

BEING BRITISH

By Deanna Rodger

I always get asked,
'Where do you come from?'
My repeated reply is
'London.'

The town that sheltered a mother fleeing from war-torn land,
baby in belly given chance to be a man,
a city of prosperity.
She sought jobs allowing her to keep her dignity, independently
living in a state,
not off it.
Her benefit,
one son,
a bright boy of renewable energy.
He knew all he'd ever be
was a product of the city that changed his destiny.'

'OK,'
they say,
'but what country?'
I breathe deeply,

swallowing sarcastic syllables, and exhale,
'Great Britain.
The island
throned in seas that channelled safety.
She carried men to defend
countrysides scattered with towns full of factories.
The curator of colonies
voiced view to keep view,
exploit used to heavily recruit
natural warlikes
to fight aggressively,
with strength and bravery.
Fifty-two thousand casualties,
Ghurkhas' support
over two world wars.
Nearly half a million fought for
Great Britain.'
I'm teasing them,

because although it's not a lie
I know it's not the desired response



POEMS

and so am not surprised when they reply,
'Where are your parents from?'

See, I can't hide pigment skin within words,
whether fact or fiction.

So I tell them

I'm a product of miscegenation.

That my parents' parents are from Jamaica and Scotland.

Raised in England,

they found love and made life in London
to birth and breed a British girl.

So while I'm an addict for hard food,

I fiend for the smell of 'eggs an' ba'on' in the morning,

I'm a sucker for a cuppa

and I'll batter a fish and chips in less than fifteen minutes.

I was raised by the church and educated by EastEnders.

Friday nights of teenage life were spent going on drink benders.

I can't pretend, 'cause

all I know is GB

and I suppose on paper I could quite possibly read as

an ideal recruit in the BNP,

wear my balaclava too high so my eyes can't see

the route of my journey to the RWB,

ticket's the qualifications on my CRB,

five for hate crimes would get me VIP.

But a face-to-face interview

would refuse my application

on the grounds that those I walk on are not my birthright nation,

profile is proof of racial integration,

defies the silent slogan of skin-based segregation

and as the tick box of White/Caribbean is crossed

my rights are wrong and I should politely get lost.

Pack bags,

try to find where I belong.

But before I'm forced to leave

I'll leave thoughts to ponder on.

Where do you, your parents

And your ancestors come from.