"What Are You?" An Exploration of Race and Mixed Identity in the Netherlands

Claire Haug

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“What Are You?” An Exploration of Race and Mixed Identity in the Netherlands
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Abstract

The Netherlands is a country well-known for its multiculturalism and politics of tolerance. But is this the whole story? How do colonial legacies impact the current racial politics in the Netherlands, and how does this framework differ from that of the U.S.? This zine, along with reflective artist’s statement and literature review, provides background in both colonial histories and current language and context around mixed race/bicultural identities and the regulation of interracial relationships in the Netherlands. Furthermore, it explores my own relationship with my mixed identity, as a student coming from the U.S. to the Netherlands.
Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

Abstract 3  
Acknowledgements 4  
Artist’s Statement 6  
  Introduction 6  
  On Language 7  
  On Inspiration 8  
  On Purpose -- Concluding Note 10  
Literature Review 12  
  Queer of Color Critique 12  
  European Contexts 14  
  Dutch Contexts -- Historical 15  
  Dutch Contexts -- Current 16  
Bibliography 21  
Appendix: Zine Contents 23
Artist’s Statement

“When are you?” A Zine Exploration of Race and Mixed Identity in the Netherlands

Introduction

This zine, as with many art projects, was a project born out of failure. In April of 2019, I set out with the intention of conducting a series of oral histories on chronicling the lives of mixed race (initially LGBT+ identified) individuals in Amsterdam for my final ISP project. But after weeks of fruitless emailing without reply (in the end, I was contacted by two people in total: one who was not actually mixed, and one who called too late in the game) I had to face the facts: it was just not going to happen.

At this point, I was already knee deep in my literature review -- combing through the few studies on mixed (or “bicultural,” as is the language here) people in the Netherlands that exist, and supplementing this dearth of knowledge with my own background in critical race theory and research I had done on mixed people and interracial relationships in American contexts. I found the Dutch history to be a fascinating counterpart -- with an entirely different vocabulary around race, different colonial contexts, and a country that is significantly geographically smaller, it was fascinating to look at the ways in which racism works in a place that claims to be one of the most “tolerant” in the world. Not wanting to abandon this work, I decided to compile what I had learned, and my own reflections on it, into a zine -- one of my favorite mediums through which to summarize academic content and offer reflections, given its artistic possibilities and accessible format.
On Language

I decided to focus particularly on the topic of language, because it was one of the things that surprised me most in coming to the Netherlands as a student of Gender Studies. It is highly likely that one of the reasons why I did not get participants for my initial project is because the language I used in my initial pitch was too U.S. oriented -- the word “race” is used far less in sociopolitical discussions here, and language that carries less familial/biological associations, such as “culture” or “ethnicity” tends to be used more often (often in situations where the word “race” would be used in the U.S.). While in later emails (after being advised by someone more familiar with the language), I shifted towards using terms like “bicultural” and “multicultural,” this initial failure at intercultural communication was likely a factor in my inability to recruit participants.

Operating in a context with an entirely different vocabulary -- even when not doing research -- still proved to be a challenge. For one, it is hard to research when you do not know what terms to enter into the search bar -- and even when I found the right terms, the results were disappointing. The shift from using language oriented around “race” to using language oriented around “culture” proved to be one of the most difficult parts of this process. “Race” and “culture” have fundamentally different meanings, regardless of context -- however, I found that in the Netherlands, their meanings have significantly more overlap than they do in the U.S. The language change that affected my work the most, as I wrote in my zine, is the predominant use of “bicultural” where we would say “mixed race” in the U.S. However, bicultural can mean more than just being mixed -- and that is where complications begin to arise. I have yet to entirely sort out the
meanings and connotations of these words for myself, and I believe that it would take a long time of living here to be able to truly understand the nuances of the vocabulary around race and culture here. Given the time constraints and language barriers, I have done my best to explain the terminology differences and why they matter in my zine and literature review.

These language differences, as I have previously stated, have a fundamental impact on political and social discourses on race and culture. The use of language that discusses “culture” in place of “race” can lend itself to generalization and the creation of a hierarchy of cultural acceptability. While this is also partly a product of being in a country that has a more coherent sense of “national identity” than the one I come from, it is still important to note the ways in which rhetoric that reifies “culture” can spawn monolithic understandings of culture, which can perpetuate generalization and stereotype. Rhetoric that focuses on “culture” can also be used to mask racism -- when discussions revolve around cultural incompatibility, it is easier to hide the fact that that perceived “incompatibility” is rooted in racial prejudice.

*On Inspiration*

In designing and executing my zine, I drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources. Zines have always been a part of my academic landscape -- in making them, I draw from my research on zines in the grrrl zines collection at Smith college, as well as queer zines from the 90’s and modern day online zines. I also took inspiration from zine ISPs created by previous SIT students. These ranged in topic and format from a illustrated comic detailing the story of t’Mandje, the oldest lesbian bar still open in
Amsterdam, to a hodge-podge account of someone’s lesbian exploits (with nudes included!) from a SIT student in the year 2000.

Simone Zeefuik’s presentation on her #decolonizethemuseum/#rewritetheinstitute movement also provided major inspiration for my work on this ISP, and her ideas have played a vital role in all of my writing and research this semester. Her presentation drove home the ways in which language defines discourse, and how colonial legacies define language. In a tourist city like Amsterdam, where colonial legacies are often obscured in the name of attracting tourists and preserving a picture of a “tolerant” national politic, #decolonizethemuseum reminds us to reexamine the narratives we are being shown, and the ways in which the institutions we participate in benefit from the perpetuation of those narratives. It is also important that we do our best to not recreate (or at least minimize) the ways in which those colonial power dynamics and narratives present themselves in our work. And in that same vein, it is vitally important to call out the inaccessibility and elitism of academia -- particularly when one is in the position of being an American studying in a foreign country. With the implied superiority of western academic institutions comes a power dynamic -- one that is deeply ingrained in the structure of American run programs, as well as the institutions that students come to them from.

I also drew inspiration from Tenee Attoh’s project “Mixedracefaces,” a website which documents the lives of a wide variety of mixed race people (primarily living in Europe, as that is where Attoh is based) through writings and portraits. Attoh herself is mixed -- Ghanian and Dutch -- and was inspired to start the project by her mother, who was a photographer. Her project inspired me to present my research in the format of a
creative project, and it drove home for me the importance of personal narrative in the areas of social sciences and historical research. In my initial project proposal, I planned to conduct oral histories rather than straightforward research oriented interviews precisely for this reason -- to center the human element, rather than divorcing identity from personhood.

My initial research interests in mixed identities stem from several sources. I have previously done creative work exploring my own mixed background, and more recently explored the historical contexts and personal nuances of mixed identity for a research paper on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, wherein I argued that Frankenstein’s creature can be seen as a metaphor for the mixed race experience. Several of the sources I discovered in researching for that paper were helpful in the construction of my zine -- particularly Silvia Cristina Bettez’s work on “Mixed Race Women and Epistemologies of Belonging.” Her theories on identity construction and parental disidentification, though grounded in American racial contexts, form the groundwork for my research on mixed identity.

*On Purpose -- Concluding Note*

As our world becomes increasingly globalized, I am of the opinion that we need to remain careful and aware of our assumptions around race and language. Places like the Netherlands pride themselves on their politic of tolerance, of their liberalism -- but as we have learned time and time again this semester, politics of tolerance (which can base their credibility in policies of acceptance towards LGBT individuals and pro-women politics) are often a way to excuse the blatant racism and xenophobia that plagues their countries.
It is important to not confuse increased globalization with increased acceptance. In fact, as is plainly evident in recent years, globalization has fueled xenophobia in many ways -- just look at the rise of far right fascist parties all over Europe, the rise of the far right in the U.S., the declaration of the “failure” of multiculturalism here in the Netherlands. It is particularly important for those in academia to pay attention to this cultural moment -- as knowledge producers in positions of power, academics have a unique power to shape public discourse. And this power must be wielded with responsibility and intention.

The first mixed baby to be born into the British royal family in generations was born a few days ago, and already a well-known BBC broadcaster has been fired for comparing the child to a chimpanzee.¹ As I wrote in the conclusion to my zine, I so deeply want to believe that this isn’t as commonplace an occurrence as it is, but that would be lying to myself. I want to believe in the promise of a world where otherness represents an invocation of possibility. But the creation of this future needs to be a collective act. Which, ultimately, is why art is my medium of choice -- I think that it has the power to educate in ways that academia as an institution can fall short in.

Personally, I have yet to decide how I feel about the “What are you?” question. I’ve been asked it more times in the past three months abroad than I have in the past year or so in the U.S. As a matter of fact, I was asked it again, just an hour ago -- the telltale hesitation after I tell someone I’m American, followed by the “…but something else too, right? You don’t look American.” And while I think a part of me will always feel weird

about it, a bigger part of me is fundamentally proud of what I embody, and my way of existing in the world.

Literature Review

To introduce my work, I will first provide a brief overview of the literature on which my project is based. My work is grounded in my own background in queer of color critique and critical race theory, however given that these fields generally operate within American racial paradigms/language, I will also provide historical background and current theory on Dutch and broader European contexts and racial paradigms, which frequently employ a different kind of language when discussing race and racial mixing.

A fundamental weakness of the background I provide is the fact that most theory (that I could find, and that was written in English) that discusses mixed identities is rooted in the U.S. context, and as such relies on American racial frameworks and languages. While there have been studies on interracial relationships and historical perceptions of mixed people in various European contexts (the Netherlands included), most of them are written using a perspective and methods grounded in the social sciences -- a field I take issue with for its tendency to reify objectivity and disregard human perspectives. It is my hope that through my work I can build a bridge between the two, and construct a language that can be used to analyze Dutch contexts while maintaining a human-centered perspective that does not erase individual voices.

Queer of Color Critique
To offset the inherently depersonalizing and pathologizing nature of social sciences theory and studies which I will discuss later on in this section, I turn to women of color feminisms, and the principles of theory grounded in lived experiences. One such instrumental writer is Gloria Anzaldúa, a self-identified Chicana Lesbian Feminist, and her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Her discussions of “borderlands” identities, grounded in queer women of color critique and her own lived experience, brings up the ways in which identity contradictions define and shape lived experience, and why they are worth paying attention to. Not only does she introduce this new identity paradigm -- she provides a trajectory for it: “Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos -- that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave -- *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness.”

Anzaldúa theorizes about borderlands identities, identity that inhabits a space of contradictions. She discusses how inhabiting this kind of in-between space necessitates the development of a “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity.” At the core of her argument is an argument against the reification of culture as monolith, and the common understanding that cultures are incompatible and inherently in conflict.

While framed in the American context, Silvia Cristina Bettez’s piece “Mixed-Race Women and Epistemologies of Belonging” brings up many important concepts around mixed identity and the ways in which traditional scripts of identity formation differ for mixed individuals, specifically women. Bettez, citing theorist Stuart

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3 Ibid. 101
Hall, argues that because identities are constructed discursively, they are necessarily fragmented and unstable, changing depending on location, time, and other contexts. This mutability applies to language and terminology too -- coming from a U.S. context, I initially framed my investigation with terms such as “mixed race” and “multiracial.” But after talking to people and doing more research, I realized that in the Netherlands, the vocabulary is much more oriented around the concept of “culture” -- “multicultural” and “bicultural” are more commonly used terms to refer mixed identity. This adds another layer to the discursive constructions of identity -- when the researcher’s own relationship to their identity is changed by context, reframing is required.

In this same vein, Bettez introduces the idea that one’s personal relationship to identity shifts as perception by outside forces shifts -- the two mutually construct each other. Another concept fundamental to mixed studies that she brings up is that of loyalty -- she quotes Gilroy, who writes of, “the hatred turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and the partially familiar. To have mixed is to have been party to a great betrayal.” This can be applied to European racial formations, which often invoke a language of national, and by extension cultural, loyalty, that is absent in American discourses. This has presented itself in the Netherlands in laws around citizenship and miscegenation, which I will now discuss.

*European Contexts*

To begin to understand the modern day political positioning of mixed people in the Netherlands, it is important to note the ways in which interracial contact has

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5 Ibid. 151
historically been regulated. Similarly to the U.S.’s anti-miscegenation laws, the Netherlands has a history of regulating interracial contact, and policing desire -- which by extension indicates the policing of mixed bodies.

In this vein, one important conversation on European racial mixing discourses comes from Dan Rodriguez-Garcia, and his work “La Abominación de lo Híbrido: La Mixofobia como Política de Estado.” Rodriguez-Garcia discusses the ways in which the mixed body has always been a kind of political symbol, and how the figure of the hybrid represents the enemy from within, a menace to the sociopolitical and economic status quo. The mixed person fulfills a political ideological role, as well as a cultural one. Given this paradigm, mixed identity exists as an inherently transgressive subject position in so-called western countries with white majorities. Rodriguez-Garcia goes on to argue that the presumption that people or cultures exist in a pure monolithic state is essentializing and unjustifiably reifies the construction of culture as an immutable monolith. This construction, he argues, is false.

If we understand race to be a socially constructed category, mixedness can be seen as almost doubly constructed, and simultaneously deconstructed: one operates from a subject position that both reinforces and defies constructed binaries. Given this lack of ideological (and often physical) legibility, how does the state know how to treat you?

Dutch Contexts -- Historical

The current Dutch racial context is predicated on its history as a colonial power. While nowadays that fact is deeply removed from Dutch political discourses, colonial

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legacies have had a clear effect on the ways in which race and culture operate, from macro level policies around citizenship and immigration to micro level interactions. To understand the current climate around multiracial/multicultural identity, it is important to draw connections to the Netherlands’ colonial legacies, and the ways in which colonial law has impacted modern day citizenship law and sociopolitical discourses around racial mixing.

Betty de Hart’s work discusses these topics in detail, in the context of Dutch citizenship laws and the ways in which they’ve been deployed against the threat of racial mixing. She essentially argues that regulation of citizenship represents another form of anti-miscegenation legislation. Her primary example is the Dutch Citizenship Act of 1892, which established that Dutch women who married foreign men automatically lost their Dutch citizenship, while foreign women who married Dutch men automatically became Dutch citizens. She also documents a shift in colonial era rhetoric around racial mixing -- from it being encouraged, as a project of nation building, to it being discouraged, and seen as a tainting of racial purity. This discourse is particularly linked to the fear of marriage between white women and men of color, a common colonial fear often used to symbolize the defiling of a nation -- the white woman’s body becomes a metaphor for the nation.

Dutch Contexts -- Current

There exists a common understanding (misconception) that continental Europe never had anti-miscegenation laws, other than Nazi prohibitions on marriage between

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8 Ibid. 176
Jewish people and non-Jews, and colonial laws (which often did not extend to the European continent). This feeds into rhetoric of Europe being homogenous, and non-xenophobic due to that racial homogeneity -- there is no race in Europe, only culture.

This brings up the issue of language, and specifically the ways in which language is used in the Dutch context to influence politics around race and citizenship. Namely: the distinctions between ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ and ‘culture,’ and the ways in which they operate differently in different countries. Coming from the U.S., my knowledge base is grounded in critical race theory, and American academics rely on the language of “race” and the American history of seeing race as a biological reality through which our discourses on racism are constructed. Dutch scholars Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens break down the ways in which Dutch racial discourses differ from American ones, and instead rely on language related to culture and national identity.

In "'Who Wants to Feel White?': Race, Dutch Culture, and Contested Identities," Essed and Trienekens bring up the idea that racism in the Netherlands is rooted in discourses of national belonging -- a kind of cultural racism, as opposed to the biological racism of the U.S. Immigrant groups are framed in political discourse as being unable to culturally integrate into Dutch society.⁹

This emphasis on cultural (un)belonging is further reinforced by the Dutch concepts of Allochtoon (ethnic/racial/cultural/religious “others”) and Autochtoon (“real” Dutch people). The ways in which these two categories are defined are particularly

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interesting to consider in discussing mixed identity, given that the official government definition of the term “Allochtoon” includes individuals who have one parent who was born in the Netherlands. Allochtoon is a broad term, and despite any claims at an “official” definition, for all intents and purposes one can say that it simply means “non-Dutch” (the implication being that “Dutch” necessitates whiteness) -- racial connotations to the term are “strong but not absolute.”\(^\text{10}\) It is also important to bring up the universalizing nature of the term “allochtoon” -- it does not distinguish between ethnicity or culture, and often extends to religion, including all Muslims in the category.

This specific language says a lot about the Netherlands’ discourses of belonging. Both the Netherlands and the U.S. highly valorize the concept of “belonging,” but do so in different ways -- since U.S. was founded on a melting pot narrative, our discourses of belonging focus on citizenship (see: the current census debate) while Dutch discourses of belonging focus on cultural assimilation (particularly given that it is a smaller country, with a longer legacy of coherent “national identity”).

Given how small the country is, it is no surprise that there exists a lack of research on mixed race identity as it exists in the Netherlands. One source I have found is the research of Matthijs Kalmijn, who has run several studies on interracial relationships, and the children of those relationships, in the Netherlands and in Europe. In “Consequences of Racial Intermarriage for Children’s Social Integration,” Kalmijn concludes that children of interracial marriages tended to be more strongly connected the culture of the white parent, and to generally have more contact with white individuals.\(^\text{11}\) In gauging

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

these connections, the study took into account factors including social integration and neighborhood integration of the minority parent, and educational level of the child. Kalmijn’s research also found that minority parents in mixed marriages tended to have higher levels of education, and to live in less segregated neighborhoods, thus exposing the child to a more diverse group of people. These results are interesting to consider, given Kalmijn’s subsequent study in 2015, which revealed that the children of interracial marriages did not demonstrate a significant tendency towards the culture of either parent.  

Kalmijn’s 2015 study concludes that children of interracial marriages are, in terms of their social life, educational life, and other factors, located in somewhere in between the cultures of the “dominant” parent and the “minority” parent. The study’s attempt to quantify this social location determined that the children’s situations varied widely, depending on a variety of social and economic factors. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the fact that the 2015 study considered a broader array of social factors than the 2010 survey, which focused on the children’s social contact with individuals of native or non-native backgrounds. Either way, Kalmijn’s work only serves to reinforce what existing scholarship reveals about mixed race individuals: a complete lack of conclusive statistical data.

The weaknesses in Kalmijn’s work come, as they often do in the social sciences, from his framing of the work. By invoking the language of “assimilation” without problematizing it, and without first calling into question why he is measuring that quality, and why it is considered important, he falls back on and normalizes colonial dynamics.

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that value the “other” solely on the basis of how much they can pass for non-other. On a broader level, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that the majority of research on mixed people in the Dutch context relates to their integration and assimilation. This is indicative of the Dutch social/political agenda, and on a larger level, the ways in which academia can serve to reinforce colonial dynamics.
Bibliography


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- my host mom, Mali, for the endless cups of mint tea

- Jana, for always bringing Alice in to sit at exactly the right moment

- my previous ISP topic, for failing

- everyone in this class, for everything.
This zine is the product of several sources:

- a semester spent wandering about language
- a year spent wandering about identity
- a complete and utter failure
- a (healthy?) amount of self-obsession

Hi, I'm Claire, and I'm here to talk to you about race & being mixed in the Netherlands. But first, some context:

One of the first presenters to visit our class this semester was Simone Beerkens, founder of the #decolonize the museum movement, which aims to draw attention to the ways in which museums manipulate historical narratives through the language they use. Her presentation inspired both my topic and medium for this project— I see zines as a medium with great potential to be a grassroots/decolonial art form. Zines, as a medium, have a long and political history: originally developed as vessels for fan-mode content in the 30’s, they were adopted by underground punk movements in the 80’s and from there spread to Riot Grrrl and Queer movements as a low budget grassroots way of spreading information and personal art/writing projects. Like many in my field, my main critique of academia is its lack of accessibility— I see zines as a way of eliminating some of the barriers that exist in our realms of knowledge/cultural production, of breaching down walls.

Simone’s talk also threw into relief the ways in which the Dutch language around race and racism absolves itself of blame— something that became more and more apparent as the semester went on. I realized that no matter my ISP topic, I couldn’t not talk about it.
"LANGUAGE is the Only homeland"

Before we really get into it, there's something you need to know about language. If you're like me, and from the U.S., you're probably used to a very specific way of talking about race. But as I've learned over the past few months, the whole vocabulary around race (and mixed-ness!) is different over here. So before we start, here's some words you should know.

**Allochtone**

I'll give you a few definitions here, since this term is both incredibly important and incredibly contentious. According to Betty de Hart, *allochtone* means "people who have at least one parent who is born abroad." And according to Han Entzinger, it means "someone whose ethnic roots lie outside the Netherlands." In practice, this doesn't just cover ethnicity -- race, culture, and religion (specifically Islam) are all determinants of allochtone status. However, the definition remains conveniently vague. Are mixed people included? How does one's status change based on context? For all intents and purposes, in political discourse, *allochtone* = "other."

**Autochtone**

The equally problematic counterpart to *allochtone*, *autochtone* means "the native Dutch." Essentially meaning, you "fit in" with Dutch society, whatever that means. (Spoiler alert -- it means being white.)
In the Dutch context, being bicultural means that you come from two different cultural backgrounds. The term “multicultural” (not to be confused with “Multiculturalism”) is often used to mean the same. This is the Dutch equivalent to “biracial” or “mixed race”.

Multiculturalism

Dutch political stance/official policy from the ’80s in response to major increases in immigration rates in the 50s and 60s. However, ensuing backlash resulted in a shift towards more assimilationist policies in the 90s, and Multiculturalism being declared a “failure.” Current Dutch policies are characterized as policy of “tolerance.”

A note:

Given all this language confusion, I’m going to stick with the term “mixed” for the purposes of this zine.
Interracial relationships in the Netherlands have historically been heavily defined by the Dutch Citizenship law of 1892, which established that Dutch men who married non-Dutch women could gain citizenship for their children, but Dutch women who married non-Dutch men would lose their citizenship. This law was part of a shift in colonial rhetoric around racial mixing as documented by Betty de Hart, (who is the only Dutch person writing about this stuff, as far as I can tell). Racial mixing in the colonies was initially encouraged, as a kind of nation-building project. However, with increases in immigration rates from colonies to the Netherlands, racial mixing became increasingly discouraged, and a stance promoting racial purity was adopted.

One should not think that desire is repressed, for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes desire and the lack on which it is predicated. Where there is desire, the power relation is already present; an illusion, then to denounce this relation for a repression exerted after the event, but vanity as well, to go questing after a desire that is beyond the reach of power.

Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (1978, 81)

Fast-forward to the 20th century – increases in immigration rates resulted in the adoption of a politics of "multiculturalism," which came with a more positive political attitude towards racial mixing (and mixed people, by extension). However, following a rise in anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments in the 1990's, far right Dutch politicians have declared multiculturalism a "failure," and there's been a shift towards more assimilationist policies.
There’s a common misconception that Europe never had anti-miscegenation laws like the U.S. (other than Nazi laws against the marriage of Jews and non-Jews). Aside from being blatantly untrue, this neglects the fact that there are plenty of other ways to enforce and regulate interracial contact—things like citizenship laws, and redlining are used to shape the racial makeup of cities and nations everywhere from the U.S. to the Netherlands.

Identity is often rooted in place, but it’s naïve to think that this place doesn’t change over time, that inhabitants don’t shape their cities regardless of what the politicians want. The vector of identity goes in all directions, constantly pulling and tugging, looking for give.
I HAVE THE RIGHT...
Not to justify my existence in this world.
Not to keep the races separate within me.
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.
Not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...
To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.
To identify myself differently than how my parents identify me.
To identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters.
To identify myself differently in different situations.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...
To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic.
To change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once.
To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.
To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

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The Children of
European
Interracial
Marriages
and Their Values

Achievement, Cultural Contacts, and Cultural Identities

In European countries, the descendants of biracial marriages face a unique set of challenges. 

This study explores the experiences of individuals born to parents of different ethnic backgrounds. The focus is on the values and attitudes held by these individuals, particularly in the context of education and cultural identity. 

Researchers have identified several key factors that influence the values and behaviors of these individuals. These include the parents' values, the influence of schools and communities, and the broader societal context. 

The study highlights the importance of understanding the role of cultural contact and identity in shaping the values of these individuals. 

Keywords: biracial, cultural contact, cultural identity, values, education.
Tenee Attoh's Mixed Race Faces Project —

A website documenting the experiences of mixed people (primarily in Europe) by Dutch/Ghanaian photographer Tenee Attoh. The site also features portraits with each story. Here are some quotes from Dutch mixed folks.

"I can't imagine a conversation with my parents where I don't mix Arabic and Dutch through one another - Dutch to get things done and Arabic to express emotion. It's always been that way and I think it will remain that way too."

"When people ask "Where are you from?" I smile and tell them the city where I was born and raised. My experience is that some people may have an agenda behind the question, i.e. racial profiling. I don't want to give them power."

"When people ask, 'Where are you from?' I only answer that I am from Amsterdam."
"People tend to think that being mixed-race is really something from today's society due to globalization, but you can find mixed-race people at any place people have connected in the past."

"I enjoy it a lot when people try to guess where I'm from. I think of that as something positive. That they think of me as some new apparition that they haven't seen before and that I could actually be anything when it comes to my ethnicity. I experience that as very positive."

"I don't consider myself to be a half-breed, more double breed."

"I consider myself cinnamon/swirl."

"I feel as if I will never be enough of either culture. Whether it be 'Dutch enough' or 'Sri Lankan enough.'"
Some Concluding Thoughts:

The fundamental problematic of my work—framing mixed people as a coherent identity category—is inherently problematic. While we do share a certain category of subject position, and certain experiences through that, we don't inherently share much beyond that. The political nature of our identities differs vastly depending on our background and the context we're living in.

If "identities are constructed discursively," how are mixed identity formations constructed? As with any identity, it'll change as discourse changes. Something different depending on where you are.

Being mixed so often means having nothing to lay claim to. Having no stance in your own identity. How can we rewrite that narrative? Lay claim to the limbo we're floating in?

Can otherness be an invocation of possibility?

