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Interraciality in Early Twentieth Century Britain: Challenging Traditional Conceptualisations through Accounts of 'Ordinariness'

Chamion Caballero

Department of Theatre and Performance, Goldsmiths, University of London, London SE14 6NW, UK;
c.caballero@gold.ac.uk

Abstract: The popular conception of interraciality in Britain is one that frequently casts mixed racial relationships, people and families as being a modern phenomenon. Yet, as scholars are increasingly discussing, interraciality in Britain has much deeper and diverse roots, with racial mixing and mixedness now a substantively documented presence at least as far back as the Tudor era. While much of this history has been told through the perspectives of outsiders and frequently in the negative terms of the assumed 'orthodoxy of the interracial experience'—marginality, conflict, rejection and confusion—first-hand accounts challenging these perceptions allow a contrasting picture to emerge. This article contributes to the foregrounding of this more complex history through focusing on accounts of interracial 'ordinariness'—both presence and experiences—throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, a time when official concern about racial mixing featured prominently in public debate. In doing so, a more multidimensional picture of interracial family life than has frequently been assumed is depicted, one which challenges mainstream attitudes about conceptualisations of racial mixing both then and now.

Keywords: mixed race; interraciality; black history; social history; oral history; ordinariness; people of colour

1. Introduction

'Mixed race relationships are no longer an exotic rarity but the new normal' proclaimed *The Daily Telegraph*, Britain's largest circulating newspaper broadsheet, in Nov 2017.[1] Written in response to the engagement of Prince Harry, sixth in line to the British throne, to Meghan Markle, an American actress of mixed black and white racial heritage, the newspaper article's headline is representative of the multitude of print and online articles, discussions and commentaries that have appeared in Britain—as well as internationally—in the wake of the couple's relationship. Indeed, since the pair stepped into the public eye, a feverish analysis and dissection not only of the interracial royal couple but, by extension, of interraciality[2] in Britain generally has featured prominently in contemporary British public discourse. Within the range of views expressed on this topic—that include aversion and hostility as well as apathy and indifference—is a strand of thought that clearly positions Harry and Meghan's relationship and the 'growth' of mixed-race couples and people on Britain's streets as a 'new' normal that is as illustrative not only of modern Britain's racial diversity but of its increased racial tolerance.[3]

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1   *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 2017.
2   Influenced by the concept of 'interracialism' introduced by Sollors (2000, p. 3) to describe social and legal attempts to 'prohibit, contain, or deny, the presence of […] interracial sexual relations, interracial marriage and interracial descent', the term 'interraciality' is used here to describe the generalised concept, state and processes of such relations, marriages and heritages.
3   For a brief overview on this public discourse, with links to further reading, see Caballero and Aspinall (2018, p. 7).

Yet, interraciality in Britain has much older, wider, and diverse roots. As scholars such as Habib (2008), Onyeka (2013) and Kaufmann (2017) have painstakingly revealed, mixed-race relationships, families and people in Britain are documented as early as the sixteenth century:[4] in 1578, for example, Captain George Best commented that he had 'seen an Ethiopian as black as coal brought to England, who taking a fair English woman to wife, begat a son in all respects as black as the father' (cited in Newman 1987, p. 146). Across the centuries, contemporary sources repeatedly demonstrate not only the presence of racial mixing and mixedness but often its commonality. In 1694, for instance, the writer Charles Gildon noted that '[e]xperience tells us there's nothing more common than matches of this kind, where the whites and the blacks cohabit' (cited in Kaufmann 2015, p. 24), while in the following century the author Philip Thicknesse (1778, p. 108) complained that in 'every country town, nay, in almost every village are to be seen a little race of mulattoes, mischievous as monkeys, and infinitely more dangerous.' Furthermore, as the British Empire expanded, so too did the diversity of interraciality at home as abroad. The emergence of relationships in the nineteenth century, for example, between newly settled Chinese and Lascar[5] men—often sailors, who had settled in areas of London, Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow and other port cities—saw some white women dubbed with monikers such 'Calcutta Louise', 'Lascar Sally' or 'China-Faced Nell' due to their interracial relationships (Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 2). In addition to the presence of children produced via working-class relationships, Britain also frequently became home to the racially mixed sons and daughters of wealthy colonists—such as Dido Belle, Jane Harry, and James Tailyour—who, as revealed in Livesay's (2018) fascinating research, were often sent to the metropole to be educated or integrated into British society, an occurrence also depicted by contemporary novelists, including Austen (1817, *Sanditon*) and Thackerey (1848, *Vanity Fair*). Certainly, while interraciality was an increasingly notable feature of many portside communities from the nineteenth century onwards, it was not the preserve of the white working-class. Interracial marriages also occurred amongst the aristocracy, and the first half of the twentieth century has repeated accounts of racial mixing occurring in middle and upper class society, including the high profile mixed marriage of Lady Anne Coventry, a daughter of the 9th Earl of Coventry, who wedded Prince Victor Duleep Singh, the son of the deposed Maharaja of the Sikh Empire in 1898 (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Tudors, Stuarts, Georgians, Victorians and Edwardians of colour and their interracial families were thus found across a wide span of British social spheres and geographical locales, marking 'a historically unnoticed but significant assimilatory aspect' of the history of people of colour in the country (Habib 2008, p. 96).

However, as Balachandran notes (Balachandran 2014, p. 546), the history of racial mixing and mixedness has long been presented to us largely through the views of 'outsiders', most notably the 'prurient gaze of middle-class observers peering through lens clouded by class, racial, gender, sexual and political anxieties'. Indeed, from the documentation of interraciality in Tudor Britain, it is the written accounts of predominantly white, middle-class academics, politicians, journalists, novelists, bureaucrats, social workers, trade unionists, church officials and other establishment figures who have heavily shaped public understandings of the experiences of racially mixed couples, people and families well until the late twentieth century (Caballero and Aspinall 2018).[6] While some 'outsider' perspectives have certainly taken a nuanced or even favourable view of the concept or presence of

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[4]　Evidence for the presence of people of colour in Britain dates, of course, back to Roman Britain (see, for example Fryer (1984) and Olusoga (2016)) and, as such, the case has consequently been made for interraciality also occurring from as early as this period. However, such claims have found themselves the target of heated and aggressive public debate, as seen in the wake of commentary on the inclusion of a mixed-race Roman family in a BBC educational video for schools. For an overview of the debate, including references to scholarly arguments supporting the claim to interraciality in Roman Britain, see Beard (2017).

[5]　A catch-all term to refer to sailors from South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

[6]　From the late 1980s onwards, academic scholarship on interraciality in Britain began to be shaped by studies led by those in or from interracial relationships themselves. Accompanying this scholarship was a growth in grassroots organisations supporting interraciality as well as fictional representations of experiences of interraciality led by those in or from mixed race families. See Caballero and Aspinall (2018).

interraciality on Britain's shores, more typically they have tended to see this group in negative or hostile terms, ones that reinforced the assumed 'orthodoxy of the interracial experience': marginality, conflict, rejection and confusion (Caballero 2012, p. 43).

Though, certainly, experiences of marginality, conflict, rejection and confusion can be repeatedly found in the history of interraciality in Britain, these do not constitute the whole story. Rather, the history is an entanglement of multiple discourses, of different and perspectives, many of which offer challenging and competing viewpoints and understandings, most notably when they are rendered by those who are themselves in or from interracial families. Thompson [1978] (2017)'s ground-breaking work on the power of oral history has shown the transformational and expansive effect of incorporating the voices of those who have previously only been spoken *about* into our understandings of the past. By juxtaposing the perspectives of officialdom and the establishment with those of ordinary people, he writes, it allows 'evidence from a new direction [. . .] mak[ing] for a more realistic reconstruction of the past', one which enables 'the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated' (Thompson [1978] 2017, p. 15). As Bland (2005, p. 52) rightly argues, what has long been missing in the history of those mixing and of mixed-race are the voices of these people themselves. While gathering such accounts, she notes, is a difficult area of research to undertake, it is also one that is essential if we are to gather 'a fuller and richer' history of interraciality in Britain.

This article thus contributes to this foregrounding of a more complex history of racial mixing and mixedness through exploring the presence and experiences of mixed-race people, couples and families in Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century (specifically 1900–39). Though this period is not commonly associated outside scholarly circles with interraciality in Britain, it in fact is an era when official concern and opposition to racial mixing featured prominently in public debate (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). The wide-ranging commentaries and depictions repeatedly put forward by the media, government, academics, novelists, and other institutional contemporary forces at this time painted a picture that suggested the crossing of racial boundaries was a grim lived experience. Yet, drawing on research seeking to uncover attitudes and understandings of mixed-race people, couples and families during this period,[7] a more multidimensional picture of interracial life than has frequently been assumed emerges, one which shows itself to be full of challenges to mainstream depictions and understandings, both then and now. In particular, the concept of 'ordinariness'—'the conventional, the normal, the natural, the everyday, the taken for granted' (Silverstone 1994, p. 994)—makes itself visible not only in the *presence* but also the *experiences* of British interracial history.

2. The 'Ordinary' Presence of Interraciality in Early Twentieth Century Britain

In Jennifer Worth's popular novel *Call the Midwife* about her experiences working in the 1950s' East End of London, she talks about the great difficulty that men faced before DNA testing in knowing for certain that any children were theirs—unless, she says, the child was of a different race:

> If a husband happens to be fathering another man's child, he is not likely to know and, as they say, "what the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over". But what happens when his wife brings forth a black man's child? The East Enders had hardly faced this before, but after the Second World War the potential was there. (Worth 2002, p. 246)

Yet, as discussed previously, racial mixing and mixedness were not uncommon in Britain before mass immigration in the 1950s very visibly placed the issue of interraciality into the mainstream.[8] In Canning Town, a few miles east from the heart of the London Docklands where Worth was a

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7   Caballero et al. (2008) 'The era of moral condemnation: Mixed race people in Britain, 1920–50', British Academy Small Grants Scheme, award number SG-47233.
8   In fact, the issue of interraciality in Britain had also arisen in mainstream public debate during the Second World War with the posting of 13,000 black American GIs throughout Britain and the so-called 'brown babies' that were the visible result of some of their relationships with white British women. See (Smith 1987; Wynn 2006; Caballero and Aspinall 2018; Bland 2019).

midwife, a visible interracial population had previously attracted national attention in the 1930s, when the *Daily Express* had featured them in its 'expose' of the racial mixing occurring in an area called Crown Street. Made up primarily of black sailors who had settled and raised families with local white women, Crown Street was known locally as 'Draughtboard Alley', due to the number of black and white families who lived alongside each other (Bloch 1998). See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Crown Street Children, circa 1930. © Mary Evans Picture Library.

Despite its strong popular association with the white working class, East London in fact, was, like many other port city areas in the early decades of the twentieth century, also home to working-class dockside neighbourhoods in which interraciality was an 'ordinary' fact of life.[9] In his recollections of growing up in a severely poor Liverpudlian community in the early decades of the twentieth century, O'Mara [1933] (2009, p. 12), for example, recalls his neighbours including 'Negroes, Chinese, Mulattoes, Filipinos, almost every nationality under the sun, most of them boasting white wives and large half-caste families'. Indeed, a considerable body of scholarship has drawn attention to the embedded presence of early twentieth century interraciality in Britain (e.g., Collins 1957; Bland 2005; Tabili 1994, 1996; Caballero and Aspinall 2018), including amongst or in specific ethnic or geographical neighbourhoods and communities. Belcham (2014), for instance, has detailed the longstanding and wide-ranging racial mixing that has occurred in Liverpool for centuries, as have Little [1948] (1972) and Llwyd (2005) regarding the Cardiff area. Similarly, Lawless (1995) has documented a vivid picture of a long settled mixed Arab and white community in the Holborn district of South Shields, while

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[9]　For popular assumptions of East London as a historically homogenous white working-class area, see the television broadcast *Last Whites of the East End*, BBC1, first broadcast 24 May 2016. On historical racial and ethnic diversity in East London, see Porter (1994) and White (2001).

Wong (1989) and Seed (2006) have brought to attention the historic interraciality between the Chinese and white Britons in Liverpool and London's Limehouse respectively. Most recently, Holland's (2017) research has uncovered early twentieth century relationships between South Asian men and white women in Sheffield, while grassroots oral history projects have illuminated community histories of interraciality in Nottingham and Manchester.[10]

Furthermore, as Caballero and Aspinall (2018) have highlighted, black and other racialised populations in Britain were not simply a preserve of city life, or of the working classes. As was the case before the 20th century (MacKeith 2003; Kaufmann 2017; Livesay 2018), there are fascinating glimpses of the racial diversity—and accompanying interraciality—to be found in the suburbs, towns and rural communities of Britain in the early twentieth century, as well as amongst the middle and upper classes. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the labour needs and opportunities of the British Empire saw the steady growth of a non-white population settle across Britain itself, and from the highlands of Scotland to the coasts of Cornwall—and all the cities, towns, suburbs and rural locales in between—could be found a range of people drawn from Empire and beyond. This population was diverse in both its racial and ethnic constitution, as well as its occupation: it contained not only the more typical settler populations of sailors and soldiers, but actors, musicians, students, doctors, vicars, barristers, journalists, aristocrats, politicians, diplomats, composers and business owners, labourers, cabinetmakers, colliers, firemen and fishermen amongst a myriad other professions (see also Green 1998, 2000).

Recognising the extent of this occupational and geographical spread is important in highlighting that not only was there a deeper embedding of people of colour in everyday British life during this period than is often commonly assumed, but that it simultaneously created a substantive 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992). As such, numerous white Britons and people of colour found themselves engaging in what Lamont and Aksartova (2002, p. 1) term 'ordinary cosmopolitanisms', that is the local, ordinary and mundane bridging of boundaries with people who are different. The Japanese artist, Yoshio Markino, observed that in his temporary home of London in the pre-war years, no one 'lifts an eyelid and turns a hair' at the many foreigners walking the streets; on asking a shopkeeper if he were interested that Markino was Japanese, the shopkeeper replied, 'No sir. You see, sir, we 'ave our colonies all *hover* the world sir—white men, yellow men, brown men and black men are forming part of the British nation, so I am no curious of a Japanese gentlemen at all.' (in Rodner 2012, p. 6).

Such 'ordinary cosmopolitanisms' obviously provided vast opportunities for interracial interactions, relationships and intimacy to develop, particularly between the largely male population of colour that found itself settling alongside an increasingly socially and economically independent white female population[11] (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). New arrivals to the country tended first to stay in lodgings where landladies provided bed and board; outside of the port communities, such boarding houses were often mixed, both in terms of race and gender, and independent young women—including the landladies' daughters—found themselves living in close and familiar proximity alongside men of colour from across Empire, with relationships frequently developing. James Jackson Brown, for example, a Jamaican doctor who ran a London practice for forty years, married Millie Green, his landlord's daughter in 1906, whilst Mahomed Ben Mahomed, an Arab acrobat, met his wife, Mary, the daughter of local steelworker at lodgings in Birmingham in 1908 when he ended up rooming next to her family. Social locales—from nightclubs to home gatherings—proved another key meeting site: Nina Tomalin Potts met her Chinese diplomat husband Yung Hsi Hsiao at a 'suburban tea party', while Brinda

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10 See the 'Strength of Our Mothers' project, led by the National Black Arts Alliance, exploring the life experiences of white mothers in mixed relationships in Manchester spanning three generations of African migration 1940–2000 [www.ourmothers.org/our-story]; and 'The Colour of Love: A Celebration of Mixed Race Relationships in Nottinghamshire 1940s–70s', by St Anns Advice Centre, both funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund 2017.

11 Emerging in the late Victorian period, the population of young women who were considered to be increasingly socially, economically and sexually independent were dubbed the 'New Woman'. The New Woman's apparent rejection of the norms of marriage and domesticity was considered by many to be a threat to the perpetuation of the British race, nation and, consequently, Empire itself. See Heilmann and Beetham (2004).

Dutt, the daughter of Lord Sinha, the first Indian member of the House of Lords, first encountered her naval officer husband Lieutenant Gordon at a bridge party at his mother's house (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Certainly, the pathways to interracial intimacy were many and not at all predictable. Some opened up during everyday, mundane interactions, such as in shops and passing encounters on the street, while others were the result of more glamorous sites: Younger (2003), for example, has documented many of the accounts of the wealthy Indian and South East Asian nobles who entered into relationships and marriages with white British women after seeing them perform on the stage (see also Caballero and Aspinall 2018).

Outside of the cities, the case of the solicitor George Edalji—the son of an English mother and Indian vicar of a South Staffordshire village wrongfully convicted in 1903 of animal maiming and writing poison pen letters to his family—is a relatively well-known example of the types of interraciality to be found tucked away in the shires and spires towns of pre-WW2 Britain.[12] Analysis of newspaper articles reveals plentiful other less familiar but equally fascinating accounts, such as the 1909 trial of 12 year old William Worsley, 'a half caste' from Bolsover, near Chesterfield charged with stealing a chicken—the boy's blind father (a Bolsover resident for 42 years) also appeared in court to plead his son's innocence; or the coverage of two white half-sisters who travelled from Glasgow in 1901 with their 'negro' fiancès and 'a contingent of darkies' to their home in Helensburgh in Argyll and Bute to get married, the black visitors receiving, the press stated, 'much attention, particularly from the young people, who displayed much interest in their gorgeous apparel' (Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 184). Meanwhile, the press coverage of the relationships, family life and subsequent turbulent divorces of Princess Sudhira, an Indian noble, and Countess Hoey Stoker, the ethnic Chinese daughter of an Indonesian sugar magnate, from their respective white, upper middle-class English husbands provide a glimpse into both interraciality in the upper echelons of society as well as the presence of women of colour who also were part of interracial couples or families (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Tabili (1996, p. 183) makes the important point that uncovering the accounts of women of colour not only restores them to the historical record and provides 'a more accurate understanding of racial and social dynamics in Britain and in the empire', but also repudiates the view that interracial relationships were the sole products 'of a pathological attraction between white women and Black men, rather than of a more mundane desire to establish a home and family'.

Although the commonplace and ordinary presence of interraciality in Britain in the early twentieth century might not be widely acknowledged today outside scholarly circles, it was certainly not unknown to contemporary forces. While debate on racial mixing and mixedness prior to the twentieth century had mostly been confined to 'small circles of informed specialists', where scientific 'race-thinkers' argued over the minutiae of physical and psychological difference (Rich [1986] 1990, p. 6), growing concerns about the implications presented by the increasingly visible numbers of mixed-race couples, families and people at home saw the topic steadily enter the realm of wider British opinion. Within this discourse, the viewpoint that Tabili refers to—which placed pathology as the central force underpinning racial mixing and mixedness—was most dominant (Rich [1986] 1990; Young 1995; Tabili 1996; Bland 2005; Caballero and Aspinall 2018). As Ansari (2009) has highlighted, the maintenance of the concept of white superiority that underpinned the concept of British Empire increasingly demanded a strict separation of racial boundaries, with even supporters of racial equality freely citing the potential threat of interraciality to the imperial order—how could this be safeguarded if the subjugated races developed intimate relationships and they and their children came to be accepted as equal? Such thinking was powerfully bolstered at the turn of the twentieth century by a metropolitan bourgeois public and scientific discourse intensely concerned with preventing the racial 'degeneracy' and national decay that was thought to be facing Britain, a fear brought on by growing economic and imperial

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[12]   Edjali's wrongful conviction attracted great public sympathy and support, including from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. For further discussion of the Edjali case, see Lahiri (2000).

decline alongside social and political turbulence at home and abroad (Stoler 1989, p. 643; Soloway 1982; Ledger 1995). The way to reverse it, held many amongst the establishment class (and across the political spectrum), was to employ methods of positive eugenics, that is, the encouragement of the breeding of strong, pure national stock—ideally from the educated classes—that was morally and physically able (Ledger 1995; Bland 2007). The preservation of nation and Empire was thus heavily linked to ideas of whiteness, morality and class respectability. To cross racial lines and risk miscegenation was seen as damaging to the national stock and therefore a dereliction of one's racial and national responsibility, duty and patriotism. For white women in particular, whose imperial role was ideally as 'mothers' and nurturers of Empire (Devin 1978), to transgress racial boundaries and risk producing mixed-race children was seen as particularly unpatriotic. Only those women who were morally lacking or sexually deviant, it was contended, would violate social norms by willingly engaging in interracial relationships with men of colour (Tabili 1996; Bland 2005). Veering between popular stereotypes of possessing a hypersexual, dangerous and predatory nature, or a lackadaisical, childlike, and irresponsible disposition, men of colour were themselves stigmatised as lesser beings who, nevertheless, were thought to possess a worrying romantic and sexual allure for a certain type of white woman (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Relationships between white men and women of colour, however—though also highly distasteful to the British establishment class—were judged much less harshly (Bland 2005). Not only did most of these liaisons—whether horrendously forced or freely entered into—take place in the colonies and were thus less visible to domestic British populations, but it was tacitly held that the sexual needs of white British men needed to be fulfilled. Given the limited presence of white women in the colonies despite establishment efforts to encourage otherwise (see, Bush 1994), it was understood that the male gaze would inevitably fall on women of colour. These women were invariably positioned as possessing an exotic and savage but alluring sexuality that could weaken the resolve of even the most upright white male. Thus, while the establishment viewpoint generally held that interracial relationships of any kind between white men and women of colour were not appropriate and should be strongly discouraged, it was also tacitly accepted that such relationships—and the children produced by them—were inevitably the price to be paid for success in Empire building (Caballero and Aspinall 2018).

The relationships of white British women and men of colour, and the children produced from such unions, occurring on domestic shores, however, was an issue that was impossible to gloss over so easily. While early Edwardian discourse initially placed less emphasis on the racial threat presented by domestic interraciality than its perceived oddness, the growing fears about national degeneration began increasingly to see the visible interraciality occurring in working-class communities as deeply concerning. The relationships between the white working classes with people of colour and the production of mixed-race children was seen as destabilising the power of white Britishness at a time when it desperately needed protecting; moreover, white working-class women in particular were singled out—as always—for the significant role they were playing in upsetting the racial order. The concerns and discontent expressed the likes of local officials and the press at the immorality of white women partnering men of colour in dockside areas (and more widely) which rumbled in the background of early twentieth century public discourse (Caballero and Aspinall 2018) exploded into a moral panic in the aftermath of the 1919 race riots. This series of violent disturbances across nine of Britain's main ports after the demobilisation of First World War service personnel in which seamen of colour were viciously targeted were largely blamed in the press not just on the anger and resentment felt by returning white men at 'coloured' men 'taking' white men's jobs and houses but also 'their' women (Tabili 1994; Jenkinson 2009; Caballero and Aspinall 2018). By the 1920s, press opinion on inter-racial relationships in Britain—now a repeated and prominent topic in the press—had moved to a tone much more aggressive and condemnatory in nature, while fictional and artistic depictions—mostly focusing on the erotic thrill of interraciality across Empire—continued to underscore the message that interraciality was an exotic, 'unBritish' state of affairs, titillating and thrilling in theory but dangerous

and damaging in practice (Caballero and Aspinall 2018), as the typical book plates and covers and theatrical programme illustrations below indicate:[13] See Figures 2–7.

Figure 2. *His Native Wife* by Louis Becke 1896.
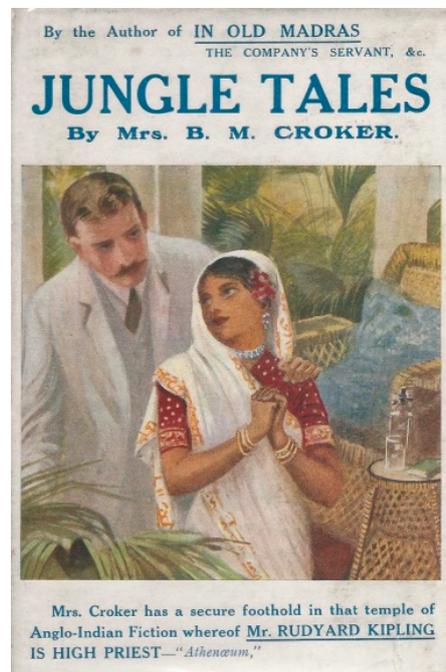
Figure 3. *Jungle Tales* by B.M. Croker 1913.

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[13]   For further discussion of how race and interracial relationships were displayed in early twentieth century book illustration, see Edmunson Makala (2016). I am indebted to Edmunson Makala's work for alerting me to the illustrations for *Jungle Tales*, *Sackcloth and Ashes* and *Concealed Turnings*.
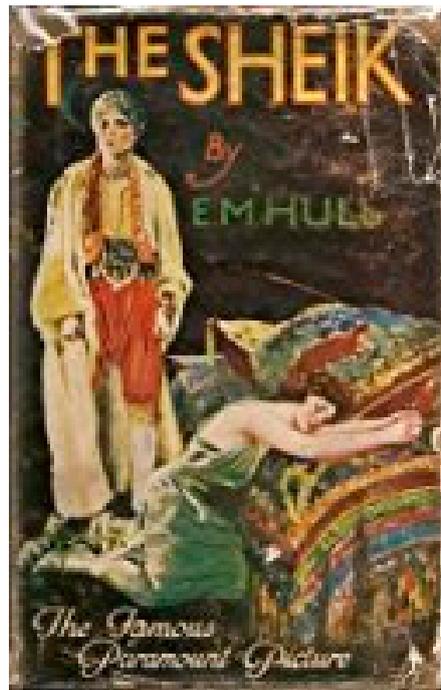
Figure 4. *The Sheik* by Edith Maud Hull 1919.

**Figure 5.** *White Cargo* by Leon Gordon 1923.
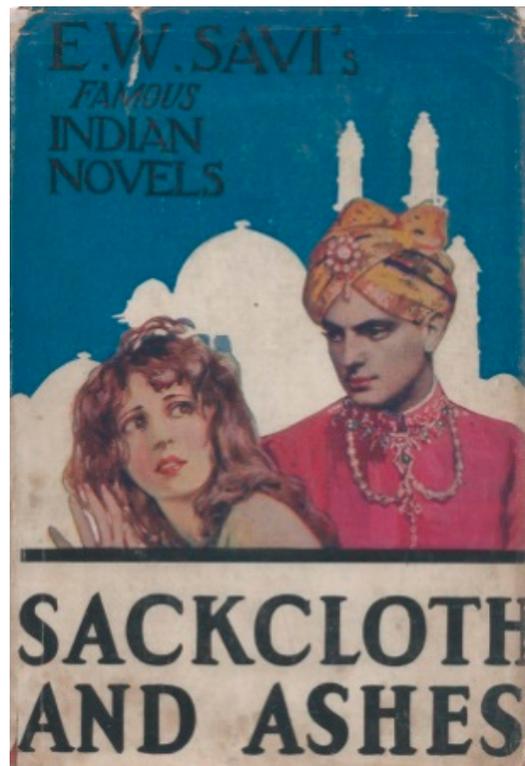
Figure 6. *Sackcloth and Ashes* by E.W. Savi 1925.
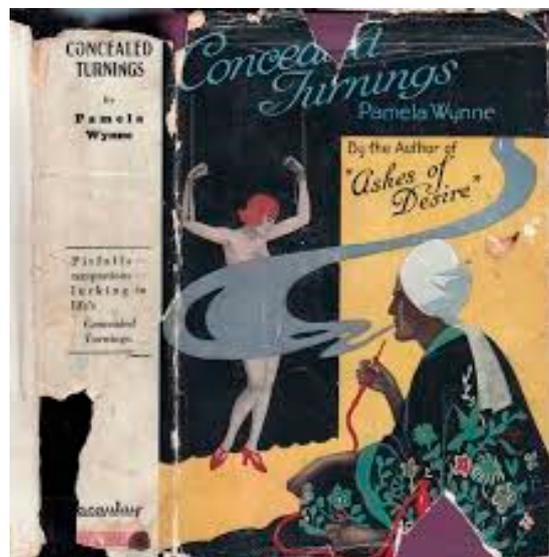
Figure 7. *Concealed Turnings* by Pamela Wynne 1927.

While men of colour certainly came in for their share of blame and hostility as regards the growing visibility of interracial relationships in Britain, the greater scorn was often heaped upon the women who were seen to be active colluders against nature and country. By the 1930s, official reports and investigations into the effects of interraciality in port communities drew on existing eugenic pseudo-science attitudes to racial mixing to thoroughly condemn the process. Most particularly, the reports commented on the 'tragedy' and 'menace' of 'half-caste' children of black and white parentage as a moral concern and racial tragedy for the nation, drawing on longstanding ideas of 'race science' that saw the idea of 'hybrid degeneration' (that is, where those of mixed race were thought to be physically weaker than their non-white parent group and less intelligent than their white parent

group) take precedence over the counter notion of 'hybrid vigour' (where those of mixed race were seen as combining the best physical and mental features of both parent groups) (Rich [1986] 1990; Christian 2008; Caballero and Aspinall 2018). In the absence of legislation against racial mixing, however, (the British reluctance to introduce anti-miscegenation laws stemmed from concern over its possibly damaging effect on colonial relations rather than egalitarianism (Caballero and Aspinall 2018)), preventing interracial relationships was for the most part beyond the real control of the authorities. As such, officials could only issue warnings (such as those issued by Registry Offices warning white British women of the dangers of marrying 'aliens' (Baldwin 2001; Caballero and Aspinall 2018)); implement discouraging laws and social policies that impacted on the settlement of men of colour (such as the zealous deportation of undocumented 'alien' seamen, many of whom were actually black British subjects (Tabili 1994) and the loss of British citizenship on marriage to an 'alien' (Baldwin 2001)); and contribute to a strong atmosphere of social disapproval, the likes of which has been soundly detailed in the scholarship on interraciality in twentieth century Britain cited previously.

As this scholarship has also clearly shown, such disapproval was largely futile as, despite the social penalty, interraciality did not only occur during this period but, in some locales, was a familiar, even ordinary occurrence. While much scholarship to date has expertly drawn on this discourse of disapproval to illuminate just how commonplace racial mixing often was, for the most part this ordinariness has nevertheless been told through the perspective of outsiders.[14] The following section thus takes up Bland's urging to balance such perspectives by bringing the voices of those mixing and of mixed race during this period to the fore. Their inclusion illuminates a generally overlooked concept of ordinariness in the history of interraciality in Britain that goes beyond physical *presence* to suggest also *experiences* of ordinariness.

3. Experiences of Ordinariness for Interracial Couples, Families and Peoples in Early Twentieth Century Britain

As McCarthy (2006) discusses, a strand of cultural studies has contended that attending to the 'power of the ordinary' (Mukerji and Shudson 1991; Silverstone 1994) not only brings to attention the lives of those traditionally deemed by dominant social elites to be less worthy of consideration, but also highlights ways of 'making visible the question of power itself' (Osborne 1999, p. 59). Within such scholarship, the unravelling of the processes of power illuminated by a focus on the ordinary has also included interrogation of what 'ordinary' itself is held to be. Such a position arose from observations that the notion of 'ordinariness' was being conflated with a working-class white, heteronormative Englishnesss, meaning that 'for some Britons, ordinariness was never an option' (McCarthy 2006). Thus, for many marginalised groups, including those from or in interracial families, both mainstream academic and popular discourse has frequently not only overlooked the ordinariness of their presence or deemed it unworthy of recording but, when it has been recognised, it has been approached from a position of 'extraordinariness': something exotic, anomalous, or problematic (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Yet, when the voices of those in and from interracial families are centred, as they have greatly been in late twentieth and twenty first century research, they have significantly demonstrated the 'power of the ordinary' to help challenge and transform understandings of racial mixing and mixedness (see, for example, Ali 2003; Aspinall and Song 2013; Barn and Harman 2014; Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008; Dewan 2008; Edwards et al. 2012; Ifekwunigwe 1998; Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Mckenzie 2010; Okitikpi 2005; Olumide 2002; Parker and Song 2001; Peters 2016; Tikly et al. 2004; Tizard and Phoenix [1993] 2002; Twine 2010; Williams 2010). By also centring the historical interracial voice, a pathway becomes clear through which we can similarly work to disrupt the types of formulaic conceptualisations which have so readily been applied to these earlier interracial

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14　It should be noted that mainstream accounts were not always and inevitably hostile. See Caballero and Aspinall (2018).

populations. Such an approach thereby allows us to gain new perspectives on the lives of mixed-race people, couples and families, as well as the society in which they lived.

Of course, while there is plenty of contemporary material written *about* these historical populations, accessing the accounts of these mixed families *themselves* presents multilayered challenges. As Bressey (2010, pp. 165–66) has remarked, the history of the British working class (not to mention the history of Britain generally) has tended to ignore the presence of people of colour meaning that preserving their voices, let alone accessing them, has often been a question of 'needle-in-a-haystack' searches. Thanks to the increasing digitalisation of archival resources, however, researchers are better equipped than ever to pinpoint these voices and bring them to light to wider audiences. Certainly, the research drawn on for this paper heavily utilised the digitalisation of records to identify such 'needles', employing a wide and varied range of search terms to gather together a collection of first-hand (and second-hand) accounts of interraciality in early twentieth century Britain that included photographs and film footage as well as oral and written histories (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). Taken together and, perhaps most importantly, contrasted with 'outsider' accounts, they suggest counternarratives and alternative perspectives to early British interracial experiences, including ones in which ordinariness was clearly present.

The Commonplace, the Mundane, the Everyday

As a body of scholarship has noted (see, for example, Tinkler 2013; Bressey 2002), photographs are a potent resource for challenging existing views of history and collective memory, thereby clearly making visible the need for alternative or more nuanced understandings. Take for example, the images below of early twentieth century interracial couples, families and people: See Figures 8–13.

Figure 8. John and Tone Milne on the verandah of their home in the Isle of Wight, c. 1895–1913. Milne, the inventor of the seismograph, met Tone during his time in Japan, her native country. The pair eventually moved to the Isle of Wight where they set up a laboratory. Tone resided in Britain for another six years after Milne's death in 1913 before returning to Japan. Image © Carisbroooke Castle Museum.

Figure 9. Eliza Head and her sister, Mabel Head, c. 1900. The pair were the granddaughters of a former black American slave who had escaped a Florida plantation and settled in Bristol in the 1850s where he worked as a stonemason and met his white wife, Louisa. Image courtesy of Bristol Archives, 43650 7–21.

Figure 10. Dolly Parnell (Princess Nasir Ali Khan) with her daughter Betty Naldera Ali Khan, 1918. Dolly Parnell, an actress, married Prince Nasir Ali Khan, a brother of the Muslim Nawab of Rampur, India, in London 1909. Their daughter, Betty, was born three years later. After their marriage, the couple lived in St John's Wood, London for a number of years before relocating to the south of France. © National Portrait Gallery.

Figure 11. Unknown family, c. 1916. Image courtesy of Butetown History & Arts Centre. The Centre hosts a vast archive detailing the lives of Butetown residents, many of whom were in and from mixed-race families.

Figure 12. The wedding party of Mohammed Hassan, a Somalian man, and Katie Link, a mixed-race Welsh woman, in Butetown, c. 1925. Image courtesy of Butetown History & Arts Centre.

Figure 13. Unknown Anglo-Chinese family, Liverpool, c.1930s. Image courtesy of Yvonne Foley. Foley has campaigned for greater recognition of the brutal repatriation of Chinese seaman by the British government in 1945–1946, many of whom were consequently forced to leave their white wives and children behind. See http://www.halfandhalf.org.uk/.

These recognisably ordinary images of early twentieth century (mixed-race) family life as displayed in the photos contrast starkly with the exotic images of interraciality found in the types of book plates and covers highlighted earlier. Such photographs not only add to evidence demonstrating the existence of interraciality in Britain during this period[15] but, as with Bressey's work on the forgotten presence of black Victorian women, they 'embod[y] a turnstile to an interconnected, 'multicultural' understanding of a new historical geography of Britain (Bressey 2002, p. 356). Indeed, while family photographs are not necessarily an accurate visual record of events, they nevertheless provide a partial view of the social fabric and maps of people's lives (Twine 2006). In their showcasing of typical family groupings or special occasions, such photographs thus suggest a level of domesticity and intimacy typically absent from outsider accounts of interraciality. As Bressey (2002, p. 356) notes of the archival images of the black Victorian women she uncovered '[b]ehind each two-tone image, there is a person of colour, an existence within a network interwoven into life in London and far beyond.' Regarding the images of interraciality above, the knowledge that posed studio portraits taken during the early twentieth century were not just a way of capturing and displaying family belonging and respectability but also involved both material and time costs (Hudgins 2010) opens up new ways of thinking about how such families saw themselves and were seen, both theoretically and literally. For example, engaging photographers and having pictures taken in typical dress and poses suggests a means by which interracial families could signal and display, as well as preserve memories, of their ordinariness as well as their individuality, both in terms of their family status as well as that of early twentieth century British citizens and residents (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). That is, there is room to surmise that many of those having such photographs taken as was the norm for white families of means also saw themselves as being part or deserving of this norm.

First-hand accounts from interracial couples, people and families certainly support the position that ordinariness was an accessible and inhabited state of being. As Bressey (2010) has also noted, a distinct layer of complexity in identifying the ordinary history of people of colour in Britain is added to the search due to the changing decisions made—both then and now—around who is identified in archival material and archives by 'race' (i.e., the 'intricacies of identity' mean that people of colour can be classed under a myriad of racialised terms, as well as none at all). At the same time, however, alternative insights may yet be gleaned from the obfuscation produced from the lack of labelling or categorising of their experiences by 'race' directly, in the sense that their inclusion under other non-racialised categories of enquiry can illuminate overlooked aspects of their lives—including their ordinariness.

Take for example, Edith Bryan, who was raised by her black father and white mother in Bute Town—then commonly known as Tiger Bay—in Cardiff, Wales, and who participated in the oral history project 'Family Life and Work Experience before 1918, 1870–1973'.[16] If we were to draw our understandings of Edith's family life from the types of newspaper articles that were written about mixed-race families in Wales at the time, we could only conclude that theirs was a wretched experience, the media accounts describing 'miserable homes' in which 'half-caste piccaninnies wallowed in rags on filthy floors' and 'slatternly white women hiccoughed curses from the inner darkness' while their 'Kaffir mates'—given 'as wide a berth as possible' by white men—'swilled porter as dusky as their skins and, vied with each other in the dandy grace of their spotless linen and gaudy ties and yellow boots'

15　See also The Mix-d Museum: www.mix-d.org/museum/timeline (accessed on 31 March 2019).
16　The Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870–1973 project was undertaken by Paul Thompson and Trevor Lummis in the early 1970s. Consisting of 573 life story interviews with a cross-national sample of people born before 1918, the research formed the basis of the first national oral history project in the United Kingdom. It was initially suggested that Harriet Vincent—the daughter of a black father and white mother who ran an Edwardian boarding house in Cardiff and who appeared in Thompson's book *The Edwardians* (Thompson [1975] 1992)—might have been the sister of Edith Bryan (Green 1998, p. 61) but in comparing extracts of Vincent's interview with Edith's transcript and taking into account Thompson [1975] (1992, p. xvi)'s note on anonymising some interviewees' details, it seems that they are the same person and 'Harriet Vincent' is instead the pseudonym of Edith.

(Caballero and Aspinall 2018, pp. 95–96). Race, such articles contented, dominated the life of interracial families, shaping their experiences just as much as—if not more than—the poverty around then.

Yet, while Edith comments in her reminiscences on aspects of race, racism and interraciality in the family's neighbourhood when asked to by the interviewer, the focus of the project—family life, domesticity, and work—means that she mainly provides fascinating insights into the 'ordinariness' of her family's daily life. Living in a working-class neighbourhood but displaying a significant degree of financial and material security, the mundane details of how her parents ran a boarding house for seamen, and the cleaning, cooking, shopping, childcare and socialisation that she, her parents and siblings undertook on an everyday basis replace the hysterical cries from officialdom with a portrait of a family whose daily domestic lives and relationships were nigh on indistinguishable from similar white families in Britain (Thompson [1975] 1992). Scenes of an everyday and mundane domestic family existence shared with other contemporary British families shine through in Edith's recollection of growing up with her family: food preparation and mealtime habits; the presence of a loving mother and strict but devoted father; sibling quarrels and closeness; and the grind of household duties and chores. An extract from her interview detailing such recollections has been included below at length in order to convey the feel of the commonplace that pervades her reminiscences, which overshadow the accusation of inherently sordid lives and 'miserable homes' put forward by outsider accounts.

> We always had Sunday shoes and day school. I know that because it was my job to clean them all […] and I had to do—help with the back kitchen and clean the knives and forks. We all had something to do […]. We used to—we had a big fireplace and we used to have—of course you'd no baths like we've got now, used to bath in there. Lock the doors up and curtains up, we'd light the fire, heat the water on the fire and bath in there […]. We had a range in the—in middle room, it was—no gas at that time. We had a range and a—fireplace in the kitchen. And we'd plenty pots and saucepans and—plenty of—utensils of every—anything for our use […]. [For breakfast] Sunday morning we'd have salt fish and potatoes. Monday morning we'd have fry up and bacon. Tuesday morning have tripe and onions. Wednesday morning we'd have bacon and eggs. Thursday—sausage. Sausage and mash. And Fridays—my father wouldn't have no meat in the house, we all had to have fish Fridays […]. [My mother] was a wonderful mother. Wonderful. I only wish she was alive today. Good woman. She was very affectionate, she was a good mother. Very fond of all her children, she never made—more of one than she did of the others. Nor my father either […]. My father was good too to her […]. The only thing with my father he was strict. He was very strict on where you went and where you go you know, if I'm out—go out anywhere ask—I went to ask my mother she said you'll have to ask your father. And if he said yes I'd go and if I didn't—if he said no that was it. When he said no he meant no […]. I used to be bossy with [my brother] see. I would be bossy and they—they resent it—they'd resent it, you see, the—and I hit him and he hit me back and that was it—father hit the two of us so we—we didn't fight no more […]. We'd all be together Christmas Day. We could have—we had a gramophone, the old battered gramophone, 'til had—we had a—music box. We were all allowed to sing and that, we had a good day. Plenty to eat […]. [My father'd] have a pipe three times a day but he wouldn't—ever drank.[17]

Similar domestic and everyday family details too abound in the reminiscences of others from early twentieth century mixed-race families, such as those of the jazz singer Cleo Laine, born in 1927 and who grew up with her black Jamaican father, white British mother and siblings in Southall, London. Laine's (1994, pp. 27–28) recollections of the family's Saturday night would likely be similar to many 'ordinary' British families of the era:

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[17]　Edith Bryan, The Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870–1973 project.

> Saturday night had always been our family night out—a visit to the pictures. We generally went to the Gem Cinema, the local flea-pit where we had to queue up because it was so popular. Pa always bought mother her favourite sweets, which were almonds covered with toffee [. . .]. My mother and father were not drinkers, and they seldom went to pubs but the big treat after the pictures was a glass of brown ale. Pa would buy a bottle at the off-licence, then come home to enjoy it with mother, who'd be listening to the radio or pottering about, while we ate our fish-and-chip supper before going off to bed.

The casual tone of Laine's reminiscences of the family's Saturday night out in London provide a stark counterpoint to the moral concern panic about interracial families like hers who were so regularly a feature of condemnatory academic, government and media reports in the 1920s and 1930s, including the children of Canning Town's Crown Street in East London (mentioned previously). 'Poor little half-castes', cried the *Daily Express* '[b]rought up amid sneers and insults, launched while still in their teens upon a life barren of almost everything but dirt, disease and despair [. . .] outcast and bereft of friends' (Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 139). Yet accounts from those who were themselves mixing and of mixed race in East London during this time period reveals perspectives that directly challenge the account put forward by the *Express*. For example, as also noted in Banton's (1955, p. 27) conversations with black residents of Canning Town reminiscing about the neighbourhood, Stephen Bourne's interviews with Anita Bowes and Christopher Cozier—the children of a Guyanese father and a white English mother who grew up in East London in the 1930s—suggest a picture of a community in which mixed families and people were not only visible but accepted:

> So black men married white women and quite a lot of mixed marriages turned out alright because they were good to each other. Where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong. The white people we lived with accepted it. I feel there is more racism here now than we ever had before the war. We never had any racism when I was young. (Anita Bowes, cited in Bourne 2001, p. 39)

This view is also echoed in accounts of white residents of Canning Town; Doris remembers growing up alongside black and mixed families in the 1930s with little racial tension:

> There were lots of black kids. We used to play together, no animosity between any of us. There were white women married black, you know, West Indians, they were working on the boats. Got on ever so well together. . . . Everybody in the street used to speak to each other, and all the children used to play together. Sometimes when me and my sister's talking, we say, "I wonder what happened to so and so," you know. During the war a lot of them went. (cited in Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 142)

Certainly, accounts from across multiracial dockside communities repeatedly provide glimpses into locales in which interraciality was so normalised that it became almost mundane. For example, though 'Tiger Bay' tended to be seen by outsiders as violent, dangerous and undesirable due in part to its large multicultural community (Evans 1985; Jordan 2001), archival testimonies suggest it was regarded with great fondness and pride by many of its actual inhabitants often because of this very same multiculturalism. Like many other Butetown residents of the 1930s, Nora, the daughter of black Liberian father and white Welsh mother, remembers mixedness as a very ordinary part of growing up:

> I grew up as the average child in the Bay of a mixed family [. . .] and people were really lovely, they were nice people, very human, very nice. They had their ups, their downs, [...] they were just hardworking mixed families, most of whom were very well respected [. . .]. Very few of them ever got into trouble and went to jail out of the old times. It was just a happy life, with all nations of the world [. . . .]. I think Tiger Bay is a lovely place and I had a lovely life in it. (cited in Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 181)

Such accounts of 'ordinariness'—of presence and experience—that disrupt the traditional pathological narratives are not confined to port side or urban communities. At the turn of the twentieth century, *The Dundee Evening Post* featured an article entitled 'Negroes as Colliers' which, with disparaging astonishment, reported on the presence of black men working as miners in the Rhondda Valley in Wales and marrying local white women 'who look with much partiality upon the coloured visitor [but] by the men he is given as wide a berth as possible.' (Caballero and Aspinall 2018, pp. 184–85). However, in his account of growing up in Maerdy, a mining village in the Rhondda, Alfred Lawes, the son of a West Indian father, recalls his father, who had come looking for work in the mines with other former black sailors in 1912, not being ostracised but being strongly integrated into the community:

> These were the first black faces they'd ever seen in, up in the valleys [. . .]. And believe it or not each one of them—there was four, five I think—were taken home, no questions asked, to be lodgers and to work down the pits with them in Maerdy. So you can just imagine the surprise when dad come home there and, "Look, who's that then?" standing behind him. "He's our new lodger, he's going to work with me in the pits tomorrow," like that, the first time. But to my father it was something as he told me many a time he discussed it: going into a house there and it was accepted, unheard of, like, it, they were part of the family. But then when it came to such things as bathing in front of the fire at, they had to learn to bath in front of the fire. But the neighbours used to be in and out talking. And whoever came in, they grabbed the flannel to wash their back, didn't ask questions, like that. It took a little while for them to get used to that, but they were taken into Maerdy just as people; nothing more or less, they were judged not on their colour, but the fact they were men and were willing to work down the pit. And that was how my father came into a place called Wrgant, Wrgant Place, up in Maerdy. And that was his first home. (cited in Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 185)

Moreover, Alfred also notes that, in time, his father married a local white Welsh woman and their growing family continued to be part of the tightly knit community:

> My father was 'Daddy Lawes', but my mother was 'Bopa Lawes'. And that's how they were known until the day they died, still as 'Daddy Lawes' and 'Bopa Lawes', and you can't get any more, what shall I say, friendly or accepted more, anything like that [...] They were accepted. My father was black, my mother was white. But that was it. They accepted them and of course as we came along, my brother and my sister as well, we were accepted as one'. (cited in Caballero and Aspinall 2018, p. 185)

As the extracts from the above accounts suggest, the aspects of ordinariness to be found inside the immediate interracial family could also extend to wider family and local community, in terms of interactions, acceptance and integration. Though certainly many white women who partnered men from other cultures in the pre- and inter-war years were shunned by their extended families, these relationships were not automatically marginalised from extended family networks. Tabili's (1996, p. 181) research demonstrates that in seaport communities, interracial couples could be found 'living in the same house with the wives' families, a common working-class residential pattern' that is echoed in mid-twentieth century studies of these communities; indeed, glimpses of such familial acceptance and integration—amongst the middle- and upper- as well as the working-classes—can be spotted across a range of archival sources. In their reminiscences, Edith Bryan recalls seeing a lot of her white grandparents, particularly her grandmother who lived in another town:

> I used to go down to see them. And they used to come up to us. Grandmother always came. [18]

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[18]　Edith Bryan, The Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870–973 project.

Similarly, while Charles Jenkins, born in 1937 to a white mother and black African father in the Liverpool 8 district (now known as Toxteth), recalls how his mother and aunts moved to be closer to his family:

> I think she ended up bringing her mother with us and her sister, two sisters, come with her. And one lived in (Birkensea) round the corner from us, Auntie Lilly, yeah . . . and that was really the only area where there were black people there so . . . her two sisters come down, three sisters, and she lived there with them. And I didn't see any of her brothers, although I used to visit one up in Edge Hill somewhere. And he was alright to me but I couldn't really remember so much about that, you know, if she had any problems because her sister lived in the house with us so that was, to me like, they must have stuck with her, I don't know. [19]

Additionally, as Tabili (1996) also notes, it was not unheard of for multiple mixing to occur within working-class families. Like their sister, the white aunts of Edith Bryan both married black men, while another interviewee in the Family Life and Work Experience project, Mary Brady, a white resident of Salford, recalled a neighbour, Annie, and her three sisters all marrying black men after the First World War:

> Annie took the others with her to where—to down Dixie—Greengate—to where the blacks lived in all these houses and rooms, you know [. . .]. I think they all married them any road, all married coloured [. . .]. Ooh, they was a good looking lot of girls, lovely wavy hair you know. [20]

Such patterns were not necessarily bound by class either: Alan Mander, the scion of a prominent Midlands family, met his wife, Princess Sudhira, when she was recuperating at a nursing home in England having visited her with his sister-in-law, Princess Pretiva, who had married his brother Lionel—better known as Miles Mander, the character actor—two years earlier (Caballero and Aspinall 2018).

Moreover, while family and community acceptance were certainly not a given—social opposition from both being a critical and recurring component of the interracial experience during the period discussed in this article (Tabili 1996; Bland 2005; Caballero and Aspinall 2018)—nor was hostility or antipathy inevitably expressed or static. Attitudes, rather, were often flexible and malleable, shaped by both individual and social choices, preferences and circumstances, as well as time and situation. Pat O'Mara (O'Mara [1933] 2009, pp. 12–13) recalls that while some white families in his Liverpudlian neighbourhood—such as his mother's—'abhorred the practice of inter-marriage [. . .] it was so prevalent that they had to keep their beliefs to themselves. There were others who had great pride in our coloured neighbours.' Such divergence of feeling and expression was also found within extended families. In her recollections of her marriage to the celebrated composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, born to a Sierra Leonean father and white British mother, his wife, Jessie, recalls that, shocked at the idea of her entering a mixed marriage, her family made 'vile suggestions' and 'horrid threats' and took 'measures' to separate them; Coleridge-Taylor himself was not 'figuratively' but 'kicked out of the house . . . literally' when he went to ask her father for her hand in marriage (Coleridge-Taylor 1943, pp. 20–21). Yet, Jessie also notes that there was considerable discrepancy in the family's views. Her father, she remarks, had had nothing to do with the 'kicking out' of Coleridge-Taylor when he sought her hand in marriage and went on to have 'subsequent love' for his son-in-law; the virulent reaction that day had stemmed from her brother-in-law who had been present at the meeting and 'had such prejudiced feelings on the subject of mixed marriages, having passed so much of his life in the east.' (Coleridge-Taylor 1943, p. 21). Similarly, though three of her sisters also disproved of the match—with one persevering in her attempts to talk her out of it right up to the day of the ceremony itself—the

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[19]   Charles Jenkins, Millennium Memory Bank, 10 October 1998.
[20]   Mary Brady, The Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870–1973 project.

day before the ceremony, her mother invited Samuel to the family home where she and Jessie's father shook his hand in acceptance and then went on to attend the wedding and act as a witness.

Similarly, views held by individual family members could fluctuate or evolve. The birth of a child, for example, could have a dramatic effect on changing previously hostile members' attitudes: in Maria Lin Wong's (1989, p. 70) interviews with mixed white and Chinese families who grew up in Liverpool in the first half of the twentieth century, one woman notes that while she knows her grandfather had not been very pleased that his daughter had married a Chinese man, 'then I arrived and my grandfather loved me and that was it.' Complex and evolving family dynamics, as well as prior patterns of emotional ties and engagement, meant that feelings about interracial marriage were not fixed but could and frequently did change over time. The dominant focus of early twentieth century outsider narratives however—that suggested interracial families operated within an inherent and static pathological state—frequently obscured the nuances of complexity and complication that were, and continue to be, an ordinary part of family life, regardless of race (Thompson [1975] 1992; Hareven 1991; Hammerton 1992).

4. Conclusions

As this article has illustrated, the long history of racial mixing and mixedness in Britain suggests a significant seam of ordinariness running throughout it, in both presence and experiences. Yet, as highlighted at the very beginning of the article, such ordinariness is often absent from mainstream public memory, due to the concept of 'normalcy' as it relates to the presence and experiences of interraciality consistently being viewed as a 'new' phenomenon. This 'mixed race amnesia'—as Mahtani (2014) so succinctly dubs the tendency in the West to conceptualise interraciality as a modern occurrence—contributes not only to the obfuscation of longstanding wider racialised histories, patterns and structures but also allows contemporary racial mixing and mixedness to be read simplistically and lineally. In such readings, contemporary interraciality becomes frequently positioned in mainstream understandings as a logical and progressive outcome of changing attitudes towards race (Caballero and Aspinall 2018). The history of mixed-race couples, families and people in Britain is thus seen as inhabiting a linear trajectory from pathologisation through to acceptance and celebration. Such readings miss the complexity and complications inherent in modern as well as historical experiences of racial mixing and mixedness and thus continue to repeat ancient tropes and stereotypes of interraciality. As several scholars have remarked (see, for example, Parker and Song 2001; Caballero 2005; Aspinall 2015), contemporary celebratory narratives around interraciality are suggestive at times of a discourse which evokes the old pseudo-science discourses of 'hybrid vigour'. Whilst it might be tempting to see such imaginings as positive pronouncements of mixedness, it should not be forgotten that hybrid vigour is the other face of 'hybrid degeneration'. Whether used positively or negatively, both types of conceptualisation are the same coin, one borne of and which reinforces spurious, static and limiting understandings of interraciality rather than reflecting its fluid, changeable and complex reality (Caballero 2005). Thus, in challenging the long history of pathologisation, we need to be careful not to go too far the other way—from 'mulatto devils' to 'multiracial messiahs' as McNeil (2010) so poetically puts it. Bringing narratives of ordinariness to the fore, however, is one means of disrupting dominant conceptualisations—either pathological or celebratory—and providing space for new understanding and perceptions of the presence and experiences of interraciality in Britain to emerge.

By foregrounding such experiences, however, it should be clearly understood that the intention is not to diminish the difficulties encountered by so many racially mixed people, couples and families, particularly their experiences of dealing with bigotry, prejudice and racism. Rather, the notion of ordinariness here is drawn on similarly to that used by Weeks et al. (2001, preface) in their work on same sex families; that is, to show how people whose lives have been at odds with dominant norms 'have been able, in the everyday circumstances in which they find themselves, to create meaningful, intimate relationships for themselves: as friends, partners, parents, members of communities.' In short,

there is a wealth of insight to be gained from looking at seeing and approaching interracial couples, people and families from a perspective that positions them as 'ordinary people and ordinary lives, made extraordinary by the circumstances in which they find themselves'.

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