aim of this article is to critically investigate the issue of racial identity and senses of belonging through the medium of the song that documents my experiences of living on the boundaries of race in the British context. The phrase 'Not From Round Here' is, therefore, a hostile variation on the 'where are you from?' question, that Doguş Şimşek refers to as drawing 'a line between othering and conviviality' (Şimşek, 2024, p. 136). I have been asked this question by police officers, the man in the street, in pubs, in academia and, in extreme cases, as a precursor to violence. What these incidents show is that, based merely on observation with no additional enquiry, individuals feel able to place someone who eludes their categorical attempts. Paradoxes, therefore, are a suitable frame with which to consider how a brown-skinned individual, with English, Irish and Somali heritage, can claim membership of all these groups, yet not be able to achieve any form of consensus as to membership based on criterion such as skin colour. As an Afro-Caribbean schoolfriend exclaimed to me when meeting my mother for the first time; 'I didn't realise your mother was that black!'

In addition to the song 'Not From Round Here', I also include evidence from the AHRC-funded Bass Culture research project (Riley, 2014) that documents and analyses the musical experience of the wider Afro-Caribbean communities in the UK. I find the project useful as a collection of oral histories from musicians and music workers who also experienced similar issues of rejection despite being citizens of the British Empire. Bass Culture, therefore, encompasses 'music born out of the impact and influence of the Jamaican community and Jamaican music on Britain', where the term acts as a 'key catalyst within popular music in Britain, one which continues to underpin multiculturalism and new music, whilst bridging generational divides' (Black Music Research Unit, n.d.). This body of work produces what Antonsich and Matejskova describe as materials that 'assemble a series of practices, habits or sensibilities which challenge the nationalist idea of a mono-cultural nation' (2015, p. 498). These oral histories document a variety of experiences, sometimes painful experiences and emotions on the boundaries of belonging in the UK whilst also having a profound effect on the musical, cultural and economic production of the country.

Materials and methods

My initial method of investigation is a form of autoethnography, represented in a music piece written as a response to a number of critical incidents in later adult life. The song

functions as both an account of the near-present circumstances and as a memory tool accounting for past events. The (more recent) incidents ranged from being attacked in the street on a Sunday afternoon to questions of whether I belong in 'this' culture. The song combines documentary accounts of events and reflective elements as process and product (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). These events initiated a range of emotional embodied responses from fight or flight to reflection, finally resulting in my decision to take action to catalogue the experience musically. Ellis and Adams define autoethnography as research connecting 'the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political' (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 254). Chang suggests that autoethnographers face challenges in deciding their research focus (Chang, 2008, p. 49), and in my case the problem was more how to contain the subject when considered over a lifetime.

One can argue that songs offer frequent autoethnographic opportunities. They are ways of showing by making 'texts aesthetic and evocative' (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 277). Song material can cover a range of themes of the personal, political, economic and social circumstances and conditions. Cohen and Wilson define 'songwriting as the lyrical expression of human thoughts and emotion through rhythmic, melodic, and textual ideas' (Cohen & Wilson, 2017, p. 545). Pieces can be intimate, rousing, polemical, discursive and fantastical. For example, the bleach lyric at the start of this article, shows that for some members of the British public a mode of imitative whiteness can be achieved, but only through acts of self-harm.

The first event that triggered the song had all the hallmarks of physical confrontation with a threat to life. The second, perhaps more devious, was a veiled threat. Both types of incidents happened within a few months of each other, and both can also be framed within class-based terms. The in-your-face we're-going-to-kill-you approach, can be inferred as the working-class approach, and the snide and devious as the more educated middle-class approach, one that attempts a more subtly coded inference of not belonging, generally via the symbols of education and culture. Both imply forms of violence. The first, physical, and the second, symbolic (Huc-Hepher, 2019, pp. 18–19).[2]

Schubert says that 'we all live in symbolic systems' (Schubert, 2008, p. 195) that are always in the process of 'classifying and categorizing' (Schubert, 2008, p. 196), therefore my skin colour is a part of this process. My skin colour, or at least the process of utterances 'making people see and believe' (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 170) that skin colour is an important determiner of belonging, of being English, of constituting national identity, produces what Bourdieu identifies as mobilization (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991, p. 170). These mobilizations are in-the-moment manifestations of a symbolic system response determined at the discretion of the agent seeking to reestablish the symbolic order i.e. who is and who belongs. Whether this agent is a schoolteacher, a professor or the man in the street, all are proxies that enable the Master's voice to be heard as a form of Respondeat Superior. Their function is to maintain and reinforce order, such as whiteness, belonging and membership. Agents will not view their actions as anti-social but, instead, as their patriotic duty. Bourdieu calls this an '*idée-force*, through its capacity to mobilize people by leading them to adopt for themselves the principle of vision that is proposed' (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 39 original emphasis). This is so even when the agent may also be from a part of society that is also dominated and, therefore, does not recognize that they are supporting the symbolic order that also dominates them. As Schubert points out, symbolic violence is 'a particularly insidious form of violence' (Schubert, 2008, p. 195).

The location of the physical attack was in Eltham, South London, about a quarter of a mile from where Stephen Lawrence was killed (Stephen Lawrence Day, 2023). I draw attention to this because it shows how some areas of London still retain racial antagonisms despite also being sites of traumatic racial events. In my situation, the attack consisted of being threatened to be taken around the corner and killed. The attack lasted about five minutes. It took place on a sunny Sunday afternoon in 2020, accompanied by claims that I did not belong here and should leave the country. The 'here', even though I was born in the UK to an English father, called into question my right to be here and to be a member of this society.[3]

The second attack consisted of the cultural belonging question i.e. is this really my culture? I refer to this as a 'Cultural Displacement Theory'. In my experience, it is a variation of the belonging question, generally asked by those with higher levels of education, generally of the middle class. I have experienced these claims in my various workplaces, including the University (Boon, 2022), where I am asked whether 'this' really is my culture and whether I belong 'here'. As Doharty and colleagues point out, 'A plethora of research has shown that those academics of colour who do work in the academy face a range of racialised and racist difficulties, are often made to feel like outsiders who do not belong' (Doharty et al., 2021, p. 234). My experiences of this question in the work and academic setting tend to be accompanied by the colour-blind assertion of not seeing my colour, usually expressed as 'Oh, I don't see you as black'. To which, my response is always, 'Then what do you see me as?' The problem here is that one cannot both state a colour-blind disposition and not provide a more descriptive response.

DiAngelo rightly points out the issues in these seemingly benign, discursive situation-dependent encounters where:

> White progressives can be the most difficult for people of color because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived. None of our energy will go into what we need to be doing for the rest of our lives: engaging in ongoing self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual antiracist practice. (2019, p. 5)

Thus, my research sits within a complex epistemological space, where mixed race/heritage, especially in the UK, is not well understood by institutions, including academia, and the general populace. In an interview for the Bass Culture project (Riley, 2018), Paul Gilroy highlighted that his mixed-race experience is different from/than Stuart Hall's (Gilroy, 2017).[4] Likewise, mine is different from/than theirs, as it is different from/than Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Phil Lynott and Akala. Yet, none of these is typically viewed as not-black.[5] From my experience, it seems that, as much as my black Somali heritage is discounted, i.e. not black enough, not Somali enough, then so is my white English heritage, i.e. not white enough nor English enough. This is further troubled by my paternal grandmother's Irish heritage, i.e. not white enough nor Irish enough, possibly being too English and too dark skinned. On the occasions when I do mention my Somali heritage, typically also at the University, I am told that I do not look Somali, thereby creating another level of disconnection. Yet, even though I am first generation I do not fit their conception of 'looking Somali' which indicates their lack of comprehension and desire for a homogenized and essentialist version they can identify as Somali. Therefore, irrespective of whether I am dealing with the 'man in the street' or a professor of international

standing, they continue to adopt the same base and reductive notions. It is also important to point out that these interactions are from women and men, black and white. My experiences, therefore, suggest that this variety of mixedness, especially where an individual like me does not conform to the expected stereotype, is unacceptable to the 'host' dominant logic. From my perspective this results in the complete negation of cultural contribution, history and status of myself and my family across many generations.

The song's lyrics are used to capture a range of experiences from childhood to the 2020s, documenting a lifelong interaction of being asked to make a choice. The choice is always phrased as part of a paradoxical question with the ultimate aim of impoverishment in having to 'choose' a side i.e. white or black, father or mother. The option to decide both or neither, however, is never a possibility. Therefore, the ultimate purpose and function of the paradoxical question, 'Not from round here', represents the dilemma of choice, where a side must be chosen that leads to a situation 'equal to choosing one parent and betraying the other' (Choudhry, 2010, p. 112). This is exacerbated by those both in and outside the workplace who attempt to 'place' the brown-skinned individual. This activity occurs before I open my mouth; my presence is a sufficient trigger. Skin tone becomes the 'visible cue that activates culturally embedded prejudices and stereotypes' (Adams et al., 2016, p. 3) and, therefore, skin tone is the phenomenal trigger (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 279). These sorts of interactions demonstrate a choice being made for me but not by me.

Being mixed AKA the wrong type of black

You know what my mum calls you?
Half past eleven.
'cos you're not from round 'ere, are ya!
(Boon, 2020)

'Half-past eleven', a variation on half-caste, suggests something in-between, perhaps not quite cooked. The poet John Agard (2012) rightfully sets about critiquing the term and the thinking behind its persistent presence. Britain's use of the term has a history that also encompasses eugenics, such as Marie Stopes' 1920 publication expressing the desire to 'legislate compulsory sterilisation of the insane, feeble-minded … revolutionaries … half-castes' (Clowes, 2017). 'Half-past eleven' was one among many epithets launched my way. The goal of my research is not to normalize my experience (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 257), merely to write it as it happened and as it landed. For example, experiences of the mixed-race participants in Storrs' research as being able to pass as white (1999, p. 197), is something that I have never been able to do. The closest to a European conception I am compared to is generally Portuguese or Italian, which also indicates a form of colourism. Yet, for many of the British, I am placed as Asian and, on rare occasions, North African or Arabic. I attribute this not just to racial clumsiness, as Storrs's research participants describe as racial insensitivity (1999, p. 197), but also as an indicator of the focus of racism i.e. that my skin provides the focus that surfaces in these encounters.

To the average Briton in the 1970s, immigrants either meant Caribbean or Asians, especially those expelled by Idi Amin in 1972 (Uche, 2017). Therefore, as I did not fit the Caribbean paradigm, to the average Brit they ascribed me to the second group. Therefore, in their eyes I also became a 'Paki' along with other epithets and insults such as the n-

word, wog, coon, half-caste, sambo, darkie.[6] I think I was nine years old when I was introduced to this piece of English playground poetry by older children at primary school:

> Wogga matter
>
> Nigger mind
>
> You'll be all-white in the morning

This type of interaction was merely one part of the landscape for me.[7] Along with the prevalence of the use of 'Paki', especially by the 1970s with incidents of Paki-bashing and increased racial murders (Sabin, 1999, p. 203), in the musical setting, the pioneering reggae musician and producer Dennis Bovell, when working with The Slits on their debut album *Cut* (Irvine, 2016), took issue with the band's use of the word, advising them to change their lyrics:

> There's a song called Shoplifting and in Shoplifting the lyrics you might think quite harmlessly 'do a runner' … it's about stealing from a shop right and then they'd go 'Mr Paki won't miss much and I'll have dinner tonight' and I went 'hold it there, hold it there … Mr Paki … I object to that. We're not having that in the production I'm doing' … 'why, it's all right, it's not … ' … I'm going 'that's a racist remark, you'll never live it down.' So I said to them 'okay what about 'Babylonian won't miss much' … and they went 'yes we'll have that.' Many years later they thanked me for preventing them from using that awful term. (Bovell, 2017)

The use of pejorative terms such as 'Paki' and associations with shops is indicative of the everyday racism, not just present in punk rock bands' lyrics, but also how these sentiments are legitimated when signed to a record label. If not for Bovell's intervention, The Slits might be remembered more for their casual racism rather than for making an influential record, especially as the song Shoplifting is also referred to as being 'anti-consumerist' (Tie, 2020). However, the exchange of 'Paki' for Babylonian renders invisible the racist basis that required the substitution in the first place. This type of invisibility is one that very few academic and punk rock scholars will be able to determine in their reading of the lyrics or of the band's legacy. This invisibility, therefore, is another type of paradox in that, whilst the band members 'learned' about the racist issues with their lyrical choices, their audience was deprived of also comprehending this. The substitution with Babylon also changes the subject focus. By replacing 'Paki', a derogatory term in use by the British, with Babylon(ian), a term drawn from Rastafarianism, the transposition of cultural significance is beneficial to the British band. Yet, this transposition does little to improve the circumstances of those that these derogatory terms are directed towards nor, surprisingly, improve the conditions of Rasta in Britain. The benefits are in the service of whiteness; the band, the record label and the legacy of punk. The reading of The Slits as a group who 'didn't give a shit what people thought' (Tie, 2020, n.d.) is one that Bovell's intervention clearly shows that they were acutely concerned about what people would think.

The Slits' use of 'Paki' should also be viewed in the context of British political culture, demonstrating strong support for the British National Party and National Front, which along with Conservative MP Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech (see Crines et al., 2016; Gilroy, 2011; Taylor, 2018; Tomlinson, 2018), signify the general exposure and indoctrination into these cultural and political moments. The Slits did not see their use of 'Paki' as racist, in the same way that the manager of UK Punk band The Clash did not see his use

of 'Paki' as offensive during an interview discussing anti-racism (Sabin, 1999, pp. 204–205). This demonstrates a lack of racial awareness among white British people when exercising their power in the use of what they view as harmless everyday terms.

The term 'Paki' serves as an emotional trigger, embedded with cultural significance, prompting a reaction from both speaker and listener. The substitution with Babylon refocuses attention towards a different target i.e. capitalist, oppressive governments (Smithsonian Education, n.d.). Yet these are not like-for-like substitutions. Murrell defines Babylon as 'Western Political and economic domination and cultural imperialism' (Murrell, 2001, p. 1). While Babylon denotes opposition to Western dominance, its use by The Slits does not align with their British identity, nor with Rastafarianism, especially as its growth was a response to racism in Britain (Gray, 2022). In this instance, Babylonian, when used by The Slits, can only have a generalized meaning as a form of code-switching (Qabaha & Hamamra, 2022, p. 396). However, both 'Paki' and Babylon become subsumed in white discourse. The use of Babylon deflects future accusations of racism from the band, masking systemic inequalities while aligning with whiteness' interests, thus facilitating a mobilising of Rastafarian ideals to obscure the effects of a culturally ingrained, everyday racism. This enables The Slits to be identified as part of a symbolic opposition to Babylon i.e. capitalist and government oppression, where the original lyric would serve Babylon's aims i.e. the denigration of South Asians. Bands like The Slits, and punk bands in general, bring into focus ideas of self-marginalization and otherness, which Ambrosch acutely observes.

> It could moreover be argued that white self-marginalization – the idea that one can choose to become Other simply by opting out of normal society – both necessitates and reinforces white privilege as marginalization is only a choice if one is a member of a dominant group. (Ambrosch, 2016, p. 913)

Therefore, ideas of Babylon assist The Slits in achieving outsiderness, where the 'Paki' of their song has genuine outsider status.

The believable lie

What kind of food do you eat?
Do you eat with your hands or knives and fork?
Uhh!
What's that?
That's the colour of your skin?
I thought it was dirt!
(Boon 2022)

The idea of mixed, whether combined with race, ethnicity or heritage, for example, reveals a complex knowledge area. Choudhry points out that in the UK it was not until the '2001 census that 'mixed-race' people were finally given an ethnic category of their own. Before 2001, such people, since they were not counted, were invisible in public sector policy making' (Choudhry, 2010, p. 39). The discussion by mothers participating in Choudhry's research regarding 'particular people's reaction to differences in physical appearance between child and parent' (Choudhry, 2010, p. 94) contributes to the earlier idea of the wrong type of black.

My mother's experience of these reactions was particularly strong (Figure 2). She was often challenged, especially by white women and the police, whether her children were, in fact, hers. Given the differences in skin colour between my mother and her children, most believed her to be the nanny and, in some extreme cases, they put forward the idea that she had kidnapped the children. This would escalate to threats to call the police unless my mother agreed to a different narrative. To manage these confrontational situations, she would tell questioners that she was the nanny and not the mother. It was easier to change her status, therefore accept the performative role of the nanny, and avoid trouble than to admit motherhood. I call this 'the believable lie' i.e. one that fits the narrative required by the questioner but is not the truth. It is a cognitive coping mechanism that deals with a potentially charged and confrontational situation. It is a performance, playing out a role designed to satisfy the questioner. When I discussed this in my presentation for the HOMELandS Unconference 'The many faces of migrants' (University of Westminster, 2021), one participant shared that this had also happened to their mother with similar implications and outcomes.

Writing this article has stimulated a number of additional questions not dealt with in the song. A key point is my mother and her status and the relative freedom of those who challenged her right of maternity. Is she a refugee or a migrant? Is she both? Did marriage to an English serviceman change her status in Britain? As Bagley reports, based on census survey data from 1969, white British men were more likely to marry Indian and Pakistani women than marry one from Africa or the West Indies (Bagley, 1972, p. 373). My mother's birth country, Somaliland, was a British protectorate, but not a member of the Commonwealth. She possessed a British passport, so would this have made a

Figure 2. My mother, Aishia Sudi Dualeh, at Milton Road, Herne Hill in 1963.

difference? Based on the evidence of those from other Commonwealth nations, such as the Windrush generation, the answer is: probably not.

My mother's story produces three critical pieces of information. The first is that her mother was killed by her father, the body disposed of with all possessions given to my mother's step-mother. Secondly, my mother was tortured as a child by her step-mother, who ensured that any scars were only on the torso, hidden by clothing so that no one would suspect that the abuse was taking place. The third incident took place when my mother was about fifteen years of age. Her father and stepmother took her out to the desert, sliced her open at the belly and buried her alive up to her neck with her head above ground. They left her to either be attacked and eaten by lions and/or hyenas, drawn by the scent of blood, or to die from dehydration in the blazing desert sun. Fortunately, she was found by a family group of Somali travellers who freed her, clothed her, tended her wounds, fed her and transported her to the port Berbera, where she was able to escape to Aden, with the assistance of her two half-brothers. At this point, my mother is clearly a refugee, fleeing conditions of long-term abuse and violence, experiencing 'coercive circumstances and threatening effects' (Zolberg et al., 1989, p. 31), circumstances for which she is clearly not responsible. Once in Aden, she worked as a nanny for a Scottish military family with three children. In Aden she met my father in 1959, subsequently marrying in 1961. Once married to my father her status changes, not just by marriage and becoming a military wife, but also her refugee status. A question here would be to what degree this change had any lasting effect once they moved back to the UK? Certainly, her status was subject to change depending on whether she was in the company of my father or not. While in his company none would probably challenge my mother's right to be. When on her own, she would become an undesirable immigrant, and with her children, her right to be a mother became a moment of investigation. It is also important to appreciate that any status change is on the side of the enquirer and not my mother. Her identity has always been stable irrespective of the degree of conflict and enquiry surrounding her.

But I don't see you as black

Wot else you got in ya?
Er, a bit of Viking,
Cos I'm not from round 'ere, am I!
(Boon, 2020)

In Edward Said's memoir, *Out of Place*, he refers to the conflicted sense of many identities and the unfulfilled desire to bring these together into a single stable identity (Said, 1999, p. 16). Yet, this stable identity is in many ways to satisfy the prospect of always being questioned i.e. interrogated, as to who you are, what you are and where you are from (Said, 1999, pp. 16–17). As Said notes, there is no satisfactory answer, and, from my perspective these questions point towards a more ontological position: 'how can you be?'. For my family, it was perfectly acceptable for my father to dress as a Bedouin (Figure 3a) and for my mother to dress in more fashionable sixties' clothes (Figure 3b). While both were Muslims, my father converted in the 1950s, they were also cosmopolitan in their friendships and appearance. My father was not limited by being in the Army nor was my mother as a military wife; both had adaptive, cosmopolitan, approaches while

Figure 3. (a) My father, on leave in Beirut 1957, aged twenty-six. (b) My mother, in Malaysia 1966, aged twenty-seven.

abroad. However, it can be stated quite clearly that their return to England demanded a more mono-identity than either was previously comfortable with or used to.

While away from Britain, my parents demonstrated the inter/multi approach suggested by Choudhry (2010, p. 33); my suspicion is that terms like inter/multi also fail to deal with charged terms like mixed race/heritage which leads to ideas that some individuals, like myself, can be the wrong type of black. While both of my parents could be foreigners abroad, especially my father benefitting as an agent of coloniality, both actively enjoyed this aspect of their lives, the return to the UK meant that my mother became the migrant/foreigner and my father returned to whiteness and Englishness. Note, not Irishness, as he diminished this aspect throughout his life, possibly to deflect anti-Irish prejudice from British people (Verma, 2018). Said (1999) discusses complications with his mother's accent and, similarly, my mother's Somali-inflected English would become noticeable, remaining largely unchanged even as she enters her eighty-sixth year. Along with her skin colour, this becomes a sustained marker of difference, of foreignness, of not being from round here. I do not have an accent, am well-versed in and have experience of British history, yet being British is frequently not an available identity for me (Şimşek, 2024, p. 137). Common perceptions in the UK around the mixing of races were usually focused on Caribbean and white. For myself, this meant that with my mix, I could not attain 'Caribbean' cool (Riley, 2014, p. 104), what Sabin refers to as the 'romance of Afro-Caribbean youth' (Sabin, 1999, p. 204). However, a question that could be asked here is what happens when neither membership is visible. I can guarantee that any policeman will not see the 50% white heritage and will only deal with the black side, which is also 50% but will acquire majority status.

I have also encountered the seeing-you-as-not-black statement at a number of universities, which can also be accompanied by questions of cultural belonging. I have been told by senior members of staff that 'this isn't your culture, you do not belong here'. Such remarks can reflect a glass ceiling reinforcing ethnic boundaries (Abutbul-Selinger, 2020, p. 210) or position senior managers as insiders while casting others as outsiders (Ahmed, 2020, p. 180). Ultimately, it is an exclusionary statement somewhat like Ahmed's description of a restriction of collegiality dividing 'those of a certain kind, our kind, the same kind, is how collegiality can function as a means to protect some and not others or even some from others' (Ahmed, 2020, p. 201). It creates a sense of otherness, akin to Edward Said's feeling of perpetual displacement (1999, p. 15). Such management statements not only threaten one's sense of place and purpose but also call into question the value of ones' contributions as educators and scholars.

The idea of belonging is one that becomes distorted when aspects like skin colour, parentage, immigration and intelligence become weaponized determiners. Ogbu's concept of 'we-feeling' (2004, p. 3) suggests that shared cultural memories should be the barometer and measure of belonging that allows for membership. However, it is also possible to distort this shared membership. One flawed example from the 1990s is the Tebbit cricket test which Fletcher characterises as 'a superficial measurement of fidelity and assimilation of migrant groups in Britain. Tebbit controversially argued that, to live in Britain, migrant communities had to unequivocally assimilate into the British 'way of life'' (Fletcher, 2012, p. 614). Put simply, any answer other than England, or Great Britain, reveals the degree of non-membership. However, rather than characterizing this as controversy, Tebbit's Cricket test is an example of what Žižek highlights as how 'a Right-winger automatically perceives himself as part of a moderate centre' (Žižek, 2024, p. 41). This line is also played out by individuals like Tommy Robinson, otherwise known as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who was one of the founders of the English Defence League (EDL), claiming that he is not racist but is centrist (Spanner, 2020). As Pai highlights, in one report the EDL 'was held responsible for disseminating anti-muslim hatred online' (Pai, 2021, p. 4). I have grown up playing football with white English kids who have taken on any number of footballing personae especially Franz Beckenbauer, Johan Cruyff and Gerd Müller. In more recent times, it is quite common to see blonde, blue-eyed Angles who support Barcelona or Brazil, idolising Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Messi. These Angles clearly 'fail' the Tebbit test, but of course, it would never apply to them.

In 2014, when Tebbit was sitting in the House of Lords, he formulated a variation where 'would-be UK citizens should [now] be asked which side their fathers or grandfathers fought for during the second world war' (Johnson, 2014). As Figures 4 and 5 show, Tebbit's requirements are clearly met.

My grandfather served in the Royal Flying Corps during World War 1 (see Figure 4). After the war ended, he worked in West Africa as an engineer building schools, churches and government buildings. Post-second World War, he worked as part of the architectural team on The Southbank for the Festival of Britain in 1951 (The History Press, 2017).

My father served in the Army for 22 years through choice, having enlisted in 1948 (see Figure 5). He missed World War II by a few years, as he was too young to enlist, though he would have if he could. However, for him the army was more than just the campaigns, even though he took part in several during this time. His highest rank was Sergeant-

Figure 4. My Grandfather, James Spencer Boon.

Major and as an NCO he took great pride in everything he did. As required, he fought wherever he was sent, prepared at a moment's notice to throw himself into the fray. He left the Army in 1971 and received notice that he was on the recall list in 1974, which required him to always notify the Army where he was living should he be reactivated.

The problem with Tebbit's ongoing tests of nationhood, Britishness and belonging, is how any of this history is visible to those of the general populace sufficiently so that it engenders a sense of acceptance and, therefore, belonging. Waters points out that it became 'much easier to cement social cohesion through the exclusion of the racial other, as was the case in the 1950s when Britishness and whiteness became increasingly synonymous' (Waters, 1997, p. 212). Tebbit, as a member of society with prolonged exposure to this discourse, had not really updated his ideas. As Pitcher states, 'As long as Britishness is deployed as a means of creating distinctions in citizenship status (whether formal or informal) on the basis of culture, it will always remain the agent of racist exclusions' (Pitcher, 2009, p. 73). My father, whilst in the Army, converted to Islam. Therefore, the notion that one could be white, have an interracial marriage,

Figure 5. My Father, James Barrymore Boon, Lübeck, East Germany in 1965, age 34.

produce mixed-heritage children, convert to another religion and still defend the country and its values, would seem an alien concept. My point is a simple one; matters like military service, protecting the nation and the willingness to make a stand when called upon, really do not matter when intersected with race and, ultimately, skin colour. Being in the Army is an expression of national we-feeling that clearly meets Tebbit's conditions, but even this cannot transcend the barrier of race for many parts of the British population. Given the EDL's vociferous support for British troops, is my father the sort of Army personnel that they would choose to recognize?

Conclusion – do we pass?

This article builds upon my song 'Not From Round Here'. Through the song, I attempted to capture the emotional context and introduce my family (Figure 6) and scholarship into the process. This article, nearly four years after the song was written and recorded, introduces more detail and artefacts in an attempt to develop the various positions, arguments and observations. In considering these points, my principle argument is that to reject my belonging here is not just a nullification of my Somali side but also my English side. This double rejection extends through ideas of service, both work and military, and cultural contributions, not just mine or my immediate family but also of my other family members. To say that I belong somewhere else is to negate a rich family history of service and contribution. My professional contribution, beyond work as a musician and academia, has included working for the Prince's Trust's residential art intervention programme, heroin rehabilitation projects and pupil referral units. Visible highlights

Figure 6. Three generations of Boon and Curran family members. From left to right – Jack Curran, (James) Spencer Boon, Margaret Thelma Boon née Curran, James (Barry) Boon and Aishia Boon née Sudi Dualeh.

include being the musical director for the Prince's Trust at the Mandela Freedom Concert in Trafalgar Square (BBC News, 2001), which is a notable moment of National pride and we-feeling. All of this work is lost if the mindset is that only those with white skin can be British. As much as Norman Tebbit devised tests of belonging, both Boon and Tebbit surnames can be traced to the Norman Conquest. While Tebbit and people like him might well suggest that their intention is not to denigrate nor diminish the exemplary service record of my father, they do so by not fully comprehending what their actions entail. Likewise, the senior academic leader who told me that this was not my culture and, therefore, that I did not belong here, made a similar gross error, diminishing my academic record and professional achievements in the service of their tawdry attempt at gatekeeping who was a suitable member of staff.

This article has argued that the misconception persists among white liberals and the highly educated that they are exempt from perpetuating racial and ethnic issues. Despite claims of being post-racial, this stance merely masks the problem. As Toni Morrison poignantly observes, 'I have never lived, nor has any of us, in a world in which race did not matter' (Morrison, 1998). A common thread links the white man/woman in the street and the white academic. Each often exerts a self-appointed power over marginalized groups, reflecting a secure abuse of power, believing that they are 'doing the right thing'. The right thing being operating and manning the border. My autoethnographic research has highlighted parallels between the scrutiny of my mother's status and my own, revealing a shared and ongoing generational struggle. I have navigated this struggle my entire life, yet I am also expected to provide explanations and solutions for a problem not of my making.

In creating this autoethnographic account, my aim has been to illustrate that many institutional initiatives devised to (re-)solve issues around racial inequalities, equities, diversity, and inclusion do not take into account the psychological cost of cumulative experience. The problem for any drive for inclusivity is that this psychological accumulation is one that is not shared just by the person in front of you but extends generationally. My mother experienced life differently from my father, not just gender but also ethnicity. Along with issues of skin colour also come assumptions of intelligence and ability, with the white frame held as the standard. White people, regardless of educational level, social standing or economic wealth, can meet this basic requirement automatically.

Their membership, with regard to belonging, fitting in and nationhood, is always assured, relying on the assumption that only whites can be called British. This assumption is periodically replenished, especially when the topic of conversation is managed/manipulated by experienced parliamentarians like Tebbit.

You know I've heard that word before

It's the sort of word that creeps around my door

I've heard you before

You only say it quietly when no one else is listening!

(Boon, 2020)

Notes

1. For a recording of the song, see Boon, 2020b.
2. See the author's incorporation of Symbolic Violence, along with other critical theories, in the context of a Drum and Bass track (Boon, 2020c).
3. More recently [April 2024], I experienced an incident outside Tottenham Court Road tube station in London where a Spanish man, who told me that he was proud to be Spanish, said that I did not belong here in the UK and should go back home. When I challenged him where he thought my home was, he said India. In this situation, the idea of national identity and belonging, such as Ogbu's we-feeling, is disavowed when those from other countries are comfortable exercising what they view as their power to determine who belongs and who does not.
4. Gilroy's purpose was to illustrate that he was born in the UK and that Hall migrated to the UK. Educationally and socially, both experienced different educational and social systems, yet both are noted as black scholars, and their mixed heritage status is often less referred to. For example, Johnston (2021) refers to music artist Phil Lynott as black Irish though not as a mixed-heritage/race musician, even though Lynott wrote a song about his condition called 'Half-Caste' (Thin Lizzy, 2018). Can Irish be assumed to be standing in place of white or does it describe a national boundary more than a blending?
5. Though Lynott, in Putterford's biography *The Rocker* (2010), is subject to floating descriptors; being black, coffee-coloured, half-caste, and the over-romanticised term gypsy, occasionally prepended with space. The use of space suggests an alien wandering through the universe. However, this could also be thought of as evidence of what would later be termed Afro-futurism.
6. Some white English people would say they were strangling a darkie when going to the toilet to defecate.
7. It was in this same environment that I encountered swastikas spray painted on walls and in alley ways that the local council saw little need to remove. The swastika was sometimes positioned next to other graffiti including crudely drawn spurting penises and the phrase 'Addo Skins' (Addington Skinheads). However, swastikas also appeared on the entrance wall of the council flat where we lived. If you washed it off, it would 'magically' reappear.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Hussein Boon is a principal lecturer and Chair of the Black Music Research Unit at the University of Westminster. His areas of interest include music production, performance technologies,

songwriting, modular synthesis, live coding, music business, and Artificial Intelligence. He was part of the team that established Rockschool's popular music exams and has worked for various artists, including Beats International, De La Soul, and the seminal UK P-Funk outfit Microgroove born from the ashes of British Jazz big band Loose Tubes. His recent composition work includes the BBC TV series Boarders.

ORCID

Hussein Boon http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3380-9474

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