



# Mixed Race Matters

Autumn/Winter 2023  
Issue 73

**We are Making  
Mixed Race Matter**

people  
in  
harmony

**Packed with:**

**Articles**

**Interviews**

**Poetry**

**Reports**

**Research**

**Resources**

**Reviews**

**and much more...**

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## Membership

Are you a member of People in Harmony? If you are not and would like to join you can now do so online via the website – [pih.org.uk](http://pih.org.uk). Your membership will help to sustain the organisation and this magazine.

People in Harmony  
20-22 Wenlock Road,  
London N17GU  
T 0333 340 3550

W [pih.org.uk](http://pih.org.uk)

E [info@pih.org.uk](mailto:info@pih.org.uk)

F [peopleinharmonyuk](https://www.facebook.com/peopleinharmonyuk)

T [@peopleinharmony](https://www.instagram.com/peopleinharmony)

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## Letter from Chair..



**W**elcome everyone to your new look magazine!

I'd also like to welcome the new trustees and volunteers, all who are giving invaluable support, expertise and their time to the existing team at the charity.

Over many years, we have come a long way in building a more inclusive and accepting environment for people from diverse backgrounds. However, it's important to acknowledge and address the unique challenges that mixed race people, families and couples face on a daily basis.

In a world where people are still judged based on the colour of their skin and their ethnic background, mixed race people, families and couples often find themselves at the crossroads of different cultures, traditions, and prejudices. They carry the weight of breaking stereotypes and forging a new path towards a society living in harmony. This can bring its own set of challenges and rewards. Our experiences are rich and diverse, and it's essential that we create a support system for each other as we navigate our way through a world that doesn't always understand or accept us completely and, at times, rejects us.

We stand  
together to

make our voices heard and our views count. We are a mix of cultures, traditions, and experiences, and it is this diversity that makes us strong. Let's take a moment to celebrate our unique backgrounds and the vibrant mix of cultures that is part of what makes us who we are. We have the power to challenge societal norms, reshape narratives, and inspire change. Our experiences hold immense value, and it's time we share our stories and perspectives with the world.

As an organisation, we need to continue to educate others about the challenges and beauty of being who we are. We can break barriers and foster understanding between different cultures. By doing so, we can create a more understanding and inclusive society for future generations.

Remember, each one of you is an integral part of our community. Your experiences, struggles, and triumphs shape our collective journey.

In conclusion, I want to express my gratitude to each member for their contribution to creating a world where mixed race families and couples are celebrated rather than stigmatised. Together, we can continue to advocate for inclusivity, challenge societal norms, and create a brighter future for all.

In harmony,

*Val*



### Editorial Board

Patrick Johnston  
Val Hoskins

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# Dear Members and Supporters of People in Harmony,

It is with great enthusiasm that I reflect on my first year as both a treasurer and trustee of this remarkable organization. During this time, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible impact that People in Harmony has on individuals and communities. Our charity stands as a beacon of unity, tirelessly working towards fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration on behalf of the mixed-race community.

The importance of our mission cannot be overstated, especially in the current global landscape. As we navigate an era marked by unprecedented challenges, the need for harmony and mutual respect has never been more pronounced. People in Harmony plays a pivotal role in bridging divides and promoting inclusivity. The projects we undertake, whether they involve educational initiatives, cultural programs, or community outreach, are all aimed at building a world where differences are celebrated, and unity prevails.

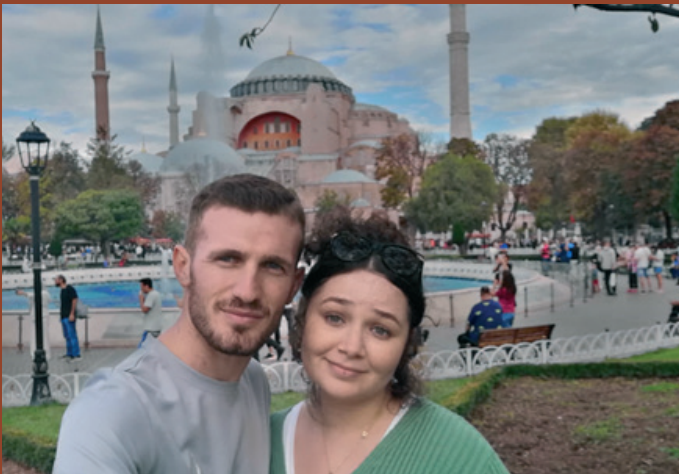
Looking forward, I firmly believe that People in Harmony is ready for significant development. Our dedicated team of members and supporters, combined with the vision and commitment of our leadership, positions us to expand our reach and deepen our impact. The world is in a constant state of evolution, and our organization must evolve with it. By embracing new opportunities for growth and innovation, we can amplify our efforts to create a more harmonious and interconnected society.

As we embark on this journey together, I am confident that our collective dedication will propel People in Harmony to new heights. With your continued support, we can inspire positive change and contribute to a world where being mixed race is not only acknowledged but cherished in society. Thank you for being part of this transformative mission.

*Jennifer Smith*

Treasurer and Trustee, People in Harmony

## Articles



# A British-Middle Eastern Marriage

In January 2021, a random man in Turkey messaged me on Instagram. There was absolutely nothing exceptional or remarkable about this, as myself and every other woman I knew had received social media messages from men in far away countries. For once, I replied, as I was waiting for a doctor's call and really had nothing else better to do - besides, it would make great content for the girls' group chat. It was never supposed to be more than a joke and a way to pass the time, because well, we have men in England, why on earth would I want an

Internet boyfriend that lives in Istanbul? This was also during the peak of Covid, so it's not like I could fly out to see him. But he was just weirdly wholesome in a way I'd never seen before and unimaginably sweet. He was a breath of fresh air after my time in the trenches with the aggressively forward young men that dwell on Tinder. It wasn't long before we were inseparable, video calling for at least an hour every day. Now, he's no longer just some random man from the Internet - now he's my fiancé (Hussein).

By October 2021, after months of obsessively checking the travel ban list, I was finally able to go to Turkey to visit him and things were just as good in person as they had been over the phone. In December 2021, we flew to his city to visit his family. They were incredibly accepting of me, despite the fact that I'm not Middle Eastern or Muslim and they seemed genuinely happy and excited for us. In February 2022, things became really hard - Hussein couldn't leave Turkey to visit me without doing his mandatory six-month army draft,

**"It wasn't long before we were inseparable, video calling for at least an hour every day."**

so it couldn't be postponed any longer. His access to a phone was limited and civilian visits were prohibited. After his army draft, the plan had been for him to apply for a tourist visa and stay in England with my family for three months (Turkish citizens cannot visit the UK without a visa, even for a short holiday). However, the visa application required six months' worth of payslips, which he didn't have because the Turkish army draft is unpaid. And so, we had to wait a further six months, with the new plan being for him to come in April 2023, which he excitedly purchased a plane ticket for. In the meantime, I flew out to see him and we were finally reunited again in September 2022.

On 6th February 2023, disaster struck. Hussein is from the southeast of Turkey, and while the earthquake missed the village where his parents live, two of his cousins died. I flew out again, as he was devastated. The ticket to England was cancelled, as the earthquake led to an increase in illegal immigration and the visa company Hussein had been using advised against it. I flew out again in March and we celebrated his birthday for the first time, and then again in May - he paid, as I was taking the year off. It was during the March trip that talks about our Nikah started.

A Nikah is a ceremony wherein two people become married in the eyes of Islam. A Nikah isn't legally binding in countries that aren't under Islamic law and a civil marriage must be registered as well (Turkey is a Muslim majority country, but isn't under Islamic law). Having a Nikah was really important to Hussein, as it would mean we are married in the eyes of God and his religion. Hussein had been saving his first kiss until marriage when we met, so I had known from the beginning that I shouldn't get involved unless I was prepared to marry him. There were numerous iterations of the plan, changing almost every month, until we settled on the current plan: to have our Nikah and get legally married in a tiny 2-in-1 ceremony in Turkey in April 2024 and have wedding celebrations

in the UK and his village in Turkey in 2026 when we have more money.

For the first year or so of our relationship, we had operated under the assumption that we would get married in around 2027 or 2028, however with more thought that plan fell apart. Even with both of us working, we wouldn't be able to afford a wedding in 2027 or save up for a house as long as he worked in Turkey (where he makes £2.50 an hour, which is unfortunately above minimum wage there). Getting legally married would allow Hussein to come to the UK on a spouse visa and give him the right to work in the UK, where he would make 10 times his current salary. And so, it was decided: we were engaged.

Being from two different cultures, we're operating under two completely different sets of expectations and cultural norms, making the reactions to our engagement completely different as well. By the time we get married in 2024, I will be 24 years old and he will be 25. For his family and friends, who are all Kurdish Muslims from rural farming towns, 25 years old is a perfectly reasonable age to get married. According to a 2013 survey carried out by the Turkish Family and Social Policies Ministry, 60% of participants said that the ideal age for marriage is between 18 and 24. In 2020, the Turkish Statistical Institute stated the mean age for first marriage to be 27.9 for men and 25.1 for women. Hussein's cousin actually got married at 18 last year, and while it was seen as a little unorthodox, nobody really blinked. Hussein himself had grown up thinking he would be married at 18, until he realised the financial implications that would have.

Since our first proper date, people in Turkey have been keen for us to get married. The waiter that night told us: 'Inshaallah [God willing] you'll get married and have children.' On a date about a year later, a different waiter enquired how long we had been together and then replied, 'Two years? Must be marriage time.' This is because in a traditional Muslim relationship, you don't 'date' until you're already engaged. You meet each other in chaperoned environments, ask the questions you need to ask and then decide to get engaged. Once you're engaged, there's a six-month engagement period, where you get to know each other better and then you get married. So for his family and friends, the fact that we've been together for two and a half years is ample time, bordering on inappropriate. They are very keen and eager for us to get married, as they feel we (especially he) should already be married by now.

Meanwhile my family and friends - British atheists from busy suburbs (and my Catholic mother) - have been mostly supportive of us getting married but noticeably less enthusiastic than Hussein's side. And who can blame them? In the UK, there's a lot of stigma around

getting married young, with many believing that young love doesn't last (and the divorce rates among young people seem to support that). According the UK

**"Being from two different cultures, we're operating under two completely different sets of expectations and cultural norms,..."**

Parliament's website, the average age at first marriage in the UK today is 31, compared to the average age of 23 in 1970. Likewise, the average age for a first-home buyer in 1960 was 23 (The Independent), compared to today's 33 (money.co.uk).

I always thought I would have a house first and then get married, but with today's economy that was probably never going to be possible. In the UK, most people seem to get married after five or more years, including living together for a few years. The combination of our age, how long we've been together and the fact that we will be getting married without having lived with each other for longer than a week at a time makes our marriage quite unconventional by UK standards.

This makes me worried about how British people's perception of me will change after I get married. For

example, what if my coworkers start a betting pool about when my marriage will end? Admittedly, that's probably just my anxiety speaking, but it's not out of the realm of possibility. Even how we met - an online, long-distance relationship - is viewed very differently by our respective cultures. For me, I was subjected to a barrage of jokes about my 'made up' Internet boyfriend and constant references to the reality TV shows Catfish and 90 Day Fiancé, as their premises were somewhat similar to my situation. For him, it was completely normal and accepted. Many Kurdish people in rural areas find relationships online, as the alternatives are being set up by family (and risking marrying a relative) or staying single.

It will be interesting to see how the cultural expectations from the people around us will change as our relationship progresses. In our relationship, we value compromise above all else, as it's important that both our cultures are equally represented and balanced. As we navigate these differing expectations, we'll be sure to take notes, in order to best advise our mixed-race children one day, in case they too feel as if they're receiving different messages from each side. As for now, I'm very excited to see what the future will hold. Next week, my parents and sister will be travelling to Turkey with me so they can meet Hussein in person for the first time, so hopefully that will all go well!

By Tasha Johnson

## Article

# The Passing of My Mother

**I**t's almost one week since I found out my mother had passed.

I had played, replayed and almost rehearsed just how I would feel when, or if, I outlived her, when this day arrived.

You see I am an adoptee of mixed parentage. Despite only seeing my mother briefly twice since she signed my adoption papers, how do I grieve for a mother I never stopped grieving for since that day she signed me away?

To be honest I have been going through that process

all my life, but now it's become a reality, my mother has passed away.

At this time of drafting this piece of work, I still do not know the exact date, all I know is my mother has definitely departed this world.

I always say to people who have lost someone, how important it is to allow yourself to go through the 5 stages of grief, because it will not matter what or how much you try to put it to one side, behind you, bury your head in the sand, developing "ostrich syndrome", grief will highly likely pay you a visit, in a way you

inexplicably cannot escape.

Like this morning when I awoke, tears were streaming down from my right eye, for whatever reason as this has never happened to me before, I had no control over them.

In the realm of the adoptive sphere, I did as much one would when there's a death.

I informed my children and adult grandchildren.

Only, I needed to add my apology, that because of my mother's decision to sign me away, the consequences have not only greatly impacted my life, but their lives too.

They all replied exactly the same, to say they were sorry and it was not my fault.

Only one of my five children had seen her from a distance, briefly.

I have one photograph which they are all in possession of.

But, and I know grammatically it's incorrect to start or end a sentence with " but" or "and" but I am born and raised in Newcastle and this is how us Geordie's talk, it is my " mother " tongue. I have nothing that I can hold close to my heart, nothing like maybe one of her favourite scarves, something with her perfume on, something anything, but I have absolutely nothing.

I don't even know what her favourite perfume was.

Adoption is, in my opinion, an act against all things maternal.

How hideous is the fact, I grew in her womb, protruded from her belly, she felt the pains of childbirth, yet I don't know her favourite perfume.

I've spent the days since finding out, searching in my mind, just what can I physically hold onto, like some sort of comfort blanket, but I have nothing in a physical form.

What I do have is a long complex story of my life when I briefly resided with her, then all what seems like, a never-ending story, of facts I've gathered over the years, as to what happened after that.

Today when my first-born granddaughter came to stay with me, I held her hand tightly close to my chest, tears started to stream from both eyes this time.

Then a few hours later, we spoke about my mother, her great grandmother and I told her the first time I saw her, very shortly after her birth, how much she resembled my mother, how she still has an expression/gaze incredibly like her.

My granddaughter gently responded with "do I?".

I feel as if because of the circumstances I have been speeding through the 5 stages of bereavement, probably

I am not, but it just feels that way.

Then in the middle of the previous night, I woke up thinking just how much more upset I was when I had to get the dog put to sleep, and I still cry for him, but Tamer was my soul mate.

I paid for his cremation, I can't let go of his ashes, I have something physical left from him.

He was of great comfort when I needed it.

No matter how many times she continued with her

**"I've spent the days since finding out searching in my mind just what can I physically hold onto,..."**

cruel rejection of me, there was always hope one day that would change.

I've searched for her obituary, but can find one, I am maybe wrong, but I think she didn't want me to know, I mean how dreadful it would of have been, if I her first born child, turned up at her funeral, for all to see, for all to see that she had given birth to a brown skinned baby all the those years ago.

Her blueprint of the life she carved out and made it come true, would be cancelled out, her pathetic house of cards, engulfed with so many lies, would fall down.

I was going to put flowers on her grave, and I will, when I find out, and I will out, where's she's buried.

I can't even say where's she is laid to rest.

Is she going to be at peace when she took so many unanswered questions, to her grave, that she could have answered, that were so very important to myself, just for myself, but for my family.

Here I have always still loved her unconditionally, but that has now gone, reality has paid me a long overdue visit.

My father after I finally found him, wrote to me from Ghana many years ago, advising me to stay away from her, that she was wicked, but I refused to accept his words.

Yet, these words have come back attached to the overdue reality.

There will be no flowers from me, I am the one who deserves the flowers.

It's my life and the lives of my children, grandchildren and now great grandchildren, I will celebrate for all what I have endured and survived, and what they have, like myself, being innocently caught up in her tangled mess and web of lies.

I actually feel, for the first time for as long as I can

remember, free.

The bond I held onto and cherished has finally been broken.

So, I will let the tears flow, as I have no control of them anyway, but I will replenish them with happy thoughts and even more love and appreciation for the gift of my life and the lives of my family.

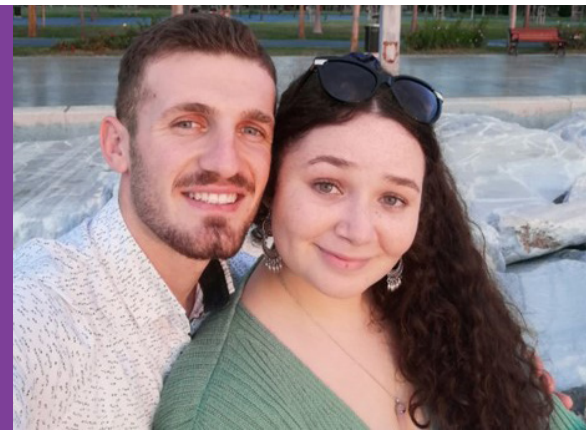
This was never a twisted competition, it has and still is my life, but I can categorically end the article with saying I won, and all my children and their children and amazingly, now the new generation, and we are the living proof that love does conquer all.

By Zeina Prempeh



## Article

# What is it like to be white passing?



**'White-passing' is a phenomenon wherein a non-white person is assumed to be white by others due to their pale skin and Eurocentric features.**

Examples of famous white-passing people include Mariah Carey, Halsey and Paris Jackson (daughter of Micheal Jackson). Being white passing can impact all areas of life, yet the specific struggles and experiences of being white passing are rarely discussed, due to the benefits of being white passing (white privilege). People in Harmony spoke to Hussein Bahur and Tasha Johnson to learn

more about their experiences being white passing.

### **Where do you live and what is your ethnicity?**

**H:** Right now, I live in Antalya, Turkey but I'm from Mardin and I'm Kurdish. [The Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East.]

**T:** I live in Surrey, United Kingdom and I'm half-Jamaican and half-British.

### **What ethnicity or nationality do people think you are?**

**H:** It depends on the people in front of me. If they are white, they think I might be from a white majority country, for example they mostly think I'm from a European country or Russia. They just think my ethnicity is whatever ethnicity they are.



**T:** Most people think I'm white, especially growing up when I would straighten my hair instead of wearing it curly. I've had one or two people think I'm Middle Eastern before, because of my Arabic degree.

### **Do you look different to the rest of your family?**

**H:** I'm the oldest one in my family and one of my siblings is a lot darker than me, he has black eyes, black hair and brown skin but our physical features are the same. I can say that we completely look like each other even though our colors are not the same. Most people are very surprised when they find out that we're brothers, just because our colors are different, which is sad because the only thing that they see is color not physical features.

**T:** My dad is clearly black and my mum is clearly white. My brother is darker than me and looks how people expect the White-Caribbean mix to look. My sister is a similar colour to me but the texture and curl pattern of her hair has a clearer black influence than mine, so it's probably easier for people to see that she's mixed. Growing up, I heard a lot of jokes about 'the printer running out of ink' or being adopted or my mum 'sleeping with the postman'.

### **How does it feel when people think you're white?**

**H:** It doesn't feel really good, especially when they only think I'm white is because I have these colors and they think only white people are likely to have these colours and that other nations and ethnicities can't have these colors. [The Kurds were originally an Indo-European ethnic group, with many having lighter skin and eyes.] Sometimes people think that I can't speak Kurdish and they don't believe me until I speak Kurdish. A few weeks ago, my boss, some work friends and I were sitting together and suddenly my boss asked another worker, guess where Hussein is from? Because that worker is also from Mardin [a Kurdish majority city] but he answered wrong because of how I look. When my boss said he's from the same city as you, he didn't believe him, he thought he was joking. When I said in Kurdish, which region in Mardin do you live in? He was very surprised.

**T:** It makes me sad. I know that it gives me access to white privilege, which makes my life a lot easier because I don't have to deal with racism as much, but it also makes me feel excluded from my ethnic group. I was raised in a colourblind household, so that also doesn't help because there's a lot of cultural knowledge and experiences that I just don't have. When you look paler, you want to overcompensate and prove that you belong but it's hard when you don't have those same lived experiences or cultural knowledge. I've found that people of colour are more wary around me when they think I'm white, they relax and warm up a lot more if I say I'm mixed.

It can also impact medical things if people think I'm white. For example, when I had my cartilage pierced, I developed a large keloid scar that had to be surgically removed, because no one told me that people with black heritage are more likely to get keloid scars. Looking white can make things easier at work, but it also means I don't feel comfortable applying for diversity schemes or scholarships that I'm technically eligible for, because I feel like I'm taking someone else's spot.

### **Can you give examples of times when people thought you were white?**

**H:** In my childhood, when I used to visit my family members in different cities, their neighbours always thought that I wasn't Kurdish and so did the teachers in my area. When I did my army draft, the commanders and soldiers would always ask where I was from just because they thought I looked different. The first time I came to a tourism area, lots of people asked where I was from and what my ethnicity was. They were so surprised when they heard, because they just think only Western people can have these features. One time, I was in the park speaking in English on a video call and a police officer came and asked me questions because I was speaking in another language. Even though I talked in Turkish with him, he still asked for my national ID number.

**T:** Sometimes white people say inappropriate or problematic things in front of me, because 'hey, we're all white here.' This is also true in dating, I've had white boys make problematic 'edgy' jokes to me to try and impress me. For example, I was talking about how hard my Arabic degree was to a guy on a dating app and he replied, it will come in handy when the terrorists take over. Obviously, I don't like jokes about ethnic groups, because if you can joke and make negative comments about one ethnic group, then you can do them about all ethnic groups and you just aren't joking about mine to my face. People will know that I'm not white, because I tell them, but because of how I look, it doesn't really click.

### **Do people think you're more or less beautiful for looking white?**

**H:** I haven't had anyone directly say that I am beautiful because I am white. My parents always told me that you're beautiful if you smile with your heart to your face and that beauty is not about colours, it's about features. Sometimes, when Turkish people find out that I'm Kurdish, they show their racist side with some stupid questions. [Kurds in Turkey face discrimination and human rights issues.] For example, 'are you really from Mardin, how can you be from Mardin if you've got colourful eyes, light skin and are tall and handsome like the Hollywood stars?' They think they're complimenting me but they're just being racist.

**T:** My Kurdish tutor [who is from an area near Hussein]

told me, 'it's only natural that Hussein's mother would want him to be with a girl with light skin and light eyes like you, it's not racist, it's just a fact.' She has darker skin and brown eyes. Growing up, I only ever got called pretty if I straightened my hair and looked whiter. But that was 2011-2016, I think today being ethnically ambiguous is very much in fashion, because the media shows a lot of ethnically ambiguous people in order to seem diverse without having to be 'too diverse.' My own perception of beauty has been affected, because when I see other mixed race girls, they look the way I feel I should and that can be hard sometimes.

### **Has looking white ever impacted your romantic relationships?**

**H:** Yeah, it has. Like everyone else, some Middle Eastern girls were looking at me or thinking about me as if I were white or Western, and they liked it. I think they just wanted to accept me being a white

Western person, because in their mind, being white Western person is much nicer than the fact that I'm a pale Middle Eastern Kurd.

**T:** Yes, definitely. It feels like whoever I date, it's an interracial relationship. When I date someone white, it's an interracial relationship, but it's never acknowledged as interracial or handled with the proper sensitivity, because they see me as white, no matter what I say. If I were to date someone of the exact same ethnicity as me, it would still feel interracial, due to our different lived experiences with me looking white and them not.

With the number of mixed-race people in society increasing, it is highly likely that the number of white-passing individuals will increase too. Our understanding of ethnic identities and the way features can vary from person to person must grow with it, to create a more empathetic and inclusive society.

## *In conversation with...* **Selina Wall**



People in Harmony (formerly known as 'Harmony') was founded by Carol Kayira in 1972. As a white mother to mixed race children, Carol was determined to speak out on issues affecting the community and connect with other mixed race families in similar positions. People in Harmony has been supporting mixed race children, couples and families for over 50 years, and much has changed in that time. We sat down with Selina Wall, daughter of Carol Kayira, to discuss her experience growing up mixed in the 70s, her thoughts on today's changing society and her approach to raising mixed race children.

### **Memories of PIH**

This would have to be the food. It was nice - we got to experience different food and you were continuously having food cooked by people from different areas of the world. Back in those days, everything was very bland, there wasn't any different types of food in the supermarket. [Meetings used to be held at members' houses once a month and hosting duties would be rotated, with the host providing food.]

### **Why People in Harmony is important**

It is still very hard sometimes for a white person to really understand what the [mixed race] person is experiencing, because as much as you may feel you're empathising, it still isn't a personal experience. If you haven't experienced [racism], while you can be supportive and sympathetic as my mum was, you still cannot understand how that feels inside. I can see how important your zoom chats can be for people, particularly if the only mixed-race people around you are children - you almost need to speak to people who have come through it to know that you can come through and do really well, it isn't something that needs to hold you back.

I remember Mum saying to me once that she had not appreciated the racism that my dad was experiencing and she hadn't understood it - I think she was so busy living her life and looking after us as kids that she wasn't supporting and understanding him. He used to be walking home from work and a police car would be driving beside him, it was very overt, he was very conscious of it and I think he found it extremely hard

to then go home and not have any support - I wonder sometimes whether that also drove her into Harmony to try and help others not experience what she ended up experiencing because of her lack, at that point in time, of understanding. For those of us experiencing racism it's really hard, if you've got a partner who doesn't understand. You don't have to understand

**I remember Mum saying to me once that she had not appreciated the racism that my dad was experiencing and she hadn't understood it**

by experiencing it or feeling but it's listening and just feeling safe enough to air what you're feeling. If you haven't got that, you can see how relationships can end, particularly in a society that doesn't want your relationship to survive either, particularly back in the day, people weren't out there looking for it to succeed.

#### **Growing up mixed-race in the 70s**

Moving from London to Somerset was tough for all of us. In London, it was easier, we were one of many, then we moved to a tiny village where there was a bus three times a week, on a Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. So, it was a little village, it had a little shop and that was it. And we literally were the only black children in the village. Somerset in itself had very few people who were anything other than white and had probably never left the area in their lives. So, looking back it was probably an experience that has helped shape who we are now but at the time, it was actually a very painful experience. We had to get a school bus to school, we were the only black people on the bus - it was almost like we went back in time with racism, rather than having moved forward. I remember being at school and people looking for my tail - it was very open racism, rather than hidden. Not necessarily maliciously intended, you could actually say that it was ignorance rather than deliberately intended. Some people just said what they thought rather than thinking of the impact of what they thought.

As a mixed race child growing up, at some point you suddenly realise that you are different from other people. Before Somerset, we lived in London and much more built up areas, with much more mixed groups of people so I probably noticed my time at Somerset more, because I was older. Even now, I'm still in Somerset and the village I'm in might have one other black family, but I'm not even sure - I've never seen them and there's only about 100 houses in our village. I was probably more conscious of it then, so

I'm more aware of the importance of spending time with other mixed race people and mixed race families. Mum and Dad split up, so we didn't have a black adult role model in our lives on a permanent basis, we had just our mum who was white and then the four of us, and that probably made a difference as well.

As I've got older, I see myself as more black than I probably did when I was younger. When I was younger, calling myself mixed-race felt like I was making clear to people: just so you know, I am white as well. Whereas now, I feel more comfortable and more proud that I'm black, I wouldn't want to be white. But when I was younger, I probably thought that life would be easier to be white.

#### **Changing attitudes**

Nowadays [being mixed] is accepted more as the norm. Interestingly at work, my colleague and I were commenting on the fact that as an organisation, we've got a high amount of people working who are all ethnicities, but actually, when you start looking at the managers, you've got very few. So, whether it's unconscious, it is still something that holds people back rather than supports people to move forward. We all have a responsibility to support and enable our children to see that they can be whatever they want to be and not be limited by the colour of their skin, or the perceived difference in their skin or their parents.

Whilst there's still not a very good representation in books, I would argue that there's a massive difference now in the representation on tv, that visually you see in actors etc. [Black] Actors are now getting parts where they're not the burglar and they're not the murder and they're not the baddie, because that was my experience growing up. The role models you saw on tv were always in the parts of the poor, they were in low-paid jobs and they were the wrong side of the law. I do feel and see that that has started to change now. I can see with some of the actors nowadays that people are getting parts where it's not about the colour of their skin, it's about who's the right actor for that part. So, I can see that change happening.

I think simple things like Barack Obama's presidency have changed people's perception. For the kids, there are more role models and the parents - whether white, mixed, black - people are advocating in a different way for their children, and feeling confident enough to be able to do that. A lot of people when I was a child would've just accepted it or said, ignore it, if you don't bother them, they won't bother you again, kind of thing. But now, people are bringing their children up and teaching them that it is okay to challenge things, don't just accept it. Sometimes the challenge is about positively educating. You don't have to challenge in a way that makes the person feel bad. You're wanting to

help them understand but not in a way that's saying, how dare you! Because the best way of learning is actually a positive way, because otherwise, actually all you do is reinforce people's prejudices through your reaction. You educate through being kind and the kinder you are, the more people start to see you as you rather than seeing you as a colour.

**When I was younger, calling myself mixed-race felt like I was making clear to people: just so you know, I am white as well. Whereas now, I feel more comfortable and more proud that I'm black, I wouldn't want to be white.**

I think more so nowadays, [racism] is very rarely maliciously intended, it's ignorance - it is children who've heard their parents say things. There is still a generation there - like my colleague's dad, who's in his late 80s/early 90s and he's stuck in an era, and almost fighting to keep his childhood misconceptions of what he sees as a much better Britain, before everybody came over. If I had a pound for every time I used to hear, 'Go back to where you were born'... Even now, with my [work] flat in Rotherham, when I first moved in, all the 60, 70 years old that live in the other flats when they were getting to know me, they would say, where are you from? I said Somerset. 'Yes, but where are you from? Where were you born?' Brighton. I said, do you mean where are my parents from? It wasn't malicious but in their age group, there's an assumption that you've come over.

### **Raising mixed race children**

My two children are also mixed race, because they've got me as their mum and they've got a white dad, but our challenges have been slightly different, because if you look at them both, they don't look like they've got a mother who is black. So, I think for the children, it was helping them to see that it didn't actually matter what colour their parents were, we were their parents. I think society has changed. If it was back 40 years ago when I was a child, then they would've experienced more overt racism, because I don't think people would've understood how you could have two white children from a black parent. That would've been really hard for them in explaining it to their friends or their friends' parents, because often, it isn't the friends, it's the parents who say things that the children then repeat and sometimes in a very innocent way, not realising that what their parents said was not appropriate in the first place.

For me, when I was bringing up my children, stability was key. My husband was born in the house that we lived in for many years and we've been together for almost 36 years, so our relationship has helped to provide that stability. The children having stability growing up made such a difference because you're not having to explain your life and your family to new people all the time. I'd moved around and changed schools a lot growing up. When you keep moving, people are seeing you for the first time and you're almost having to explain your family makeup. There was also an assumption about whether your mum was white and your dad was black or whether your mum was black and your dad was white. Even now, there's this assumption about whether you're Caribbean or whether you're African, people don't always understand or see the difference. My children have had that stability, they went through the same schools, they didn't change, so once people knew, they knew.

*If you're interested in learning more about the history of People in Harmony or reading more people's experiences, please visit our website <https://pih.org.uk/> We have copies of the People in Harmony (formerly 'Harmony') newsletters dating back to 1972 currently at Lambeth Library, let us know if you would be interested in seeing them!*



*In conversation with...*

# Lucas Fothergill



**B**ooks are undeniably essential to our nature as human beings, helping us to learn, develop and grow. The importance of books which reflect our own histories and experiences cannot be overstated, especially for people of mixed-race heritage who have historically been underrepresented. With this in mind, we sat down with author Lucas Fothergill, to discuss his debut book, *Everyone Everywhere: Mixed-Race Family Stories*.

## **How did your experience of being mixed-race inspire you to write your book?**

The inciting incident that inspired this book occurred when a new friend of Lucas' met his Sri Lankan cousin and was visibly confused, explaining that he had thought Lucas was Egyptian, rather than mixed-race. To read a detailed description of this incident, check out this extract from the book: <https://unbound.com/books/everyone-everywhere/excerpt>

**Lucas:** I always thought that that was just a random, strange comment because he just met me and then immediately assumed that I was Egyptian - we never had a conversation about it. As a teenager, it was one of the first times when [race] had really come up in that kind of way. My cousin went on to tell my Sri Lankan family and they all thought it was hilarious that someone thought I was Egyptian. Myself and my brother were two of the few mixed-race people in our family at that time. I thought it was funny, but it made me start to feel kind of strange and I started realising that I didn't really spend any time thinking about this or considering what mixed history in Britain is or which mixed figures are out there. I wanted to learn more about it and that started a ten-year period of reading, watching and listening to as much stuff on the subjects as I could find. And that turned into this book. That's where the idea came from. I went through this process of realising that I was basically ignorant, it felt like there was a mystery to be solved: is there a mixed history out there? I wanted this book to try to solve that mystery, by telling the story of 100 years

and all the people with fascinating stories throughout that period. I'm hoping that someone out there who maybe doesn't know this history, the way I didn't as a teenager, might get a lot of the book.

## **What is your goal with this book?**

**Lucas:** My number one priority is that I want it to be a book full of compelling stories that readers are entertained by, about all these real people and the amazing things they did in their lives. If people are going to be kind enough to dedicate some of their time to reading this book, I just want them to enjoy it, to enjoy learning and hearing these stories. I'm hoping that at the same time, they're going to learn about the untold mixed history in Britain. It's something that isn't really spoken about or considered very much, even though mixed people have tripled to be one of the fastest-growing groups of people in the U.K. over the past 20 years. This is an opportunity to share that history. I hope it's something that's entertaining and educational at the same time - that's my dream.

## **What was your process while writing the book?**

**Lucas:** Building the book was mainly based around unearthing good stories, which is what I do in my day job. I'm writing this book in my spare time as a passion project. I work in TV, in documentaries, and that's all about finding good stories, finding amazing people, and asking them gently if they would be up for sharing those stories. So, I approached the book in the same way. You've got to start by finding these sources. I went to the British Library and the National Archives and I read through as many magazines and newspapers as I could. I listened to podcasts and watched documentaries, to see what's already out there. Often the best way of finding a good story is by reading or listening to something else, spotting a throwaway line and thinking, 'Oh wow, that's really interesting, I want to learn more about that.' I also got in touch with organisations like People in Harmony and I got myself added to groups on Facebook, WhatsApp and Meetup, to put the word out that I'm

making this. The book is a mix of archival research and interviews with people sharing their family histories. You just keep interviewing and looking for stories constantly. Eventually, you have an array of potential stories, and you map them out and decide which ones to use, as you can't use them all, sadly.

#### How would you say books have impacted your own personal mixed-race journey?

**Lucas:** It's everything. People from certain backgrounds being given the opportunity to tell their stories and given a platform to share – it's just really exciting when you get to see your experiences represented. And if it's in a film or in a TV series, when you get to see that shown up there, it just gives you that sort of spark: it's electric. I remember when I was starting university and two of Nella Larsen's books, *Quicksand* and *Passing*, were on the syllabus. Getting to read those for the first time - I know those are American stories - but just getting to read about that was so amazing to me, because I feel like I never hear about this kind of thing, about people articulating these kinds of experiences. I think it's so important that people get to do that and we find a space. But I think that as well, it's important that these stories are for everyone. While my book is about mixed history, it's not only mixed people who should read it. It should be for everyone.

#### How do you think books impact our views on race and culture?

**Lucas:** They totally steer the conversation. Non-fiction books especially drive conversation. If you look at the news, so many of the articles are driven by the work and the research of books. The years of work and research that go into books drive what everyone talks about. That's the amazing thing, books do set the agenda. They change everything. They totally shift everyone's opinions on things, they highlight topics and they move people's attention around. And I think that's really important. That's why supporting the publication of books is really important as well because if you support certain kinds of books and they do well, then publishers will take notice and they'll start making more books on that topic.

#### What was the most moving or interesting story you heard while interviewing people for your book?

**Lucas:** There are so many hugely moving stories in there about people falling in love, finding long-lost family members, coming across massive challenges like war and connecting with people. It's really hard to pick one, but one I did really like involved someone's transatlantic journey to find long-lost family members. I've been in contact with this person for about two and a half years now and just this summer, she finally got in touch with the family that she'd been searching for for

over 80 years. So that was really special. I think that because we've been in touch for so long, I feel quite close with them in a way - I feel like I'm rooting for them, I'm like their supporter. That's the thing about the book, while it does cover some of the toughest, most challenging experiences that people go through, I

People from certain backgrounds [are] being given the opportunity to tell their stories and given a platform to share – it's just really exciting when you get to see your experiences represented.

really wanted at every opportunity to include moments of triumph and joy, because that's the part of the experience that you don't get to hear about so much. I feel like that's worth celebrating and that life's not just about being abused a lot of the time. There are lots of wins in people's lives and I want to share those as well.

*Everyone Everywhere: Mixed Race Family Stories* is being published by Unbound, who have published successful books such as 2016's *The Good Immigrant*. In order for the book to be published, it needs to reach a certain number of pledges and preorders. The project is currently over half way towards the target amount with the goal to be finished by January. For a £10 pledge, you will receive a digital ebook with your name in the back or for £25 + shipping, you can receive a first edition hardback with your name in the back and the ebook. If you are able to pledge your support towards this project, please consider doing so!

Visit: <https://unbound.com/bookseveryoneeverywhere/> for more information.





My family are farmers and casual workers  
Nuns and fighters from the rebel country

I come from the fifteen bridges, barges and flower markets  
Trading skills, silks and spices in faraway places  
Boiled cabbage and bacon and potatoes have made me  
Champ and colcannon, barmbrack and boxty

I come from Bridie and Nuala and Patrick  
From New York or London on the flip of a coin  
I come from the tenement buildings in Westbourne Grove  
Smog and fog and 'Not Welcome' signs

I come from Ska and highlife and shebeens  
Rhythms drifting and mingling with a slug of poitín

I come from prejudice and assumptions limiting my path  
If you listen  
you will hear...  
The call of bodhran and the song of the griot and the seductive trader  
Stand back, shield your eyes  
The phoenix is rising

*by Caroline Hastrup-Baptiste*

I come from the chiefs long table laden with sumptuous delights  
Starched guinea brocade agbadas and towering head wraps  
My family is a cornucopia of vibrant fruits and fiery red peppers  
I come from Arabic scripts and church mission societies  
  
From aunties and uncles with wild intonation  
Big personalities big laughter, big ideas  
Always thinking and planning and buying and selling  
Educated and uneducated  
The gifted and the lost  
Turning Terracotta pots and firing bronze  
  
I come from the peat bogs from smiling eyes  
Broken pots, broken teeth and promises unkept  
From culchies in country and townies from town  
Superstition and logic in noisy collision



I am not a lady, in the shadows I'm concealed,  
I'm walking with mycelium, and the secrets unrevealed.

I am not a lady, but a creature of the night,  
I'm glistening with the moon and the glow of silvery light.

I am not a lady, with the norms I don't conform,  
I'm dancing with the stars, in the skies celestial storm.

I am not a lady, I'm a spirit unconfined,  
In the universe's tapestry, my essence intertwined.

I am not a lady, I am nature's harmony,  
A symphony of elements, live inside of me.

I am not a lady, I'm a soul unbound and wild,  
Embracing the cosmos, like an eyes-wide-open-child.

*By Tanya Forgan September 2023*

## *I am not a Lady*

I am not a lady, in convention's chains I'm free,  
I'm moving with the tides and swirling with the sea.

I am not a lady, on paths less trodden I tread,  
I'm crawling with the creatures, where the wildest dreams are spread.

## Assessing the Impact of...

# Declining to State One's Ethnicity on an Application

### INTRODUCTION

Discrimination exists in many different forms. If an employer knowingly or subconsciously rejects a candidate based on that candidate's race or ethnicity, then that candidate was discriminated against. Proving such discrimination is very difficult and often goes unnoticed.

According to the GOV.UK website, employers must not ask candidates about 'protected characteristics' which include age, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy or on maternity leave, disability, race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. However, the employer can choose a candidate who has a protected characteristic over one who does not if they're both suitable for the job and the employer believes that people with that characteristic are underrepresented in the workforce, profession or industry (GOV.UK, 2021). Of course, the only way an employer can choose a candidate who has a protected characteristic over one who does not is if they asked the question and the applicant answered it.

On many job applications, one of the categories for race or ethnicity is invariably "Decline to state." Some white job applicants are afraid to identify a race or ethnicity because they believe some employers are hiring applicants strictly to increase workplace diversity (Reddit, 2013). Some other applicants are afraid to decline identifying a race or ethnicity because they think that failing to submit voluntary information will negatively affect their application (Reddit, 2017). So, the question becomes, should an applicant (with a protected characteristic or without) choose "Decline to state?" Would it hurt or help their chances for a successful application?

This paper investigates the impact, if any, of choosing "Decline to state" for a protected characteristic on an application. If results show no statistically significant impact of choosing "Decline to state," then no additional actions (education or legislation) need to take place. Conversely, if results show a positive or negative statistically significant impact of choosing "Decline to state" on an application then the Black Asian Ethnic Minority community should be educated to avoid that option.

Author: Joseph Denezia

**DOWNLOAD PAPER:** [pih.org.uk/front-page/applications-and-ethnicity](http://pih.org.uk/front-page/applications-and-ethnicity)



### Making History Teachers

<https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/making-history-teachers-the-role-of-teacher-training-and-teacher-education>

Making History Teachers: The role of teacher training and teacher education

### KEY FINDINGS

In the wake of Black Lives Matter and the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and teacher trainers have expressed a strong commitment to developing a more inclusive curriculum and changing pedagogic practice to tackle entrenched racial inequity in schools.

While barriers for teachers have long been recognised, there has been little focus on the crucial role of teacher educators and teacher training in developing a diverse profession, practice and curriculum.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision is increasingly fragmented and marketised. Within this 'chaos', the key concerns of teacher educators included: subject knowledge being deprioritised, a lack of monitoring, the quality of in-school training, and intellectual freedom being eroded.

There are a number of constraints in the teacher education space, including lack of time, 'tick-box' approaches to 'diversity' work, gaps in trainers' subject knowledge, and lack of Black and minority ethnic representation among teacher educators/trainee teachers.

In schools, significant constraints were identified, including other issues being prioritised, teacher apathy or resistance, limited time for innovation, lack of training and guidance in teaching 'difficult' or 'sensitive' subjects, and the need for accredited, high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) for all teachers.

School-based mentors are key to supporting the transition from ITE to in-school teaching. However, this requires a commitment to partnership working, to training and support from mentors who are suitably recognised and remunerated, and to developing a more diverse mentoring cohort.



# People in Harmony Trustees

Welcome to four of our  
new trustees

**Jennifer Smith is a Senior Director at Sage Group, where she leads Marketing Technology & Operations globally.**



Jennifer has been a leader in the field of marketing and sales technology for over 20 years, working at global companies such as Macmillan and MasterCard. Her career has focused on supporting businesses in their use of technology to drive consumer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. Jennifer enjoys leading teams through challenges and transformation in the digital age—working collaboratively as “we solve better together than as individuals”.

Jennifer grew up as part of a mixed-race family, identifying how vital the People in Harmony charity is as an additional support system for children, families, and couples. She joined as a Trustee in October 2022, taking on treasurer responsibilities to continue to drive the charity's mission for all who live with this unique identity—from children grappling with their own identities at school to adults looking for meaningful connections within their communities.



**Lee Hemmings is accomplished leader and senior executive, marked by entrepreneurial success and a prominent career in financial services.**

Displaying a talent for translating strategic plans into tangible achievements, Lee's legacy includes founding Player LENS, a revolutionary global football industry platform spanning 70+ countries. His leadership in investment banking, across the UK and Asia, has been distinguished by his commitment to inclusivity and diversity, leading a global team of over 70 members.

Beyond professional spheres, Lee exhibits a dedication to inclusivity, impactful leadership, innovation, and networking. These values are expressed in his roles as a trustee for People in Harmony and as a Non-Executive Director of St Alban's Community Bank. In his personal life, Lee is married to Angie and is a proud father to Leanne and Louis.

**Hi, I'm Hannah Candassamy and I'm a Londoner of mixed heritage - my mum is White British, and my dad is from Mauritius.**



I currently work in the public sector and have previously worked in the charity sector and spent some time living abroad. I got involved with People in Harmony as I think there are a lot of common experiences among those of us who grow up as mixed race in the UK, regardless of ethnicity or background. I'm keen for more of us to have a space to share those experiences and hopefully feel part of a community.



**I'm Melanie Hadaway, I have worked in corporate services for many years with responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion and am proud to say that I have implemented EDI policies and initiatives in many companies.**

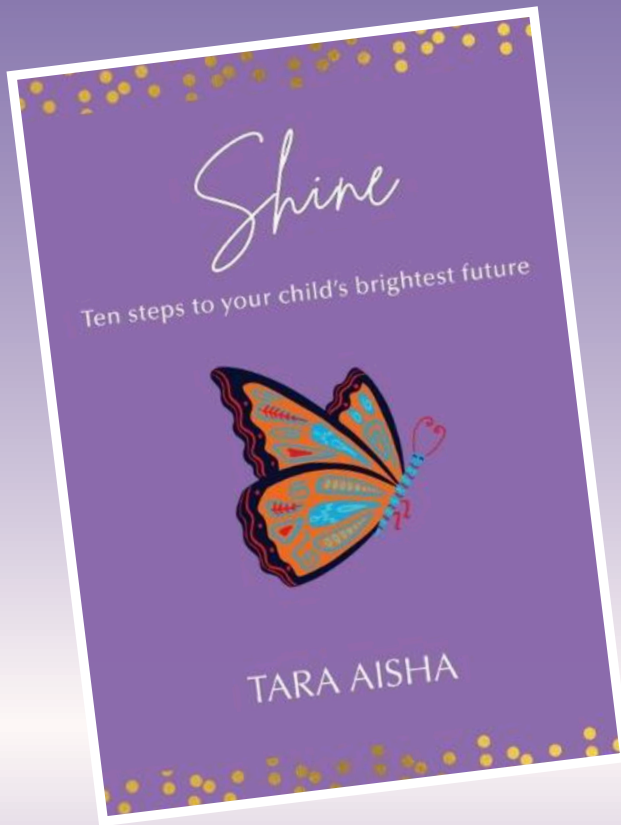
During this time I have received commendations from Board Trustees and Senior Management Teams as well as winning awards from Race Equality Matters.

I have been in a mixed relationship for 31 years and have two grown up children and two grandchildren. Whilst it was important for us to raise our children understanding both sides of their heritage, it was only recently that I realised there is a lack of cultural awareness in actually being a mixed race person which led me to becoming a Trustee at People in Harmony. I am pleased to say that in the last 30 years acceptance of mixed relationships has changed immeasurably and my grandchildren are now the product of two mixed race parents which in turn gives them an exciting wider cultural mix.

The PIH website has some great resources and is jammed packed with useful information and it is amazing that it has been providing this service for 50 years! I have joined as a Trustee to hopefully help to make the charity have a wider reach especially to those of second and third generations of mixed race people, and to be a useful source of reference for as much useful information as possible for mixed race people, their families and those wanting more information.

# Shine

Ten steps to your child's brightest future



## Shine: Ten steps to your child's brightest future by Tara Aisha

Published by Maple Publishers, 2022

ISBN 9781915492586

Review by Sherena Corfield

Shine highlights the critical role of emotional intelligence in parenting. The author—a mother, teacher and therapist—believes that parents must take care of their own mental and emotional health to

create happiness in their children. Throughout its ten steps, the book supports readers to uncover and deal with their own emotional patterns, behaviours and issues that could affect their child's life.

Aisha grounds much of the book in her own difficult childhood experiences due to being mixed race and singled out as different. The negative feelings that adults can carry from feeling 'other' as a child will resonate with many who read this magazine, I'm sure.

The book's style is candid and disarming. Aisha aims to have a friendly coffee chat with the reader, and she absolutely achieves this. The combination of very personal anecdotes, vivid metaphors and direct, accessible language helps connect readers to challenging topics, as well as easing them into reflecting on their behaviour.

The short, stylish worksheets at the end of the book help the advice to sink in and show how to apply the learning to everyday life. Each chapter contains countless positive mantras and words of encouragement from someone who clearly empathises with a parent's struggle to do better for their child.

However, I would welcome more details on how to work through some of the issues that are brought to light and some more words given to how it's ok to not always feel happy. On occasions the message 'if I can do it, so can you' jars with Aisha's otherwise forgiving and supportive attitude, as this advice could lead some people in difficult walks of life to internalise blame.

Overall, the book offers an informal and approachable way for parents to think about and work on their mental and emotional behaviours to positively help their children shine bright.

# “And”

REVIEW OF

## BY ISABEL ADONIS

Isabel Adonis has written a most unusual autobiography in a lyrical, poetical style. She describes it as a memoir of her mother but really it is a more personal memoir of her early life, and focusses on her father as much as on her mother.

Isabel Adonis is the daughter of a Welsh woman, Catherine Hughes, and the celebrated Guyanese artist, Denis Williams, whose work has been exhibited in the Tate Gallery. Her mother had been married previously before the war and then had a war baby with a black American serviceman, who left her and returned to the USA. She then met Denis Williams, who was working in the Civil Service in Guyana but came to London on a scholarship. He was several years younger than her but they married and lived in London initially where Denis was working at the Central School of Art and the Slade School of Art.

Denis Williams then took his family to Khartoum in the Sudan where he was offered work. Isabel sees this as him looking for the “dark continent” and for himself, the black man, because he had been brought up in Guyana as though he was white, with British cultural values. She recounts her memories of the boat trip and of starting school there and paints a picture of herself as looking like her father, the “dark daughter”, the son her mother really wanted, with her father’s temperament, and describes sitting under

his desk while he worked, desperate for his attention, which he could not give.

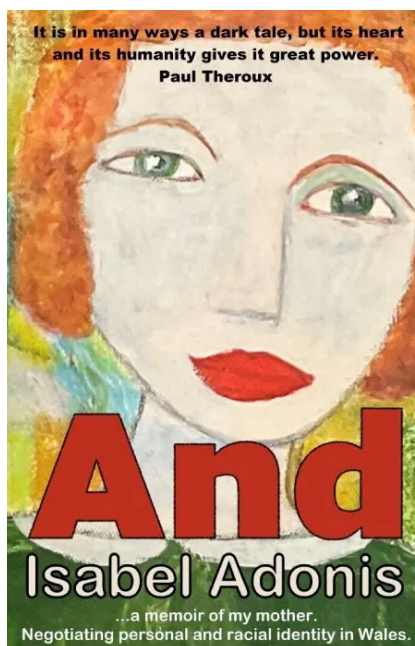
The family returned to Wales for Catherine’s youngest child to be born but Denis then returned to Africa, and the family went to and fro’ for a while but never really lived together again, and eventually her father formed a new relationship and a new family in Africa.

Denis became famous for his paintings and for his scholarly work about Africa and the continent’s artistic history. Isabel is unforgiving, feeling that he operated as a “default white man”, and angry that the family and her mother are abandoned to poverty, despite her mother devoting herself to him and his needs for many years. She notes that in her parents’ marriage there could only be one who was in control,

with it being her mother in the house, and her father in the car and in the world of work, with the mother, father and children all living in separate worlds. She does not make the connection that this would be true of many traditional marriages but perhaps it speaks more to a lack of warmth and affection within the family.

This book has much to say about race, colonialism and its consequences, identity, and family complexities, and implicitly touches on the difficulties in cross-cultural relationships. It is very much a personal account, but written in a unique and rhythmic way.

By Cindy Matthews



*“And...a memoir of my mother” by Isabel Adonis  
published by Black Bee Books 2022*

ISBN: 978-1-913853-10-5



# Events

2023

## MONTHLY EVENT



**PEOPLE IN HARMONY**  
 Making Mixed Race Matter

**Members CHAT Zooms**

**Where: Online**  
**When: 1st Tuesday of Month**  
**Time: 7:00pm onwards**

[pih.org.uk](http://pih.org.uk)  
Charity no. 104356 Company reg. no. 2424930



## ANNUAL EVENT

**PIH AGM/ANNUAL EVENT 2023**  
 making mixed race matter

**Saturday 4th November 11:30am - 4:00pm**  
 Living Space, London SE1 7BE



