

Traversing Racial Boundaries: Thoughts on a Rainbow Nation

Tana Nolethu Forrest

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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By Tana Nolethu Forrest

# Acknowledgements



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# Abstract



This research begins to reflect on how multiracial families navigate racialised difference in everyday life in South Africa. It utilises qualitative data collected in both Mahikeng and Cape Town, to throw light on various people's lived experience of race in South Africa, whilst concurrently drawing from the large discourse on race in South Africa and elsewhere. The findings suggest that multiracial families are interacting with the remnants of Apartheid still evident in South Africa - most notably in discourses of racially homogenous kinship and racial categorisation – whilst concurrently thinking about new ways to engage with and envision possibilities beyond the dominant discourses of race evident in South Africa at present. These possibilities take the forms of recognising kinship which crosses racial and biological boundaries, engaging with the limitations of Apartheid racial categorisation in a space where Apartheid and all legislation pertaining to interracial relationships has been dismantled, and formulating new language with which to accommodate racial diversity. This implies that whilst South Africa remains haunted by its past, possibilities for alternative ways of engaging with race are emerging. The research contributes to on-going debates about how racialised difference is accommodated within post-apartheid South Africa. It allows for critical reflection on (a) the state of the family in South Africa; (b) formations of difference and similarity and (c) the ways in which historically racialised discourse and practice remain embedded in everyday social interactions.

*South Africa we sing a song of strength. We go on like a rolling train forever we never let gravity become too familiar because we, we were always meant to fly. (Sarah Kay, Tshotsholoza)*

# Chapter 1



## *On Location*

In 1991 I was given permission to enter South Africa for the first time since 1980 and visited with my small daughter who was just over 1 and was shocked to be told by a good friend of mine that Tana was too white...for a black child. It had not occurred to me that having a mixed race child meant that people would categorise her as black as though her white mother did not exist and had no part in her genetic make-up. My fury at this was extreme - how a woman carries a child in her for nine months, is the main care giver, and yet somehow the child is seen as only black like the father is still something I do not understand.

But that visit made me aware that we were on show in South Africa – that we were a question mark which raised all sorts of strange notions with regard to race and that I needed to give Tana a clear definition of herself for when we came back or else she would be labelled 'coloured' which was a distinct social group to which she had no connection.

To me she was the 'future' a child of the new South Africa and the Apartheid categories simply did not work. Under Apartheid it would have been illegal for me to have my daughter. With the end of Apartheid we had to start imagining and creating lives differently - the rainbow nation concept - but still it hasn't happened. Linguistically South Africa has not made the effort to move into the racial future. We seem to be tied to our past even when the future is here and mixed race children have to imagine their place with no help from our leaders who use the same old racial categories and terms even while they talk about the rainbow nation. That is very strange – because ending Apartheid implies an end to separation and the beginning of mixing (personal correspondence, 2014).

The words above were written by my mother – they trace her understandings of race and the reasons why she chose to equip me with the terminology of “mixed-race” when she was explaining race to me as a child. My mother cites the reproduction of Apartheid racial terminology in post-Apartheid South Africa; she cites the intersection of gender and race in the practice exercised during Apartheid with non-white couples of different categories which took the father’s racial classification in order to classify the children and not the mother’s; she cites the continued separations between people in post-Apartheid South Africa, and underscores the lack of blurring the boundaries. My experiences of race in South Africa have fallen along similar lines – most notably the struggle has been one of categorisation, of the need for people and institutions to categorise and my lack of fit into a category. Such notions have intersected with my relationship to my mother, and the continued presumption that we are not mother and daughter because of our differing racial appearances. These are the reasons why I entered into this project – I sought to map the experiences of others in similar positions to mine, of people

with parents of different races and their experiences in South Africa. This essay is about sharing their experiences, which although different are undeniably linked to one other and to me – as a researcher I am inextricably involved in this project, perhaps more so due to the personal reasons behind its beginning. bell hooks (1989) asked “Who is speaking and to whom. Where do we locate ourselves and comrades?”(hooks, 1989:209) – I am speaking with my participants; we are speaking to each other with the hopes of being heard by South Africa.

## Introduction

The history of Apartheid in South Africa, which saw the classification of people into four different race groups -Black, White, Indian and Coloured- and the segregation of those groups from each other, has yet to be erased from the post-Apartheid landscape, both literally and figuratively. South Africa’s history of racial segregation lingers in the present - not only in the ever-growing discourse on the historical construction and significance of race in post-Apartheid South Africa, which emphasises the importance of recognising the traces of the past in the present, but in the geographical and institutional spaces of the country. If one looks at the city of Cape Town, one finds a very much racially divided geographical landscape - a clear example of Apartheid’s legacy (see Western, 1996: xix). Further, one need only look at official documents such as census data records, or the University of Cape Town’s application forms, to see that, although contested, Apartheid’s four racial categories are still utilised and institutionalised in the post-Apartheid setting, namely in order to redress the racialised inequalities wrought by Apartheid (see Suttner, 2011).

The idea that the racial categories of Apartheid were constructed by the Apartheid Government has been widely discoursed by numerous scholars (see West 1988, Duncan 2002; Posel 2001; Stevens et al., 2006)<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the constructed nature of these racial categories, focussing on race and racial categorising is still very much a part of contemporary South Africa, or the “Rainbow Nation” (see Stevens et al., 2006 and Reddy, 2001). Unfortunately, this has left little room for accommodating racial diversity, or for acknowledging the potential complexities of racial categorising in post-Apartheid South Africa. The perpetuation of the use of historically saturated and static racial categories in a country where the legal framework of Apartheid has been dismantled and where people who identify with races not listed in the aforementioned categories live, overlooks the potential for diversity and assumes that racial categorisation remains a simple task. The institutionalised assumption that is part and parcel of

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<sup>1</sup> I elaborate on this discourse in Chapter 2.

requiring those living in present day South Africa to choose a racial category from the Apartheid past in official documents such as Census questionnaires, and the pervasiveness of racial categorisation in everyday life in South Africa (see Price, 2014 and Lajake, 2014) suggests that choosing such a category is easy and clear-cut for South Africans and people living in South Africa today. Further, it ignores the force with which racial categories were attached to people's bodies and embedded in the landscape during Apartheid. Such categories do not account for the various other factors that contribute to identifying with a racial category, as well as the ways in which such identification can change over time and depending on context. In short, it could be said that the notion of the "Rainbow Nation" perpetuates the idea of people situated in different, linear racial categories living next to one another as opposed to together.

The initial aim of this project was to begin to answer the question of how families made up of people categorised in different race groups navigate racialised difference in everyday life in South Africa. Its purpose was to critically assess the current formulations of race, culture and family as constituted by state institutions (such as Social Development, courts, education systems) and as lived by multiracial families. The sample was to include interracial couples and their children, as well as multiracial families created through adoption. Here, the term multiracial is used to refer to families made up of people who are categorised into different race groups – these families can be biological or adoptive. The term mixed-race/mixed refers to children who have biological parents who are categorised into different race groups, whilst the term interracial refers to partners who are of different races.

On beginning my research, the scope of this endeavour and the participants with whom I engaged caused me to refine my approach. My initial plan supposed a generalisation of the varied experiences of different kinds of multiracial families, which proved very early on to be problematic. In short, I assumed that I could group together the experiences of biological multiracial families and adoptive multiracial families, when in reality so doing would not allow for me to engage with the specificities of each in a Masters Research project. It emerged that although the experiences of various kinds of multiracial families may have been similar, the politics of interracial adoption in South Africa – the legislative adoption processes, interactions with social workers, and bureaucracy for example - required significant attention which had the potential to shift the focus of the project. Further, the majority of participants with whom I came to engage early on in the project came from multiracial families who were biologically

related to one another which further contributed to my refining my scope to focus solely on experiences such as theirs.

The focus thus become more specific and asked how biologically related multiracial families navigate racialised difference in everyday life in South Africa. The research contributes to on-going debates about how racialised difference is accommodated within post-apartheid South Africa. It allows for critical reflection on (a) the state of the family in South Africa; (b) formations of difference and similarity and (c) the ways in which historically racialised discourse and practice remain embedded in everyday social interactions.

For interracial couples and their children, the task of categorisation – be it institutionally or socially - poses difficulties. The ways in which parents negotiate these difficulties - the ways in which parents prepare their children for the institutionalised and social need in South Africa to racially categorise themselves was of interest to me. What emerged was the continued prevalence of ideas of race and kinship that pertained to discourses of Apartheid.

In the same way that fragments of Apartheid can be located in the post-Apartheid landscape, so too can they be located in contemporary understandings of race and kinship; the assumption prevails that families share a racial appearance; racial categorising prevails and along with it the assumption that processes of racial categorisation are straight forward, which rests upon the idea that families are racially homogeneous; the language of race in South Africa is drenched in references to Apartheid. In many ways these assumptions echo the regime of Apartheid South Africa which attempted to keep people of the same race together, and prevent people of different races from having relationships with each other as equals. At the same time, however, instances emerged during my research which countered these dominant discourses – I discovered families who exist across racial boundaries, as well as families who are not informed by genealogy, confronting the dominant discourses of race and kinship. Racial categorising is being both reproduced and countered through the production of new language with which to think about race, highlighting the tension between discourses of the past and discourses of the present. It is thus at the margins of these dominant discourses that possibilities emerge with which to think about new ways to envision a future that takes note of, but is not imbricated by, Apartheid's past, making this research essential to the post-Apartheid discourse on how people living in South Africa have attempted to overcome and navigate Apartheid's remnants of racial categorisation and segregation.

## Sample

I looked for parents involved in interracial relationships due to the fact that I was interested in the intersection between race and family as opposed to individual experiences of race outside of the family structure. This explains the varying ages of my participants – all of them were parents but became parents at different times and had children of different ages.

Many of the families with whom I worked inspired my desire to begin this research in the first place – I had heard about their experiences of race in South Africa and the questions they had been faced with which did not recognise their positions as racially heterogeneous families. I worked with five families whom I introduce below – Jean-Louise, Seamus and Jeremy; Meryl, Robert and Thato; Nella, Arjun and Aditi; Ellen, Aunty Joanie and Mina; Lola, Christopher and Alice. Four of the families were biologically related, and one of them – Meryl and Robert’s family - was created through adoption. With Meryl and Robert I focused more on the aspects of the couple’s understandings of race from the perspective of those in an interracial relationship than their experiences with bureaucratic processes of adoption. In the initial stages of the research I also interviewed a social worker from Mahikeng who had experience with facilitating adoption between parents and children of different races.

Jean-Louise (29), Jeremy (3) and Seamus (29), all live in Cape Town. I met Jean-Louise in 2009 at University and we have been friends since we met. Jean Louise and Seamus are no longer together and have shared-custody of Jeremy, who spends the majority of his time (5 or more nights a week) with Jean-Louise. Jean-Louise works at a University and is currently completing a Master’s degree. Seamus has a business which specialises in the design of furniture and house-ware for which he received a tertiary qualification. Jean-Louise identifies as mixed-race and is from South Africa. Seamus is from Northern Ireland and identifies as white. I asked Jean-Louise to participate due to my knowledge of her experiences of race in South Africa as a child with parents of different races, as the partner of a man of a different race, and as the mother of a mixed-race child.

Meryl (early 40s), Robert (50s) and their son Thato (3) live together in Cape Town. Meryl is Nella’s cousin and I met her when she adopted Thato in 2010. Meryl works for Government and Robert has his own security company. The family utilises the term “black” to refer to themselves in a political sense, whilst concurrently recognising that if they adhered to the use of racial categories, theirs would be Coloured, Indian and Black respectively. Nella suggested

I reach out to Meryl due to the various ways in which she had been confronted about her and Thato's varying racial appearances.

Nella (50s) and Arjun (50s) are a married couple who live together with their daughter Aditi (15) in Mahikeng. I met their family in 2007 through my mother who worked with Arjun. Nella identifies as Coloured, Arjun identifies as Indian and Aditi identifies as mixed-race. Nella and Arjun both have medical backgrounds and Aditi is in High School. I asked them to participate as a result of my awareness of their experiences with discourses of racial homogeneity and kinship.

Ellen (30), Mina (3) Aunty Joanie (67) live in Mahikeng. Ellen is Aditi's dance teacher and Aunty Joanie is retired. Ellen identifies as coloured – she is divorced and is a single mother to Mina whose father identifies as black. Aunty Joanie is a widow who identifies as mixed. Nella recommended that I speak to Ellen due to the fact that she had mentioned my project to her and she had voiced interest. Ellen recommended that I speak to her friend Lola, who she thought would be interested.

Lola (30s), Christopher (9) and Alice (6) live together in Mahikeng. Lola is a student and friend of Ellen who put me in touch with her. She is a divorced, single mother who works at a law firm and is completing a degree in law. Lola identifies as black and her ex-husband identifies as white.

### Methodology

I conducted six weeks of fieldwork over two sites in South Africa – Mahikeng and Cape Town – in 2013, rotating through the houses of each set of my participants. These sites were chosen as a result of my existing relationships with participants, as discussed above.

Initially I held informal interviews with participants in order to introduce the project and familiarise them with my research questions. Thereafter, the majority of my research took place in the form of informal group discussions with participants which were recorded and transcribed unless participants stipulated otherwise in which case I took written notes. I would initiate a group discussion with two or more family members and let them feed off each other as opposed to making use of an interview schedule. Usually I asked participants a question pertaining to their experiences relating to my research questions and thereafter allowed for them to engage with one another. If the conversation ended I would interject with another question that could elicit useful information. For example, if a participant used race to describe

someone (e.g. “that’s a coloured” or “Indian people...”) I would ask them to explain their understanding of race in that instance. Or, if a participant began to say something I thought was interesting but was interrupted by someone else I would ask them to finish what they were saying later on in the discussion. A lot of the time my questions requested participants to expand upon a thought or idea they had voiced which they assumed everyone would understand, in order to capture the multifaceted nature of the data. Not only did this approach allow for more informal discussions, but it enabled the participants to steer the conversation in a direction that suited them, thus enabling them to participate in shaping the research project, as recommended in Anthropology Southern Africa’s code of conduct (2005).

Most of the group discussions took place at either mine or my participant’s homes depending on what they were comfortable with. I hosted a dinner party with three of the families involved in my research which resulted in less talk about my research and more social engagement – in this instance I simply took part in the evening and wrote down field notes the next morning. Nevertheless I resolved not to organise such a large scale event with the aims of having a group discussion as it was too difficult to facilitate conversation in such a large group. The majority of discussions thus involved one or two families.

Alongside these discussions I conducted participant observation, which was dependent on people’s schedules and my level of familiarity with each family. Some participants simply did not have the time to allow me to observe and engage in their everyday activities, and thus invited me to their houses for meals and tea which allowed for simultaneous participant observation and discussion. Other participants did not offer to spend time with me outside of our allocated meetings, and I followed their lead based on how much they were willing to give to the project.

A significant amount of my participant observation was conducted with Nella and her family, perhaps due to the proximity between our two families which meant that we already spent the majority of our evenings together prior to the start of my research. In this instance, having participants with whom I was already close benefitted my research and also raised questions, with which I engage in Chapter 3.

### Ethical considerations

My primary ethical consideration was my existing proximity to the majority of the participants. I already had close relationships with Nella’s family and Jean-Louise’s family which meant

that there was an element of trust on their part in my ability to respect their wishes. I believe I have done so and have maintained the integrity of their contributions.

Another ethical consideration was the involvement of children. The only child I actively engaged with was Aditi who was 15. I obtained her parents' permission prior to speaking with her, as well as her permission. I also asked if her parents would prefer to be present during all our discussions, however they did not think that was necessary.

An additional concern with regards to working with families was how my research may affect the participants. All participants were given full information about what the scope of the project was, and thereafter expressed interest in engaging. I spoke with Nella and Arjun about the potential effects the research could have on Aditi but they were confident that she was fully aware of notions of race and had her own opinions about it and were thus not concerned that the research would enter into a conversation about something novel.

### Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the contemporary discourses of race in South Africa towards the end of Apartheid and post-Apartheid, as well as discourses on race from elsewhere. These discourses highlight not only the importance of acknowledging the historical position of race in South Africa in relation its position in the present, but underscore the importance of looking at individual experiences of race in the everyday. Chapter 3 analysis the experiences of my participants and myself which unsettle notions of kinship that are bounded by notions of racial homogeneity and consanguinity. The chapter engages with the possibilities of kinship which exists across racial boundaries and is not informed by genealogy. Chapter 4 interrogates the ways in which participant's experiences of race have been shaped according to their context and generation. It interrogates how discourses of racial homogeneity have influenced multiracial families in the past and the ways in which people engage with these discourses in the present. Chapter 5 argues that the language and categorisation of race in post-Apartheid South Africa still references Apartheid South Arica, whilst concurrently recognising the existence of a contradiction evident between the language of the past and the emergence of new racialised terminology in the present. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by highlighting the possibilities for envisioning the future when positioned on the margins of dominant discourses of race and kinship.

## Chapter 2



### *Entering into the Race*

Much of the social scientific and historical discourse on race in South Africa towards the end of and after Apartheid, looks at the ways in which discourses of race have been constructed and mobilised in order to justify and perpetuate systems of domination and inequality such as Apartheid (see Mbembe, 2014; Prah, 2002; Posel, 2001; Marx, 1998; West, 1988 ). These discourses thus acknowledge that race is a social construct, whilst concurrently acknowledging the powerful effects such a construct has had on people's lives in South Africa (see Stevens et al., 2006 and Dixon and Tredoux, 2006). Guillaumin (1999) eloquently captures this contradiction; “[n]o, race does not exist. And yet it does. Not in the way people think; but it remains the most tangible, real and brutal of realities” (Guillaumin, 1999:362 as cited in Jaynes, 2010:397).

When thinking critically about the position of race in contemporary South Africa, this literature remains central to our analyses due to the importance it places on acknowledging the processes of constructing race that have occurred through time. In so doing it allows for the recognition of the remnants of the past in the present. Post-Apartheid South Africa then, should be understood in relation to South Africa's long and painful history of racial segregation, inequality and discrimination. In addition to identifying the value of the historical in the contemporary when thinking about the position of race in this country, much of the discourse on race also suggests that we concurrently acknowledge how race intersects with conditions of gender, class, socio-economic and political circumstances. Race then is not only constructed *over* time, but constructed constantly, and in *relation to* various socio-political conditions.

Scholars of race in South Africa have grappled with the ways in which discourses of race were constructed and utilised during Apartheid. Anthropologists such as Martin West (1988) have argued that during Apartheid, the racial classification of population groups ensued as a result of the Apartheid government's desire to ensure those classified as white maintained economic and political superiority over those classified as non-white. This implies that when thinking about race, we must not focus solely on the ways in which it is legitimated - i.e. the biological

and cultural explanations which justify racial domination – but on the ways in which explanations of race are *mobilised* in relation to broader structures. West (1988), along with others (see Duncan, 2002 and Posel, 2001) argues that during Apartheid, discourses of race and racialised difference were naturalised in order to legitimate the continued domination over and segregation of people classified as non-white, by those classified as white. Not only were those deemed non-white organised spatially and geographically, giving the state control over the distribution of South African land, but they were exploited for their labour which served to grow the economic positioning of the white-governed State and reproduce capitalist modes of production (Wolpe, 1972:253).

West (1988) traces the vague and imprecise nature of the racial definitions utilised in the Population Registration Act of 1950, which was one of the seminal building blocks of the Apartheid system. Additionally, Deborah Posel (2001) speaks about the centrality of the Population Registration Act to the enforcement of the National Party's Agenda of maintaining "racial purity" as well as strengthening the power of the state. Posel (2001) highlights the rigidity with which the Apartheid government enforced a political system of racial domination, segregation and classification which were built upon years of racial discrimination in South Africa. Posel understands racial categories as significantly interconnected with social hierarchies and thus opportunities/access to various services. Further, she notes how aligning discourses of racial difference with social hierarchies validated eugenic discourses of race (see also Dubow, 1992). In short, the class differences evident between races perpetuated social hierarchies and thus enforced the notion that non-white races were inferior to the white race as a result of their position at the top of the social and thus racial hierarchy.

Studies of the history of racial classification in South Africa have also included insights on the intersection between discourses of race and gender. West (1988) and Posel (2001) highlight that during Apartheid, women in interracial couples were made to change their classifications to that of their male partner's unless said partner was white in which case the partner would have to change their classification to that of their non-white partner, showing how race came to be decided alongside a heterosexual, male-headed and racially hierarchical vision of family. Jonathon Hyslop (1993) elucidates the ways in which changing gendered relations in the white working class prior to the start of Apartheid, contributed to the National Party's agenda of

racial purity, which became manifest in the implementation of the Mixed-Marriages Act<sup>2</sup> of 1949. The Act sought to prevent marriage between the races and was cast under the guise of “protecting” white women from the threat of non-white men. Hyslop (1993) understands this dialogue in relation to the ways in which patriarchal family structures of white families were unsettled due to a significant increase in a white female workforce and thus a rise in female bread winners; the influx of black labour into urban centres which resulted in competition for employment; and the significant rise of the independence of white working class women which raised concern about their sexual activities out of wedlock and especially across racial boundaries in the unsegregated urban areas where they lived. Ultimately, Hyslop (1993) situates these factors as contributing to a threat to the hierarchical status of white men in relation to white women and non-white men. That the Mixed Marriages Act was one of the Apartheid State’s first pieces of legislation, preceding the Population registration Act of 1950, speaks to the long-standing unequal gendered and racialised relations in South Africa, as well as the ways in which they intersect, exemplifying how the construction of racial discourses can seep into the production and maintenance of gendered inequalities and vice versa.

Conversations such as those above have sought to underscore the constructed nature of racial discourses and highlight the purposes they served during Apartheid through the historical analysis of secondary materials. They have contributed to a conversation about the intersection of discourses of race with discourses of gender, politics and economy. Further, they have served to add nuance to our understanding of Apartheid. Often we run the risk of reducing Apartheid relations to a simple discourse of the dominant vs. the dominated without acknowledging the nuances in both dominant and dominated groups that allowed for the enforcement of such racist and violent structures. Here we see how patriarchy and concern over class informed Apartheid policies. We also see that relationships within the dominant group were in fact layered and hierarchical; that there were those who were dominated within the broader dominant group.

Whilst some have underscored the complexities of the construction of race during Apartheid, other scholars have sought to highlight the ways in which people attempted to resist the structures implemented by the Apartheid government. Scholars of South Africa are not only trying to acknowledge the traces of the past in the present but are doing so in order to understand what the prospects are for the future. Academics are engaging with global

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<sup>2</sup> The Mixed Marriages Act was preceded by the Immorality Act of 1927, which banned sexual relations between white and black people. It was later amended (1950) to prohibit sexual relations between European (later ‘white’) and non-European (later ‘non-white’) persons.

discourses on race such as those produced by seminal scholar Paul Gilroy (2001), who spoke about the need to interrogate the possibilities of belonging and togetherness beyond race, and noted that it is important to think about the potential for factors other than race to bring people together in order to confront and resist racial hierarchies. In other words, he suggested moving away from race – even when race is situated as a catalyst for togetherness - in order to overturn racial hierarchies. David Theo Goldberg (2009) and Kelly Gillespie (2010), have engaged with such suppositions in relation to South Africa. For example, they grapple with the possibilities of moving beyond racialism in post-Apartheid South Africa and ask whether this is a valid option in light of the continued racialised inequalities in the country. Along with scholars such as Achille Mbembe (2014), who noted the need for antiracist struggles to keep up with “mutating” forms of racism, Goldberg (2009) and Gillespie (2010) engage with discourses of non-racialism in South Africa in order to recall the term and think about how to reframe it in order to accommodate the present circumstances.

Where Goldberg (2009) critiques non-racialism and implicates it as conservative in that it advocates disregarding race and in so doing does not address the underlying structures that have intersected with and been shaped by discourses of race, Gillespie (2010) warns us not to reify discourses of non-racialism, and to acknowledge the existence of various non-racialisms, some of which have underlined the relationship between race and class and have thus spoken to the connection between race and larger political-economic structures.

Gillespie (2010) goes about this by eloquently engaging with the non-racialism posed by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during Apartheid, of which Steven Biko was a seminal member, and the non-racialism of the Unity Movement of which Neville Alexander was a member. Importantly, Gillespie (2010) highlights that where the Black Consciousness Movement steered towards discourses of the multiracial, the Unity Movement felt that there should be no collaboration with the ideas put forward by the Apartheid government and thus rejected the idea of multiracialism. In other words, whilst the Black Consciousness Movement acknowledged the idea of racial/national difference, the Unity Movement underscored class as contributing to ideas of racial difference and sought to utilise this explanation in deconstructing racial difference. The Unity Movement postulated the idea of an “African Identity” as opposed to multiracial South African identities, in order to propel notions of unity forward. Gillespie (2010) suggests that if the experiences of many people in South Africa were racialised, then perhaps the Unity Movement’s insistence on a rejection of racialised terms prevented it from gaining major support. Larger academic and post-Apartheid legislative discourses have

underpinned the necessity of continuing to use racialised language and constructs in order to acknowledge and address the continued existence of racial inequalities in South Africa (see Posel, 2001).

Finally, Gillespie (2010) highlights the volatility of race and says it cannot be ignored or embraced. Additionally, she suggests that we must not be constrained by the present when thinking about the possibilities of the future (see also Mbembe, 2014). This is not to say that we must ignore our present conditions, but that we must not let them limit our visions of the future. Further, these visions should recognise the relevance of discourses of the past when thinking about possibilities for the future – a theme which is referenced throughout this thesis. Scholars such as Gillespie (2010) are thus underlining the value that discourses of the past may have in the present, through providing thorough and nuanced analyses of the circumstances in which these discourses were created. Again, the focus is on engaging theoretically with discourses of the past in relation to the present.

Alongside highlighting the impact of racial discourses in South Africa, scholars continue to engage with these discourses in a way that creates space for visions of the future. Whilst paying attention to such literature in order to expand our contextual understandings of race in contemporary South Africa is important, it is as important to acknowledge the endeavours of scholars from various socio-scientific disciplines to locate the impact of broader frameworks of - among other things - gender inequality, political economy and class divisions on people's individual experiences of race in the everyday (see Holt, 1995). As Raymond Suttner notes, "embracing different racial realities is to acknowledge and integrate different South African experiences" (Suttner, 2011). These realities are no doubt diverse and nuanced, meaning that it remains imperative to include the voices of those about whom we theorise in our research (see Duncan, 2002) and our subsequent writing in order to produce theory which is multivocal. This applies to all fields of research that include discoursing about people and interpersonal experiences.

### Experiencing Race

The discourse relating to people's experiences of race is vast and rich. Zimitri Erasmus (2001), for example, has written about her experiences living in South Africa, and the complexities that come with claiming a Coloured racial identity. Importantly, she confronts the assumption that Coloured-ness requires choosing between black or white racial identities. For Erasmus (2001), Coloured-ness is not about choosing one over the other or aiming to be black or white, but

rather living with elements of both; “when one lives aspects of both these cultural identities having to choose one means the denial of some part of oneself. This is not easy, especially when one’s actions are judged in these stark racial terms” (Erasmus, 2001:2). Erasmus aims to highlight the fluidity of notions of coloured-ness as well as indicate its position as neither black nor white but as existing always with elements of both blackness and whiteness.

Seminal scholars such as W.E.B DuBois and Frantz Fanon, also theorised about race in their respective contexts of The United States of America and the Antilles. From the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, both men grappled with the ways in which the colour of one’s skin shaped one’s experiences of the world, as well as one’s understandings of oneself. Although situated in two different locales, aspects of the work of both scholars remain central to contemporary discourses on race, and to this thesis as it too is an investigation into the ways in which constructions of race come to influence our experiences.

Where Fanon (2008) wrote with anger in *Black Skins, White Masks* at the position of inferiority black men occupied in relation to those who were white, DuBois’ (2006) writing in *The Souls of Black Folk* is coated with an air of sadness. DuBois (2006) is famous for his discussion of the double-consciousness occupied by African Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One Ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois, 2006: 9).

The presence of the other in oneself is evocative, especially but not only in relation to race. DuBois (2006) presents the possibility that the only way for black people to know themselves is “through the eyes of others” (loc.cit). He speaks to the potential for their grasps on themselves to be loosened by the grips of white others, as they struggle and tug for the right to define who they really are. The colour of one’s skin becomes a metaphorical tool in this dualistic notion of the self – the outside sheath provides the information to those who view it about the contents of the inside. As inhabitants of the skin we battle against these notions, and yet we cannot always stop them from reaching us - the skin does not appear to be strong enough to protect us from that.

Fanon (2008) also underscored the influence white notions of blackness had on black men’s’ understandings of themselves. His work incorporates psychology into his analysis as he unpicks the complex relationship between blackness and whiteness in a context wrought with traces of colonialism. Again the notion of twoness is present – in what Fanon (2008) says the

black man *is* and what he thinks the black man *ought to be*. Importantly, his notion of blackness is deeply intertwined with notions of whiteness – a proximity he quite clearly resents. Unlike DuBois (2006), who paints a picture of a struggle for the right to be recognised outside of the limitations of racism, Fanon (2008) implies a struggle within oneself as a result of colonisation and the internalisation by black men of the superiority of whiteness over blackness. The idea of ingesting these exterior notions of oneself, and then watching as they become glued to one's sense of self is powerful.

Of equal importance, are DuBois'(2006) and Fanon's(2008) interrogations of the meaning of blackness in both contexts - this speaks to the importance of not simply utilising racialised terms such as "black" and "white" without exploring what they mean. In responding to Fanon and DuBois, Thomas Holt (1995) noted that the use of racialised terms in our everyday lives should be understood in relation to our broader contexts and not in isolation so that we can begin to understand why it is that we use them in the first place (see also Hartigan, 2013). When trying to overcome the learned racism both Fanon (2008) and DuBois (2006) speak of, that consists of knowing oneself based on notions fed to us from racist sources and in relationships of power, Holt (1995) - much like many of the other authors cited earlier- cites historicity as being central to this process.

Again we see the emphasis that has been placed by scholars of race, on the role of history in our analyses of race and racial identity. These analyses are not limited to the discourses produced in the academy, but extend into the realm of literature. Award winning authors such as Toni Morrison have spent decades trying to capture people's experiences of blackness in the United States of America (USA) through the medium of fiction. Her book, *The Bluest Eye* delves into racialised notions of beauty that situate whiteness as a pillar of beauty and blackness as inferior; "you ugly! Black and ugly!" (Morrison, 1999:71). Morrison (1999) movingly captures the self-hatred that may emerge as a result of not being able to recognise oneself as beautiful and black, whilst simultaneously outlining people's experience of gender-based violence and being poor.

Similarly, Heidi Durrow (2010) has explored people's experiences of having parents of different races. Her award-winning novel *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, tells the story of Rachel, who is sent to live with her grandmother as a child after her mother and siblings die under mysterious circumstances shortly after they relocate from Denmark to the USA. Durrow (2010) writes exquisitely about how Rachel learns what it means to be black in the USA, and

juxtaposes her experiences with the pain and anxiety Rachel's white mother suffered at raising her children in a country where they were constantly questioned about their racial ambiguity and made vulnerable to racist abuse. Interestingly, Rachel's experience of blackness is emphasised as being learned over time, and in constant flux;

There are fifteen black people in the class and seven white people. And there's me. There's another girl who sits in the back. Her name is Carmen LaGuardia, and she has hair like mine, my same color skin, and she counts as black. I don't understand how, but she seems to know (Rachel in Durrow, 2010:9).

And I think about the things that maybe made Pop feel alone, right in front of us, his family. No one knew how to cut his hair – he had tight black curls like other black people. And maybe he even had ash on his elbows and knees sometimes. He never told us he was black. He never told us we were (Durrow, 2010:80).

I guess I'll be someone like Aunt Loretta. Aunt Loretta is a black woman – the kind of woman I will be (Durrow, 2010:98).

When Jesse and Brick talk, I can forget that Jesse's white and I can forget that Brick's black. Or Brick's something like that. I don't ask Brick what he is. Brick is light-skinned with golden colors in his brown eyes. He could be black or Mexican or mixed like me. He's twenty-five and maybe at that age it doesn't matter (Durrow, 2010:202).

Rachel's experiences of race show how she learns to understand what it means to be black, whilst simultaneously battling with her lack of exposure to her father's racial identity due to his absence from her life. Rachel learns about blackness from those around her – from people such as Carmen and her Aunt Loretta. Thereafter she assumes she will be black in the same way that her aunt is – “I *guess* I'll be someone like Aunt Loretta” (Durrow, 2010:98, own emphasis added), the word “guess” implying that Rachel is unsure about what will happen – only to later distinguish herself as “mixed”. Importantly, even when identifying herself as mixed, Rachel still expresses doubt about her racial identity which is evident in her haunting postulation that when she is older race will not matter in the same way it did at the time.

Books such as Durrow's (2010) and Morrison's (1999) are important in that they give us insight into the ways in which people imagine race and how race can be experienced. Not only do they highlight the intersection between notions of race, gender, class and experiences of family, beauty and socio-economic positionality, but they emphasise the value that can be found in subjective everyday experiences of race. Further, Durrow (2010) in particular serves to exemplify the processes of constructing race and takes the conversation further by introducing the idea of the performativity (see Butler, 1988) of race – that race can be learned and performed as exemplified in the character of Rachel whose racial identity constantly shifts as she continues to discover herself. Such insights elucidate the ways in which literature and social theory may contribute to one another in different ways that serve to make our discourse

multifaceted and nuanced. Whilst the social theory discussed above focuses on the historical construction of race, the fiction referenced here sketches the everyday implications of those constructions. When read in tandem one catches a glimpse of both the individual and far-reaching implications of constructions of race.

Highlighting the history of racial constructs and people's experiences of race is an endeavour not limited to the realm of fiction or the academy. Race remains a pertinent topic in the media and popular culture in numerous spaces. Currently, the intersection of race and police brutality is being mapped in the USA - not only in the media but in poetry (see Danez Smith, 2014 - *not an elegy for Mike Brown*), and music (see Lauryn Hill, *Black Rage*) - as unarmed and innocent black men continue to be violently gunned down and beaten to death. Brazilian Soccer sensation Neymar's racial identity has come under the microscope recently in an article by Achal Prabhala (2014), which not only captures the pervasive and diverse categories of race captured in the census of 1976 conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, but suggests the soccer player's collusion with the opportunities of being white. In South Africa race is not only a subject of institutional deliberation as is evident in the University of Cape Town's recent debate about the use of racial categories in their admissions policy (see Price, 2014) but remains a pertinent topic of debate on social media platforms. This is exemplified in the recent controversy over two white students at the University of Pretoria who dressed up as domestic workers with black paint on their faces and posted pictures of themselves on Facebook – an act which saw their suspension from university and debates on social media such as Facebook and Twitter about whether painting one's face black is an act of racism (see Mail and Guardian, 2014).

These are but a few examples of the various platforms upon which race is being discoursed. The subject of race remains expansive, multifaceted and ever-growing, meaning that in order to think deeply about aspects of race one is forced to choose an angle with which to approach the conversation.

### Choosing an Angle

I chose – as expressed in the introduction – to focus my research on an aspect of race that is close to home; that of the experiences of those who are in interracial relationships and have children, or who have parents of different races. Scholars such as Jaynes (2010) and Sherman and Steyn (2009) acknowledge the lack of research on interracial relationships in South Africa, and this research thus contributes to this small, but growing, body of work.

As mentioned above, research has been conducted on the phenomenon of interracial relationships and marriages in South Africa, particularly prior to and during Apartheid (see Hyslop, 1993 and Sofer, 1949) which provide us with a historical background of how interracial marriage intersected with gender and economic relations in Apartheid South Africa as well as with the ways in which Apartheid understood interracial relations and marriage. Alongside such studies, research has been conducted more recently by scholars such as Claire Jaynes (2010) and Rebecca Sherman and Melissa Steyn (2009) with regard to the intersection of interracial intimate relationships in post-Apartheid South Africa with discourses of family, gender and racism to name but a few.

Where Jaynes argues that interracial relationships are useful when thinking about the “persistence of racial boundaries... against the backdrop of a supposedly liberal society, which promotes equal rights for all” (Jaynes, 2010:397). Sherman and Steyn (2009) see interracial relationships as uniquely positioned in the new South Africa due to the history of racial segregation in the country and the “official discourse encouraging non-racialism, diversity and multiculturalism” (Sherman and Steyn, 2009:69). Further they suggest that this contradiction influences interracial relationships today. Both articles highlight the value of considering interracial relationships when thinking about South Africa’s past and present in that these relationships are uniquely positioned to gauge whether or how understandings of race in South Africa have changed and how the past continues to reproduce itself in the present based on people’s responses to and understandings of race as manifested in interracial relationships.

Sherman and Steyn (2009) start by tracing the history of interracial relationships from the arrival of European settlers in the Cape in the mid-seventeenth century. They follow the increasing production of racist ideas and the stringency of the implementation of laws surrounding interracial relationships and marriage as the centuries passed, up until Apartheid where they enter into a similar conversation to that of Hyslop’s (1993) as discussed above. Thereafter they delve into their own research on contemporary interracial relationships conducted in Cape Town. They trace the interaction between the denial of race/racial difference and the notion of transgressing racialised taboos. Ultimately their work is positioned as contributing to a broader long-term study and is thus situated as an ongoing conversation about interracial relationships in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Jaynes (2010) examines the interaction between discourses of family and interracial relationships. She insists on the possibility for racism *within* interracial relationships and

families, providing evidence from interviews with participants who were part of interracial couples. Jaynes describes traditional notions of the white, male headed, heterosexual family as a “controlling institution” (p. 410) which has served to perpetuate racism in its production of family as racially homogenous, not to mention heterosexual and male-headed; “the meta discourse of the family is utilised to disguise (and thereby perpetuating) racism”(p.403);

In this discourse of the family, interracial couples and families pose a threat to the dominant model of the family, and the accompanying ideologies of femininity, patriarchy and white supremacy... the idealised construction of the family as nuclear, patriarchal, westernised, ethnocentric and conforming to racial hierarchies, is of value to the stability of the state. (Jaynes, 2010:409)

Jaynes (2010) consequently demonstrates how notions of pleasing one’s parents by not getting involved in interracial relationships were understood by participants in relation to being a good son or daughter by – to speak colloquially - keeping it in the family. Thus, participants utilised racist justifications for not wanting to be in interracial relationships that were masked by the guise of the family – the family then served to surreptitiously legitimate racism.

The relationship that Jaynes (2010) pinpoints between the institution of family and racial domination is central to this thesis. Through implicating the role of the racially homogenous and heteronormative family as a way of enforcing patriarchal and racial domination, Jaynes (2010) references a broader discourse about kinship that seeks to unsettle this dominant idea of family through recognising various manifestations of kinship. Kath Weston (1991) discusses the ways in which homosexual relationships were previously framed as a rejection of family and love, and were reduced to sexuality. This was based on the premise that heterosexual relationships provided a clear and biologically framed pathway to reproduction (as per the aforementioned narrative of domination) whilst homosexual relationships were the antithesis of this. Weston (1991) discusses the need to acknowledge homosexual friendships and intimate relationships as a form of kinship, thus rejecting biology as a premise for kinship and promoting the importance of the relationships we create that are by choice as opposed to by birth. Kinship then becomes multifaceted, and open to many different formations.

Along with acknowledging the relationship between biology and culture in notions of kinship, there has been a move away from trying to define and fix kinship, looking instead to everyday experiences and the ways in which people care for one another, as is evident in the work of Weston (1991). Scholars such as John Borneman (1997) have also postulated that anthropological studies of kinship have moved away from a need to categorise different types of kinship and toward gaining a better understanding of relationships of care - how they arise, how they are maintained as well as their political economic positionality. Seminal scholar on

kinship, Marshal Sahlins (2013), rejects the idea of kinship being rooted in biology and instead describes it in terms of “the mutuality of being” (Sahlins, 2013: 46). The mutuality of being is described as “conjoined existence” (Sahlins, 2013:44) in which experiencing the world becomes collaborative as opposed to limited to the experience of the individual. Instead this experience is interconnected with caring and people’s understandings of themselves. In short, it speaks to seeing oneself in another and knowing oneself through knowing another, which is not mimicking kinship but *is* in fact a form of kinship.

In the same way that scholars of race have sought to unsettle fixed understandings of race in order to underscore how discourses of race have been used in processes of control, so too have scholars of kinship sought to unravel the confines of the institution of family in order to situate it within relations of power not dissimilar or even separate to relations of racial domination as exemplified by Jaynes (2010). One way to confront these constructions of race and family is to draw not only upon theory, but upon people’s experiences of race and family in everyday life. This thesis will attempt to do so by drawing on the experiences of people in interracial relationships who have children or people who have parents of different races, to contribute to the array of discourse that seeks to deconstruct and contextualise notions of race in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as to the small but growing body of literature about interracial relationships in South Africa.

## Chapter 3



### *Thanks for Being My Unbiological Sister*



The picture above was sent to me by Aditi, who for as long I can remember has been a sister to me. During my research our families, Aditi and I tried to pinpoint the start of our sisterhood, but we could not agree on a specific month or an exact moment. I cannot remember a time when I did not think of her as my sister, except perhaps on the day we met. Her photo message, sent to me via the instant messaging application, Whatsapp, one day in late 2013 communicates that although we have different parents and we are not connected by blood, we are sisters. Our connection was chosen, not established by default because of our parentage and thus can be appreciated differently, and with thankfulness. Aditi is not my only sister. Through the course of my research I gained two more - a mother and a daughter - who became my big and little sisters. My mother bore three children - two boys and a girl. I was born with two brothers, and yet I have many sisters.

The message Aditi sent to me captures a significant and on-going debate in the social sciences between nature and culture; one that Kath Weston (1991) grappled with in the early nineties,

and which was discussed eloquently by Marshall Sahlins (2013) over two decades later. That the conversation has continued for so long speaks to the nuanced and complex nature of understandings of kinship. Both sides of the debate have been researched and interrogated, and yet a tension between the two continues to remain. Kath Weston's (1991) work about the families we choose is centred on gay and lesbian kinship formations that fall outside the realms of biological connectedness. Such formations are presented as chosen – much like the sisterhood between Aditi and I - as opposed to given through birth. These families of choice are not highlighted as better as or worse than biological conceptions of kinship, but rather as an alternative way of understanding kinship, as well as evidence of the possibilities beyond biological explanations. Weston (1991) suggests that through recognising families of choice as a valid representation of kinship, one can begin to acknowledge how biological explanations of kinship are equally as symbolic and constructed. This urges us to question the relationships of power which have legitimated biological notions of kinship, and expose what explanations have been hidden in the process. Further, one may recognise both as holding the power to mould people's everyday lived experiences of family.

In a similar vein to Weston (1991), Sahlins (2013) questions genealogical notions of kinship and proposes that kinship is not limited to biological relatedness:

Whatever is construed genealogically may also be constructed socially... Indeed, constructed forms of so-called 'biological' relationships are often preferred to the latter, the way brothers by compact may be 'closer' and more solidary than brothers by birth. But then, kinship is not given by birth as such, since human birth is not a pre-discursive fact (Sahlins, 2013:2-3).

Sahlins (2013) underscores the possibility of the sisterhood shared by Aditi and myself, and elucidates that kinship is not always predetermined by blood ties. He shows that we may create relationships with one another that may be close, if not closer than those we may share with our genealogical relations. Sahlins (2013) describes this connectedness as “the mutuality of being” (Sahlins, 2013:2), which he defines as “people who are intrinsic to one another's existence – thus ‘mutual person(s),’ ‘life itself,’ ‘intersubjective belonging,’ ‘transbodily being,’ and the like (loc.cit).” The notion of “the mutuality of being” speaks to relationships such as the one between Aditi and I - relationships that are so intertwined with our lives that we are unable to imagine living without them, or to envisage how we lived before such connections were established. Room for interpretation is provided, meaning mutuality is not limited to our perceptions of our relationships, but may extend to the everyday events in which those relationships are maintained – to the numerous meals my mother and I shared with Aditi and her family; to the trips we took together to and from school; to the advice given to my

mother about her children by Nella and Arjun, and vice versa; to the words of advice given to me by Nella - whom my mother named my “second mother” - during a time of pain and difficulty – words so supportive and intimate that if heard by a stranger, they would likely be understood as the words of a mother to her child.

Sahlins’ (2013) notion of “the mutuality of being” captured something that began to appear in the early stages of my research – the intimacy my mother and I shared with Aditi and her family, and had begun to share with newer participants. This begged the question of what the connection was between these intimacies and race. Further, how – if at all - had this research project influenced these relationships?

My research offered my mother, myself, Aditi and her family a chance to engage with one another and additional families in a particular context – one that was shaped by our common experiences of racial diversity within a family in South Africa during and after the end of Apartheid. The experiences varied according to generation – some had begun in the midst of Apartheid, and were continuing into the present, creating a longer timeline of experiences sculpted by legalised racial inequality, and intense pain and loss. Other experiences - such as those of myself and all the participants who were of a similar age or younger - had begun during a time of change, in which racism was no longer legal, but its effects remained etched in the landscape and the class divides of our country.

Despite these generational differences, to which I will return later, the questions asked by strangers - the stares and the very real possibility of rejection that came with being in or making a family with someone of a different race, was a common thread in all of our lives. It was the reason we had assembled, and as a result of the intimacy of the subject and the pain, trauma and joy many had experienced we related to one another on a level of compassion, and participation. Through sharing our experiences with one another, we were taking part in each other’s existence and sharing in the events that had made us who we are. Our existences became interconnected through the similarity of our experiences pertaining to race, and provided us all with insight into the different paths our lives may have taken had we been born at different times. The thought ‘*this could be my life*’ resonated with me deeply as I traced different people’s life-experiences. The experiences of Jean-Louise, serve as an example of how these moments came about. Alongside expressing her concerns about how to explain race to her child (a discussion I pursue in Chapter 5), Jean-Louise voiced her experiences as a mother raising her first child:

Jean-Louise: ...when he [Jeremy] was first born I was taking him to the park and people thought I was the nanny or the au pair. Which might've had to do with the clothes I was wearing. But also, I was, you know, a brand new mother on [sic] my first child. I was very annoyed because I was like 'isn't it obvious? Am I not doing something right that indicates he's my child?' You Know? Um, and just the presumption that I couldn't possibly be his mother, uh and also that people are brave enough to just say it to your face.

Me: what exactly did they say?

Jean-Louise: Um, how much are they paying you? Meaning, the family of this child- how much are they paying you? Kind of to be his au pair for money.

Me: Yeah, so that offended you as a mother-you took it as kind of a reflection of...

Jean-Louise: yeah. I felt like, I clearly must not look like I'm taking care of this child closely enough to be his mother. I must look like I'm just wheeling him here in his pram because that's my job. You Know? And as a new mother that kind of really irritated and hurt me because you know you don't know how to be a mother you're just kind of figuring it out and so that made me doubt if I was doing it right. Um, yeah.

Others had similar experiences - Auntie Joanie, Ellen, Lola, my mother and Meryl all described being questioned about their relationship to their parents or to their children. These instances show the ways in which notions of relatedness are so informed by ideas of racial homogeneity, that differing racial appearances obscure signs of relatedness such as care.

Such occasions made me ever more aware that as a result of our shared experiences and varying ages, we were in the position to be able to guide each other and offer glimpses to one another of the questions we might begin to ask ourselves at later stages in our lives.

### Sisterhood

One day I asked Aditi why she considered me her sister. We had met in 2007 when our parents started working together. Our families came to spend numerous hours together, sharing meals and conversing, and perhaps as a result of the 8 year age-gap between us I took on an older sister role in her life. I was put in charge of keeping an eye on her at school and I came to watch over her and care for her as a sibling. Her first answer to my question was that I had shared my experiences of being mixed-race with her. I had provided answers to questions she had, as well as options for how to address the very same encounters I had faced when I was her age. I remember Aditi's parents asking my mother questions about how to address the issues surrounding race that Aditi was raising as a result of experiences at school. I remember sitting on Aditi's couch and telling her that nobody could define her except herself, and when people asked her "what she was" she was to tell them she was mixed-race. At the time this advice seemed to me to be natural - I recognised her as mixed-race because of the fact that much like me, she had parents of different races and did not recognise one race over the other, but acknowledged both. It was only during this research that I started to wonder about my

presumed straightforwardness of this answer, and the potential influence I had had over my sister's understanding of herself. It could be suggested that through presenting Aditi with the term *mixed-race* I shaped her understanding of herself in relation to race. However, this argument implies that notions of race are static and cannot be mobilised differently by different people; it proposes that we utilised the term in the same way. Whilst Aditi's use of the term was expressly connected to our sisterhood, my use of the term was located in a very conscious decision made by my mother to provide me with racial terminology that did not reference apartheid. Thus, although there remains a clear connection between Aditi and I and the phrase *mixed-race* Aditi's experience with the term, and the ways in which she utilises it are no doubt different from how I interact with it due to our differing contexts and the ways in which we have come to know them. This speaks to the potential fluidity and subjectivity of racial classifications, upon which I will elaborate in Chapter 5.

Conversely, parallels can be drawn between our use and choice to use the term now and our probable inability to do so had either of us been born during Apartheid. The ability to racially classify oneself now is contrasted with the impossibility of doing so and of choosing a classification of one's own during Apartheid, which placed much of the power of racial classification and definition in the hands of administrative authorities, although racial classifications could be and sometimes were contested (see Posel, 2001; West, 1988). Thus, although the ways in which the term *mixed-race* is utilised and identified no doubt vary significantly, the historical implications of the act of racially classifying oneself are cognate.

In this way - through the interconnectedness that emerged from the shared naming of race and the possibility both of us had of choosing how to racially define ourselves - we have become part of one another's existence. We see ourselves in one other, posing the question of whether it is this closeness, - this form of mirroring - that informs part of our sisterhood. I see Aditi as one who is living through the experiences I had, meaning I am able to relate to her with an understanding and perspective that often requires very little explanation. Aditi sees herself in me, due to the role I have played in her life, and the answers I was able to give her to questions with which I had already been confronted. At the same time, I have become acutely aware of the possibility of the alternative directions our lives could have taken had we not known each other - both of us might have found sisters elsewhere; or perhaps not. Aditi might not have come to identify herself as mixed-race when questioned about her racial identity (see Chapter 5), and I might never have come to question the meaning of such an identification without the presence of her and her family in my life.

The role Aditi and her family played in the development of my research is a significant one, without which I doubt I would have come to ask the same questions. As noted earlier, Nella is my second mother. The evenings her family, my mother and I spent together during the research period consisted of discussions spanning a range of topics, all of which were interspersed with observations about my research. A lot of our conversations pertained to the events of the day, work and school. Alongside these everyday conversations, comments were made with regards to my research. Often they would be brought up spontaneously as someone would voice a thought they had had during the day that they believed I would find interesting, or to remind me to contact someone they thought would be interested in partaking. Most interesting were the comments made about my note-taking, which would come up quite often when people happened to notice me scribbling away at my seat; “Mum asks what I’m writing, I read out notes to everyone. Nella says she is not going to say anything else.”(Field notes: 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013) This instance contrasts heavily with Nella’s involvement in the project as a source of support, as someone who reminded me to set up meetings, as someone who facilitated meetings and discussions with other participants and as someone who answered all my questions without hesitation, and asked numerous questions of her own without any apparent restraint or self-consciousness. Although it may seem that Nella was demonstrating a move to self-censor, her involvement and dedication to me and to the project suggests otherwise.

Our lives would carry on as usual, flowing and colliding until suddenly, everyone would pause to comment about my writing, and remind me that they were aware of my presence as more than a member of the family. I did not try to hide what I was writing, and I did not shy away from voicing my frustrations to everyone about taking such detailed notes instead of relaxing and chatting with everyone else. On the occasions when I did this, I would be told to stop, which I did. It was almost as if I needed permission from my participants to take a break, and by involving them in my decision making process I truly was collaborating with them.

On one occasion, my note taking became a tool with which to break some tension that had built up in the room:

We eat. Mum gets stroppy. I tell her not to shout at us. Later Nella comments on it and Mum apologises. Nella says she hopes I’ll include this in my notes, I say it’s not about my family, Thank God. (Field notes: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013)

Nella’s comment speaks to the awareness everyone had of my role as observer and note-taker, as well as a daughter and a family member. Further, although spoken in jest, it served as a reminder to me, that I was responsible for trying to map every aspect of the interactions,

including the behaviour of myself and my mother. Looking back now I think how ironic it is that I thought my research at the time was not about my family – that I could somehow focus on some aspects of our lives, without acknowledging our relationship and the circumstances that allowed us to engage in such a personal manner.

These circumstances were central to my research and the thinking that informs my work. Again I have come to think about the mutuality of being in relation to Aditi and her family and myself and this thesis – we are all interconnected, an intersection that I only came to recognise through this research. I cannot imagine writing this thesis had I not met Aditi and her family, which extends the notion of the mutuality of being beyond the realm of human connection to encompass the life of this project which would not have been produced without the existence of this relationship, thus making the relationship intrinsic to this thesis.

I cannot imagine thinking about the meaning of being mixed-race, the meaning of kinship, the meaning of reflexivity, and their mutual implication, had I not known these people. These thoughts seem to me to be central to this conversation, and the conversations held by all researchers engaging in fieldwork with kin – how can one write about the direct presence of one's family in one's fieldwork process, without acknowledging their effect on the end-product? What at the time seemed to me to be a conversation outside my research interests, was in fact central to them. I was desperate to focus on conversations about race without thinking about the relationship between race and family, but as I came to learn – race was the beginning of the conversation, not its entirety. The rest of it was about family and the different bonds we come to form with people that change our lives so drastically we are unable to imagine living without them. Nevertheless, at the same time race was the reason I began this research, and it was present in a lot of the conversations between us – when it came to describing people we had met, or discussing accents. If anything race was the catalyst for this research – driving me to ask questions, the answers to which contained only fragments of the driving force.

### A Rainbow Family

Lola had organised for us to stay at Sun City – a holiday resort located in the North West province of South Africa - together for a weekend in August, 2013. Lola and her children Christopher and Alice, were joined by my mother and I, Nella, Arjun and Aditi, and a close family friend Jeanette and her daughter, Mahlia. One day we all piled into a hotel shuttle to go to a nearby shopping centre. Amidst giggles and sighs as we all squeezed in, Nella commented

that we really were a rainbow family because we represented all colours of the nation. Alongside the imagery of a rainbow family, comments were also made about us being the “New South African Family”. This was not the only time that the term “family” was used by participants to describe our group, but it was one of the only times nationalistic images of post-Apartheid South Africa were called upon as descriptive tools. My mother joked that there was only one man present. Not only did this elicit laughter from Lola – a single mother of two, but it rang true. It was funny, and pertinent that of the five children in the group, only one’s father was present and only two out of the four fathers were present in the children’s lives on a daily basis. Although we were a small group, this is not an uncommon phenomenon in South Africa - if anything the prevalence of single mothers and absent fathers in my participant group exemplifies numerous family structures in South Africa today<sup>3</sup>. Thus, we both were and were not representative of common South African families – we were racially diverse, but the strong female presence in the group was not unique to our context.

The comments made on that short trip expose the novelty of such a racially mixed group going on holiday in South Africa. Although we all interacted on a regular basis, somehow the fact that we were at a holiday resort together made my participants take note of the diversity of our group. Such comments were made almost in awe, by older members of the group who had grown up during Apartheid. Perhaps being in public with many other families served to remind my participants that we were in the minority, and that the racial complexity of our now extended family was not the norm in South Africa although Apartheid had been over for almost two decades. Through acknowledging the cohesiveness of our group, and utilising the term *family*, my participants were recognising the possibilities for relatedness that occur beyond biological connections. Further, they were implicating the role that race had played in the bringing together of our group – again it was a catalyst for a much deeper connection that extended way beyond my research period. This is evident in the fact that we were travelling together over a month after my intended research period had ended. Further, participants have continued to meet with one another independently. Nella, Angie and Arjun attended Christopher and Alice’s Holy Communion, and my entire participant group from Mafikeng

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics from research conducted by the Institute of Race Relations in South Africa in 2011 show that urban single parents from all racial classifications in post-apartheid South Africa are overwhelmingly female. 84% of women classified as Coloured were single mothers, 79% of women classified as Black African were single mothers, 69% of those classified as White were single mothers and 64% of those classified as Indian were single mothers (Holborn and Eddy, 2011:3). The number of present fathers for those classified as Black African was 30%, the number for those classified as Coloured was 53%, the number for those classified as Indian was 85% and the number for those classified as White was 83%. (Holborn and Eddy, 2011:2)

gathered together this year for a Valentine's Day party. We are all still in touch at present – Lola addresses me as “sis” in our communications, acknowledging the role she has taken on as my big sister, whilst referring to her six year old daughter Alice, as my little sister – exemplifying how our connection may have begun with a one-dimensional notion of race, but did not end with it. The comments made on our trip served to validate the need to incorporate and acknowledge the prevalence of family in understandings of race, as well as an engagement with the very meaning of kinship.

Later that day, on our way back from the shops we all got onto a staff bus to take us back to our hotel - Christopher was using Lola's Tablet to take pictures of us all. He stood balancing in the aisle of the bus, facing the rest of us who were seated. As the bus made a stop two middle-aged women boarded and walked past him to find seats. As the bus pulled away I heard them speaking in Setswana, and I heard Lola responding. Something about their tones after Lola had responded made me look back at them and try to decipher what was being said. Later, I asked Lola what had happened. She told me that on seeing Christopher one of the women had commented that these “Chinese people” like to take photographs of their backsides and then put them on the internet. Lola had responded saying “does he look Chinese?” to which the women said something along the lines of “I don't know they all look the same to us”. Lola told them “That's my son you are talking about” and warned the woman to be careful what she said and where.

This incident was telling of a number of things. First of the language people use to try to explain racial difference; second, of the assumption that Christopher would not be able to understand their comments; third, of the assumption that Lola was not his mother; and fourth, of the racial stereotype used to describe Christopher's behaviour. The first point about the language used to map racial difference pertains directly to Chapter 5 and I will return to this point there. The other three points speak to the prevalence of race in our understandings of language capabilities, kinship and behaviour. As noted earlier, the scars of apartheid remain visible in post-apartheid South Africa. Language, for example, remains racialised, as is evident in the assumption that because Christopher was seen as Chinese, he could not speak Setswana (a language in which he is fluent). Race also continues to shape understandings of family structures, as is evident in the assumption that Lola was not Christopher's mother since they had different skin tones. Finally, notions of behaviour are connected to race – it was not assumed that he would put photographs of their backsides on the internet because he had a

Tablet that could take photographs, but rather because he had a Tablet and he was understood to be *Chinese*.

Instances such as these drew attention to the racially diverse nature of our group. Our family outing enabled us to appreciate the uniqueness of our situation, and to celebrate it. At the same time, as a result of its uniqueness we were at times subject to being misunderstood and isolated because prevailing notions of kinship knot race and family together in homogenous ways. The rainbow family was celebrated from within and at times misunderstood from without, making instances of recognition all the more valuable.

During the trip, one such instance of recognition presented itself. Mahlia, Alice, my mother and I stood waiting for the lift. Two men approached with their suitcases, obviously on their way to check out of the hotel. Alice had drawn pictures for my mother and I, and my mother was telling Alice that later she would show her how to draw curly hair. “It’s easy” she told Alice, to which one of the men turned around to face Alice and responded “Nothing in life is easy, the only thing that’s easy is when your mother tells you it’s easy”. My mother laughed.

The conversation was brief, but I was struck by what seemed like the man’s recognition of my mother as the mother of Alice and possibly of Mahlia and me as well. Through acknowledging that Alice was my mother’s daughter – he directed his comment at her and said “*your* mother”, not “one’s mother” or something else less personal/general, as if warning her not to believe everything my mother said to her in my mother’s supposed position as Alice’s mother - the man was allowing for the possibility of a family of different colours. He was recognising that not all families are the same race, and that race does not determine motherhood. Further, it allowed for the possibility that we were all sisters – that if Alice was my mother’s daughter, perhaps we were too.

The ambiguity of his comment raised questions – did he think Alice was adopted? Did he think she was not? Did he think Mahlia and I were also my mother’s daughters? At first I struggled to come to terms with this ambiguity – what would I conclude in my writing if I did not know what he really meant? Eventually I decided rather to question what the ambiguity meant for my thought-processes. What it meant was that the only certainty with which I was provided was that the man had assumed that the link between Alice and my mother was a link between mother and daughter – it was not about their skin tones, but the way they appeared together, holding hands and chatting about drawing. This meant that as much as I wanted to analyse it in relation to the culture vs. biology debate and the relationship between race and family, I was

unable to do so and was forced only to focus on their bond. As opposed to the previous experience with Jean-Louise and Jeremy, and Lola and Christopher which involved assumptions about race and very little thought about family, this experience was doing the opposite – was that not what my research had revealed? That the bond between us far surpassed our varying skin tones?

Our weekend away lead me to recognise both the positive and the negative aspects of our group - of how we bonded and how people responded to that bond. It highlighted the absences in our lives and showed how our interconnectedness filled existing gaps – sisters who were not siblings, men who were not fathers, family where ‘biological kin’ were not close by. It spoke to the impact that different spaces may have on our perception such as how a trip to Sun City caused us to acknowledge and foreground a relationship that had been present all along. We had always been aware of our racial diversity, yet somehow this trip had made it all the more visible and thus a source of conversation and celebration. Perhaps it was only through recognising the rarity of this relatedness that was made apparent in our various experiences in Sun City and the racial contrast we provided with other families that we were able to acknowledge the real possibilities for change apparent in our family. Notions of the ‘new South African family’ were only possible when contrasted with imagery of the ‘old’ South African family, and in a context where my research was focussing on calling these terms into question, thus, positioning the reflexivity of the work as both a method and a process of knowledge production. As our closeness to one another across racial lines came to the fore, the uniqueness of our situation in a country that has continued to be beset by racialised inequalities seemed to make us all the more determined to maintain our connection.

# Chapter 4



## *The Years Between Us*

I argue that a key relationship between race and kinship, evident especially but not only in the Western world, is based on what I call race-kinship congruity. This is the idea that people who are related by consanguineous kinship should also have a 'racial' appearance that is congruent with – explicable in terms of – their kinship connections. The idea is based on longstanding notions of shared 'substance' (blood, genes) that are common to racialized kinship thinking in many areas of the world (Wade, 2011:79).

Wade (2011) accompanies the above extract with an interrogation into the ways in which biology has been both understood as constructed whilst continually called upon to explain numerous phenomena in our social worlds. He goes on to suggest that notions of relatedness informed by biology are as constructed as biology itself, and yet they continue to pervade numerous understandings of kinship and relatedness. In the same way that race has been acknowledged as constructed, yet hugely influential in people's everyday lives in numerous contemporary spaces, so too have notions of kinship that are informed by biology. Most striking is that these discourses of kinship and race are not only constructed, but intersect with one another in significant ways.

Although Wade (2011) notes that race-kinship congruity holds particular resonance in the Western world, he acknowledges its presence elsewhere. One such example can be found in South Africa. Historically, South Africa has seen the division and subjugation of people based on racial constructs, constructs which have had such severe effects on people's lived experiences of the world that we continue to be confronted with very real examples of the power such constructs yield in post-Apartheid South Africa. As noted in previous chapters, race in South Africa, continues to be a *big deal* - not only in the public sphere, but in the realm of the private – in the realm of the family.

The intersection of race and family historically in South Africa, is most easily located in the legislation of Apartheid. The Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 for example, prevented those classified as white from marrying people classified as non-white in an attempt to maintain the racial purity and superiority of those classified as white. Shortly after this Act was enforced, the Population Registration Act was legalised in 1950, which required every citizen to be classified into predetermined racial categories. These categories were utilised in relation to the

Group Areas Act of 1950 (although their definitions of each category varied in order to accommodate instances such as interracial couples – See West, 1988) which literally grouped people placed into these classifications in different areas (for numerous reasons along with those mentioned here - see Dubow, 2014). Interracial couples were required to classify themselves into one racial category, so as to erase the interracial aspect of their relationship and maintain racial segregation;

...relating to the issue of where people who are married or cohabit can live or own property in the event that they are classified differently... a white partner, male or female, takes the classification of the other partner, whether black or coloured, for the purposes of the Act. In relationships between people classified coloured and black, however, the woman takes the classification of the man (West, 1988:104-105).

These Acts clearly elucidate how the racial discourses of Apartheid infiltrated into the realm of the family, in order to enforce the notion of race-kinship congruity discussed by Wade (2011). In short, people were separated into different racial categories, expected to live and marry within those categories and thus create families which reinforced those categories.

In the previous chapter I discussed the possibilities of family that extend beyond notions race-kinship congruity. Here I seek to address the pervasive discourse of race-kinship congruity and the ways in which it continues to inform our understandings of family in post-Apartheid South Africa (see Jaynes, 2010). I draw directly from Peter Wade's (2011) work throughout this chapter due to the way in which it resonates with and eloquently frames my ethnographic findings. More specifically his terms of "race-kinship congruity" (Wade, 2011: 79) and "racial appearance" (ibid.) are utilised throughout and should be understood as referencing his work.

Chapter 3 was concerned with acknowledging the existence of kinship that is not based on race-kinship congruity, or even consanguinity, and tracing people's lived experiences of such kinship in post-Apartheid South Africa. This chapter is about recognising that although the discourses of biology and shared substance that inform race-kinship congruity and notions of kinship have been underlined by many as constructed within relationships of power (See Weston, 1991; Wade, 2011; Sahlins, 2013;), they continue to infiltrate our understandings of ourselves and each other. A contradiction is evident between people's experiences of kinship and the continued pervasiveness of the dominant discourses of race-kinship congruity and consanguineous kinship which often obscure our vision of the possibilities at, as Judith Butler writes, the limits of intelligibility (Butler, 2004:74). In light of the rife nature of these dominant discourses, this chapter seeks to delve into how people in racially heterogeneous families

navigate the discourse of race-kinship congruity and examine the very real impact it has had and continues to have on people's lives in South Africa.

Various questions are raised: how are notions of race-kinship congruity used to counter kinship relations or legitimate them? If notions of family are reduced to race-kinship congruity, how do we come to explain the relationships between people who identify as mixed-race and their families? How are they legitimated in contexts where what Wade (2011) calls differing 'racial' appearances (Wade, 2011:79) are not accommodated, and manifestations of biology such as melanin are used to legitimate family structures? Does this always result in confusion for people who identify as mixed-race and their families as they try to negotiate this bounded relationship between racial appearance and kinship?

### Reminders of The Past

Sandra still needed a national identity document, required by law for anyone over sixteen. So in February 1974, when she was eighteen, Petrus drove her to the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria to apply for one. "The person there said if they give me a white I.D., they're going to take my kids away because a white woman can't have kids who are not white. So I wanted to become coloured again." Two years after her first attempt to change her classification from white to coloured, Sandra filed an affidavit through a lawyer in Pretoria; she doesn't remember how she found him. It read, in part:

I am happy with my boyfriend and our children, I want to obtain permission to be classified and/or reclassified as a Swazi and I do not want to be classified and/or considered white because I want to keep my children and also proceed to marry my boyfriend. I have for all intents and purposes lived as a Swazi woman for the last four years and I have given birth to Swazi children and I intend remaining a Swazi and I pray that I be permitted to continue living as a Swazi in which group I have been accepted as a daughter-in-law. I do not intend to go back and live as a white. (Sandra Laing in Stone, 2007:162)

The above extract is taken from Judith Stone's (2007) biographical novel about the life of Sandra Laing, entitled *When She Was White*. Sandra Laing was born in South Africa in 1955 with a different racial appearance to those of her Afrikaans parents - her skin was darker, her hair was curlier. Sandra's parents determined that Sandra's racial appearance was a result of an interracial relationship that had taken place in one of their families - her racial appearance was determined a genealogical link to a non-white relative. Sandra was registered as white, however at the age of ten she was reclassified as coloured on the basis of her appearance. Her parents fought this reclassification both legally and publically in the press. Thereafter, when the classification laws changed to descent as opposed to racial appearance, Sandra was reclassified as white. On falling in love with a man classified as black, Sandra sought to reclassify herself as coloured or black, but required her father's permission to do so, which he refused to give. Sandra's request was thus responded to as follows;

The magistrate at Carolina sent Sandra and Petrus a summons, and when they appeared before him he warned them to stop living together in Kromkran. "He told me to go home to my parents" Sandra recalls, "and he said the children could go to a coloured orphanage. He said he would be in touch with us." The magistrate's threats worried Sandra, but she had no intention of leaving Petrus or giving up her children (Stone, 2007; 162).

Sandra's experience shows firstly how race-kinship congruity came to be the norm in Apartheid South Africa – children were expected to have a racial appearance similar to that of their parents due to the fact that the laws actively prevented interracial unions, and if they did not they were classified differently, resulting in a breach of the Group Areas Act. Secondly, Sandra wanted to change her classification in order to remain with her children and partner – as a white woman living with a black man she was breaching the Sexual Offences Act of 1957(which prevented white people from having sexual relationships with people classified as non-white), as well as the Group Areas Act. In both extracts she highlights her concerns about her children being taken away from her, and remembers the magistrate threatening to do so. It remains unclear whether children such as Sandra's were legally removed from their parents, however, it is clear that people in situations such as Sandra's were forced to make decisions regarding how to live as a family within the constricts of Apartheid laws. In this case, Sandra chose to reclassify herself so that she could live legally with her family.

Sandra's experiences show how people in multiracial families were forced to make decisions which would erase the multiracial aspect of their family. The possibility for racial difference was removed by the laws of Apartheid, which insisted upon the formation and maintenance of racially homogenous families – even if racial appearances differed, racial classifications were to be homogenous. The terms of racial difference were determined by the State, not within the family, requiring people to make decisions so as to remain aligned with the legislation of racial segregation.

### The White Side of Life

Sandra's dealings with the Apartheid legislation on racial classification provide us with a glimpse into how people with multiracial families lived and experienced Apartheid. There were no doubt many others who had similar experiences. One such person is Aunty Joanie, with whom I worked closely during my time in Mahikeng. Aunty Joanie, conveyed to me the questions she faced when thinking about having children as a young woman with parents of different races growing up in Apartheid South Africa.

Aunty Joanie was eloquent and impassioned about growing up as a mixed child during apartheid. She explained to me clearly that the experience of having parents of different races

only became problematic when one of those parents was classified as white – that children with a white parent would forever be questioned about *what they were*. Those children would suffer. And so, to prevent her children from experiencing suffering such as she had experienced (see below) she decided she would never marry a white man – “you don’t choose who we fall in love with. You don’t, it just *happens* you know, but growing up...you know being in my twenties I always thought white? Me? No, I’m not gonna let my children *suffer* the way I suffered” (transcribed discussion, 2013).

In light of the legal implications (as discussed above) of being white in an interracial relationship, Aunty Joanie’s refusal to create a family with a white man becomes all the more clear. In addition to these legal implications, Aunty Joanie’s lived experience of being born to interracial parents during Apartheid was wrought with pain and suffering – unfavourable conditions for any mother to want to pass on to their children.

Aunty Joanie’s refusal to have children with a white man was intertwined with the pain she had experienced as a child. Her father was white and her mother was creole – they had four children, two of whom could pass for white. Shortly after Apartheid was introduced in 1948, 5 year old Aunty Joanie and her brother were taken by her mother to St Joseph’s Home for Coloured Children in Sophia Town in 1951. They never saw their parents again. Decades later Aunty Joanie found one of her mother’s best friends Mrs Cloete, and learned that her parents had died. Through piecing together the information she got from Mrs Cloete, and her memories of Apartheid, she learned that after the Mixed Marriages Act was implemented in 1949, her mother wanted to ‘pass<sup>4</sup> for white’ and the only way for her to do so was to take the children who could not pass for white to an orphanage;

Tana: So when that happened, your mom stayed with your father?

Aunty Joanie: Ja, they stayed there, they were married.

Tana: And there was no problem with that?

Aunty Joanie: No, they stayed married, but they left the town, they moved right out of the town and moved to Pretoria.

Tana: But they never encountered any problems with the law?

Aunty Joanie: No.

Tana: Not that you know of?

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<sup>4 4</sup> The notion of “passing for white” references a larger discourse about the ways in which those classified as non-white in racially stratified spaces manage to acquire positions of whiteness although they may not fit the definitions of whiteness available.

Aunty Joanie: I asked that question. I asked Mrs Cloete, she said nee, she said no, I think your mom wanted to be white. That was her words. I don't know. She said I think your mom wanted to be white and she could pass. She had the features, she said and the hair.

Aunty Joanie's rejection of a white partner is, among other things, indicative of a rejection of the Apartheid government and their discrimination which separated her from her family as a child. Aunty Joanie rejected notions of whiteness as a result of the impact of growing up in a multiracial family whose adults wanted to pass for white during Apartheid;

Aunty Joanie: I don't know what your life is like, but growing up for five years with a family was tough. Family that wanted to be only white. And then they have black children. It was tough. And then growing up also in an apartheid state - a country like South Africa - having a white surname, and you know lots of questions, all your life you know? It's, it's not easy my darling. It's not easy. I wish you all the luck in the world.

Aunty Joanie's understanding of whiteness is located explicitly in the context of Apartheid, where racial appearance became politically symbolic of suffering and separation. This is evocative of the very damaging and embodied effects that the racial categorisation of Apartheid had on those living in South Africa – not only were people's bodies regulated, controlled and subjected to violence, but they were indicators of the position they occupied in a segregated society. Aunty Joanie's experiences throw light on the lived realities of the discourse of race-kinship congruity utilised by Apartheid which effectively forced parents such as Aunty Joanie's and Sandra to make choices they might never have made.

Aunty Joanie's memories of that time remain so concentrated with pain that during our discussion about her experiences, she spoke of the hurt that *I* no doubt experienced as a result of having a white mother in South Africa although I was, in her words "born free"<sup>5</sup>. This speaks to the centrality of our contexts to our understandings of race, as well as the ways in which these understandings become interconnected over generations. Aunty Joanie's story was evocative for me – it spoke of her pain and the losses she had suffered, of her strength and the scars she would forever carry with her. We both shed tears as we spoke – I shared a part of her pain, which was so clear in her voice and eyes, and was heightened by the understanding that had I been born at the same time, her story could very well have been my own. As she spoke of the last time she saw her mother, through the closed gates of the orphanage where she was to spend the rest of her childhood, her raw emotion communicated the very real and life-changing effects that the shades of our skin have had and continue to have on our lives. Although we had only just met, I felt our stories were interconnected - two women, decades

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'born free' is used to refer to children born in post-Apartheid South Africa and thus born without the constraints of the Apartheid state. It refers to what could have been had one been born during Apartheid and thus born unfree.

apart – lifetimes and indeed historical epochs apart – but linked through our experiences of being born mixed.

### Then and Now

The stories of both Aunty Joanie and Sandra elucidate how people in multiracial families navigated the stark racialised realities of life during Apartheid. Although the racial categories of Apartheid continue to be used in post-Apartheid South Africa, multiracial families are no longer illegal or liable to being separated due to differing racial categories or arrested for interracial sexual relationships. The experiences of participants who are raising children in post-Apartheid South Africa explicate the ways in which multiracial families navigate the racial discourses of post-Apartheid South Africa.

Parents I worked with tried to explicate their racial identities to their children in ways they would understand, whilst remaining conscious of the importance of including the racial identities of both parents in the explanation. Alongside trying to explain their racial identities to their children, they also tried to equip their children with the linguistic tools needed when their children were questioned in social spaces such as at school about their apparent racial ambiguity and/or their differing racial appearances to their parents. Sometimes this was in response to questions raised by people encountered in everyday life – as was evident with participants such as Nella who was asked by Aditi how to answer the question “what are you?” in racial terms (see Chapter 5) – at other times this was based on personal experiences of racialised discourses which created a need for parents to engage in a kind of pre-emptive strike in order to prepare their children for the questions they knew would come ( see Jean-Louise’s experiences below).

This process was in no way straight forward, as was seen with many of my participants who struggled to come to conclusions about how they would explain their children’s racial identity to them. Single parents voiced concern about how they would transfer information about the absent parent to their children:

Ellen: It’s – ja for me now the challenge is - especially because now I am raising a daughter and with my sister it was different, because her husband and her separated when the children were a little bit older so they got to experience being Black and being Coloured, whereas with me, my daughter is living with me and my family and we live in a predominately Coloured community. Of course everything is cosmopolitan now but I still have to now teach her about being strong as well, because that is part of who she is, it is, you know and it is going to be a challenge because his family is not very involved in her life...

Tana: Ja

Ellen: And to know about all of that and, and it is going to be a challenge, it is going to be a challenge for me because like I said we are growing up – she is growing up in a Coloured environment.

Tana: Ja

Ellen: She sees me and my mom and my family all the time and we speak English and we speak Afrikaans and then now for me to have to teach her how to embrace that [her father's racial identity], I, I honestly I haven't, I don't know how we are going to do it, but it's important – because I see that with my sister's sons, I noticed that it is easy for them to want to forget their dad's culture because they are angry at him. But it is still who they are, you know. Like with them, they are just boycotting the whole, everything. They don't want to be Coloured, they don't want to be Black, they just want to be – which I think is fair also, they should just be – (personal data, 2013)

This extract from my first discussion with Ellen is multifaceted. It references the juncture between notions of race and notions of culture and language. In addition to these ideas, the notion of mixed-ness is summoned as Ellen grapples with how to provide adequate access to her child's racial identity by highlighting the importance of explicating both “sides” of Mina to her. In Mina's father's absence, this is done by trying to create a continuity– a continuity that speaks to the history of racialization in South Africa, which continues to influence our racialization of ourselves in the present. In other words, South Africa's history of racial segregation and classification remains visible in the present, not only in the context of political economy and geography, but in our understandings of ourselves and our continued reproduction of the practice of racial categorisation.

Through speaking about her need for Mina to understand what it means to be black in the same way she needs to understand what it means to be coloured, Ellen illustrates the importance she places on notions of culture and racial identity and the ways in which notions of culture are conflated with notions of race. Here her concern is not simply about an absent father, but an absent father who identifies as black and the repercussions his absence will have on the production of Mina's racial identity. Ellen's understandings of blackness pertain to language and environment – she fears Mina's father will not teach her his language, and that she will be unable to learn about his cultural practices due to his absence. Through voicing this concern Ellen shows an acknowledgement that race is not simply about skin colour, race to Ellen incorporated notions of language as well as seeing how other people who identified as that race acted – i.e. learning how to *perform* a cultural identity.

We can see clearly that in this instance race is understood to be social – based on that by which we are surrounded and on the knowledge we gain from the people around us, such as linguistic knowledge. This is knowledge that for Ellen cannot be acquired simply by having a biological link to someone, but requires the involvement of those people in that person's life. At the same time that race was acknowledged as being social, there was an understanding that Mina's father's racial identity is a part of her - “that (blackness) is a part of who she is”. For Ellen,

Mina's biological link to her father makes his blackness a part of who she is, and it is important to Ellen that Mina understands her perceived implications of that.

This speaks directly to the interconnectedness of notions of culture and biology in understandings of kinship and race as discussed by Wade (2011) – notions of a biological link between two people inform the need for the provision of a cultural education about what that link represents. This implies that race can be informed by biology, but also suggests that race cannot be reduced to it. Thus, someone may be inclined to learn how to perform a racial identity because of what they understand to be the imperatives of biological connections, but they are no more equipped to understand those racial identities than people without biological connections simply because of their biological connectedness.

Understandings of the knowledge that parents felt they needed to transfer to their children about their mixed-ness took different forms, speaking to the array of factors that contributed to their understandings of race. For Ellen, this meant trying to ensure her child learned about the meaning of blackness and being black through interacting with her father and his family. For Jean-Louise this was highlighted through her concerns about the knowledge she would pass onto her son Jeremy about her own racial identity, and was communicated through the use of terms such as “heritage”, “tradition” and as with Ellen, “culture”.

Tana: So, Jean-Louise I don't know if you have anything to say, based on what we discussed the other day, did you have a chance to think about it, or?

Jean-Louise: I thought about it a lot and I thought you know, I really need to have some serious sit down time with myself to, you know, figure out what cultural, what gifts or legacy I have to give to Jeremy because at the moment I don't have any. And the fact that I'm okay with that is a little bit worrying because I don't want him to be confused about one half of his heritage, you know. So it lets me feel like something that I don't consider to be important is turning out to be really important in the life of my child and I have not brought that up in the interview.

Seamus: Why do you think, you don't have an identity?

Jean-Louise: No I have an identity, but like culturally speaking being of no particular race, it's very hard to pin down a particular culture that you can say is yours and that you or for me, that I can whole-heartedly buy into. You have like your sort of generic South African culture with rugby and boerewors and biltong, but within South Africa you have people who identify as Zulus, or Xhosa speaking people and they have traditions that go along with being part of those groups that are South African but are also individual. I don't have that, so in talking about culture for Jeremy, and his heritage, I feel like I don't have a particular thing, or particular sort of look that like, these are our traditions, I don't have. I was saying to Tana, like when I was in primary school [in Johannesburg] we had a cultural day, and we were told to come in the traditional attire of your culture and I went home and said to my mom what am I supposed to wear? There's no traditional attire for who I am and so I wore my school uniform because there was just nothing I could identify as my particular culture and I'm okay with that, you know myself as an adult because I said that I create my own sense of identity depending on where I am. But when it comes to Jeremy, especially if we think of moving to Northern Ireland, where he's going to acquire an Irish accent, when he learns to talk and he doesn't look, he looks like a white boy, so on the surface when people see Jeremy with an n Irish accent he's a white Irish boy. So on the surface he's going to completely fit into this culture and

society and nobody's going to question him. But then actually I'm going to be like I'm his mother, I'm in there somewhere, but I've got nothing to add, other than that.

Jean-Louise's concerns are in certain instances evocative of Ellen's concerns. Again we see a connection between notions of race and notions of culture, however since Jean-Louise describes herself as of "no particular race" it is "hard to pin down" her culture. This, itself a cultural understanding of race, is underscored as a potential source of confusion for her child: "I don't want him to be confused about one half of his heritage". As opposed to referring directly to race, Jean-Louise cites heritage as a potential source of confusion for her child. This confusion is related to her child's looks and his accent and a distinction is made between his exterior and that which is located beneath the surface i.e. he looks white but he is not because Jean-Louise is his mother and she is not white. To Jean-Louise the way her son looks is indicative of an illusion that will confuse not only her child but the reactions of others to her and her child – here she engages directly with notions of race-kinship congruity raised earlier.

Jean-Louise's use of notions such as culture, heritage and tradition are telling. All of these terms have been interrogated in postmodern and contemporary Anthropological discourses, as a result of previous understandings that sought to freeze and bound notions of culture, tradition and heritage in time and within specific spaces (see Thornton, 1988; Spiegel and Boonzaier, 1988; West, 1988). Since then they have been acknowledged as constructed and ever-changing heuristic devices which people use in different ways to explain the world around them (see Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). Importantly, they have been acknowledged as part and parcel of culture i.e. defining culture is a cultural process in itself and is not exempt from being influenced by context (See Thornton, 1988).

For Jean-Louise, defining culture, tradition and heritage are interconnected with defining race. These thought-processes are extremely stratified – race is highlighted as a product of culture, but culture cannot be defined as in this instance Jean-Louise does not define her race. Further, as a result of Jeremy's appearance it is made all the more important that he understand his mixed-ness, in order to acknowledge his parentage and to understand his "culture". There is a desire on the part of Jean-Louise to be recognised as part of Jeremy *by* Jeremy – this recognition can only be attained through teaching him *why he is not white* and in so doing enable him to acknowledge her non-whiteness within his non-whiteness and thus acknowledge her relationship to him as his mother. This logic could be seen as a response to the discourse of race-kinship congruity, its history in South Africa and its continued prevalence in South Africa today in that Jean-Louise is attempting to provide an explanation as to why her and her son

have differing racial appearances so as to prevent this discourse from influencing their relationship with one another. In short, Jean-Louise is saying that despite the responses of others, I am your mother and this is why. She struggles with *how* she will explain to her child who to her looks white, that he is not white and what not being white means when he is older. This reinforces the notion that race is not informed by skin colour, but requires the acquisition of situational knowledge regarding what it means to be identified as a particular race.

The experiences of Ellen and Jean Louise show how people grapple with discourses of race in post-Apartheid South Africa. Where Aunty Joanie and Sandra's lives as part of multiracial families were bound by the law, Ellen and Jean-Louise are living without those confines. Nevertheless, due to the remnants of Apartheid in post-Apartheid South Africa that propel racial categorisation into the fore and continue to segregate people on political-economic levels, they are required to negotiate bounded notions of race in order to explicate their racially multiplicitous families.

Thus, people in multiracial families must navigate these ruins of the past, which continue to remind us of their prevalence in the present. Families do so in different ways, based on their experiences of race. Jean-Louise's personal experiences of race informed how she thought about explaining differing racial appearances and identities to her child. Through using an example from her own childhood, growing up with parents of different races in South Africa, Jean-Louise highlighted the influence familial figures have on our understandings of race. Jean-Louise was thinking deeply about how her understandings of race would affect the experiences of her child, and how she could explain his race in terms that would prevent him from facing the kind of confusion she faced whilst growing up. Ellen used her sister's children as a point of reference, to recognise how their relationship with their father shaped their understanding of blackness into something they wanted to reject because of their troubled relationship with their father. In short, their father and their understanding of blackness became synonymous. Whilst Ellen engaged with this she also acknowledged the ability of her nephews to "just be", which showed how she is grappling with the outcomes of aligning oneself with a racial identity and the benefits of not doing so, pinpointing the possibility of *not* accepting racial categorising and refusing to conform to thinking about oneself in terms of race. Importantly, she used the experiences of her nephews to think about the possible experiences of blackness her child might have with an absent black father, and tried to figure out how she would *compensate* for his absence and possibly prevent her child from rejecting entirely her father's black identity.

Experiences of navigating race in post-Apartheid South Africa are in no way straight-forward or easy to come to terms with – in the same way that Sandra and Aunty Joanie’s lives were irrevocably changed as a result of the racialised legislation of Apartheid, Ellen and Jean-Louise’s lives are being influenced by the discourses of race in post-Apartheid South Africa. The thought-processes of these parents show the processual and fluid nature of understandings of race as well as the complexity that accompanies defining the racial categories we assign to ourselves and to one another. Sandra and Aunty Joanie chose to work the system into which they were born – Sandra through attempting to reclassify herself, and Aunty Joanie through consciously choosing a partner who would not put her children in the same position she had been as a child. Jean-Louise and Ellen interrogated what it means to pass on a racial identity to their children in very significant and varying ways – instead of simply determining a racial identity for their children they were thinking constantly and carefully about what the implications of those identities were, and how best to educate their children about what those identities actually *mean*. In a time when racial categorising remains institutionalised and part of our social worlds, but racism and racial hierarchies are no longer legal, the terrain upon which multiracial families navigate race is both inflected with remnants of the past, and spacious enough that people may take the time to make decisions about race and racial identity for themselves and consider the implications of so doing.

# Chapter 5



## *Amperbaas Hindigans*

*Language is also a place of struggle. (hooks, 1989:203)*

Sociologist, Heather Dalmage (2003) introduces her book *Tripping on the Color Line. Black-White Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World* with a question posed to her by several of her students; “what are you?” Her answer is noteworthy;

The question is loaded. More than five hundred years of socially, politically, economically, and culturally created racial categories rest in the phrase “what are you.”... Those of us who do not come from or live in single-race families must daily negotiate a racialized and racist system that demands we fit ourselves into prescribed categories. (Dalmage, 2003:1-2)

Dalmage (2003) uses this incident to enter into a conversation about the contemporary experiences of people who have multiracial families in the United States of America (USA). She suggests that unlike the majority of multiracial families formed in the past, many of the multiracial families today are formed on the basis of love, as opposed to sexual violence or exploitation. Further, their formation is based upon a choice to “fight to be a family everyday” as a result of the “larger rules of race [that] work to divide us”. Alongside eloquently pinpointing the connection between discourses of race and the impact they have on family, Dalmage (2003) also throws light on the role that language has played in the production and maintenance of fixed racial boundaries;

After centuries of racial categorization, the color line seems clear. The language we have to talk about race makes racial boundaries and identities appear fixed, natural and essential. Steeped in western tradition of either-or thinking, our language leaves little room for addressing racial complexities and justice simultaneously (Dalmage, 2003:173).

Dalmage’s discussion uncovers the intersection between discourses of race, language and family and the ways in which they contribute to the maintenance of one another. Ideas of the existence of discrete racial categories are propped up by notions of the monoracial nuclear family as well as the language of racial difference with which we come to understand our contemporary worlds. Questions such as “what are you?” are examples of the ways in which this language is mobilised to do the work of maintaining racial boundaries in that they demand racial classifications and assume that the work of classification is neutral and straightforward, when it is anything but, especially for people with racially heterogeneous families.

### Almost, Nearly, Neither.

In 2004, whilst at high-school in Mahikeng in the North West Province a group of boys called me “amper-baas” and laughed. I could not understand Afrikaans, and yet I knew they were laughing at my expense. One of them explained that amper-baas meant “almost white”, because I – the girl with a white mother, a black father and very light brown skin - was almost white. The meaning of *amper* in Afrikaans is almost, and *baas* means Boss - a term commonly used during Apartheid by non-white workers to address their white bosses. I was being perceived as almost, but not quite, in the position that many white people once occupied during Apartheid; the implication was that I was almost powerful and able to dominate non-whites.

What was it that my schoolmates found funny in this comment – was it that my father is black and yet people often do not believe this as a result of my skin being so pale? Or was it that if my genes had been slightly different I could have passed for white? Based on the use of the term *baas* I suspect it was the latter – it implied that I could have occupied a superior position than I was in currently, if people thought I was white. It spoke to the on-going racial inequality in South Africa at the time that shaped people’s understandings of whiteness and drew them together with notions of privilege and power. Further, it showed clearly how South Africa’s past is intertwined with South Africa’s present – the term *baas* still resonates as a result of the continuing racialised inequalities in the country which (in the midst of an ever growing and significantly racialised gap between rich and poor) continue to situate those once classified as white at the top of our social hierarchy whilst those classified as black remain most affected by housing and educational crises (among other things) (Bundy, 2014; 48-49).

I can only speculate as to why the boys used the term *amper-baas*, but the utilization of the term in this instance is striking. Not only due to the fact that I could not understand the language being used (which was not the official language of communication between students) and so was excluded and dependent on explanation from the speakers, but by the fact that the words had such negative connotations. The negativity stemmed from the fact that I was neither here nor there – I was positioned in-between white and almost white – I was nearly white and thus nearly placed in a position sheathed in the negativity of South Africa’s history of Apartheid. Further, the use of the Afrikaans language to underscore such a fraught notion, relates to the historical position of the Afrikaans language in South Africa. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (2011) highlights the ways in which the Apartheid government attempted to enforce Afrikaans hegemony through the implementation of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction in

African schools, which many suggest triggered the Soweto Uprising of June 1976. Although it is clear that numerous factors contributed to the outcry of students in Soweto, the enforcement of the Afrikaans language – the language of the boss - as a medium of instruction remains central.

When thinking about the use of Afrikaans in the phrase *amper-baas* then, the historical moment of the Soweto Uprising serves as a reminder of the historical significance of the continuing racialised inequalities apparent in South Africa, and the ways in which they intersect with the language we use. Ndlovu's (2011) discussion about the use of the Afrikaans language to further solidify Afrikaans hegemony and power is central to our analysis of the term *amper-baas* in that it not only references the position of those classified as white at the top of the racialised social hierarchy then and now, but it implicates the power of language to index such hierarchies.

This is not to vilify the Afrikaans language which remains widely spoken and taught in South Africa by people of all colours, rather it is to underline the historical significance of the particular use of the language in this instance – in the phrase *amper-baas*- which references the role the language has played historically in systems of domination. As Max du Preez (2004) poetically stated; “The tongue of my heart and my soul is a tongue born in Africa and called after Africa, but after many decades of abuse it is now resented by many as the tongue of alien invaders (Du Preez, 2004:5).”

What then does this incident tell us about the ways in which discourses of race are mobilised through language in post-apartheid South Africa? How do we think more deeply about the fact that although at the time of this experience, Apartheid had ended a decade prior and at the time of my writing this two decades prior, the discourse of Apartheid appears to remain intertwined with the ways in which we communicate with and understand one another – a shadow lurking on the horizon of our everyday lives. What does it mean that South Africa's past flickers so persistently on the discursive vista of our present, and how do we make sense of that?

### What, When, How?

Most of my participants expressed similar experiences to Dalmage (2003) – some were asked the same question of “what are you?”, whilst others had faced similar variants and were consciously trying to think about the racially infused language they would pass on to their children in order to alleviate the difficulties they had faced when being asked to racially categorise themselves.

Auntie Joanie's experiences pertain directly to the question addressed by Dalmage (2003). She spoke expressively about her experiences as a child with parents of different races growing up during apartheid;

Aunty Joanie: ...our surnames were from January to December- the children's surnames. You were a January, you were a February, it was just names -when the children were removed, placed in the home- that the nuns gave them, some of them were like love-children like you know children born out of wedlock. Then the nuns gave them according to the home, you know this is from a white father and a black mother. You know, here's the child, then they just gave the child any surname because they were all from England, our nuns, they were all white. They don't know coloured surnames, they just gave us all well I was lucky I was Kotze, lots of us had our own surnames but there were others that they just gave oh February is here...you know, some came with those surnames and then we always said that was the boss's child you know when you grow up also. But on the whole it was a very, very difficult uh life for me, for me and for many others because the first thing they'd ask you when you start working or something- "you Kotze? Oh what are you actually? Who's the Kotze? Was your mother working for him? Is it the boss's surname?" and things like that. It was tough.

Auntie Joanie's experience pertains directly to Dalmage's (2003) assertions above, not only due to the repetition of the question "what are you?" but as a result of the assumption that was made about the nature of her parent's relationship. Based on what Auntie Joanie told me, her parents were quite happily married and there was no mention of an employee-boss relationship dynamic, however due to the nature of Apartheid legislation which situated interracial relationships as illegal and immoral the association between Auntie Joanie's parents was shaped as such as with the material consequences for those children who did not 'fit'. We see here how the legislation and practice of the Apartheid government contributed to solidifying notions of the monoracial family as well as racial hierarchies, and how these notions seeped into people's' everyday understand of themselves and each other.

Auntie Joanie's experience is situated during Apartheid, and yet a clear link can be drawn between Dalmage's (2003) conversation about the question "what are you?" and my experiences of being associated with the boss, indicating that Aunty Joanie's experiences still resonate in the discourses of race that are being produced today. This is evident not only in the personal anecdote I provided above, but in the experiences of other participants who were thinking about how to directly combat questions such as "what are you?" and how to frame them in terms that would explain the phenomenon of the multi-racial family to their children in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Jean-Louise, whom we met in the previous chapter expressed her concerns about how to frame her child's racial ambiguity to him in a way that would make room for the racial differences of people in his family. In a conversation between her, Jeremy's father Seamus, and myself, Jean-Louise noted the following concerns about how she would confront the possibility of Jeremy

being mistaken for white in the context of Northern Ireland (Seamus' home) due to his pale skin and the texture of his hair;

Jean-Louise: ... I think it's something I may have to proactively approach because I don't think he's gonna be bullied for racist issues because he's gonna blend in with a white environment in Northern Ireland but I think I'm going to have to one day sit down and say you know Jeremy, I know what it seems like on the surface but you're not a white boy. And I think for me it's important that I say that to him, because I can let him presume he's a white boy because with his ginger cousins and his blonde cousins you know? It's gonna be easy to forget that he's got some other part of him. And so I guess it's gonna be my responsibility to make sure that he knows he's not a white boy, and I think that's just gonna have to be something I explain and also because of my dad and my brother you know? So that when he's with my dad and my brother he doesn't feel like how could these people be my family? Because you know I have a dad and granny and grandpa and all my cousins who look like me and then these other people who live far away who are also my granny and grandpa but how are they possibly related. I need to keep that kind of, not at the forefront of his mind but just that he's aware and that when he explains to people that he's you know half South African half this, that he can also explain in the same breath that he's also mixed-race, and what it means to be mixed-race.

Jean-Louise's fear that Jeremy will not recognise her father and brother) who have darker skins than her and Jeremy), as his family comes from the notion that families are monoracial. Through utilising the term *mixed-race* Jean-Louise attempts to confront this pervasive discourse and in so doing equip her child with language that will accommodate the racially heterogeneous nature of his family, whilst concurrently acknowledging her racial identity within her son's racial identity;

Jean-Louise: yes, well I mean of all of the terms like 'half-caste' and what, 'mulatto' and 'half-breed' or whatever people say, I think mixed-race is for me the least offensive because, sort of, it in itself explains what it means. Whereas things like 'half-caste', a lot of people don't know what caste means um, I have a problem with half because it's like you're not enough, you're half of something and half of something else um and mixed-race - it is what he is, so I'm more comfortable with that term than 'interracial'. 'Inter' also implies being between something and he's not between something he's what he is, he's mixed-race so that's the term I'm most comfortable with.

Through mobilising the term *mixed-race*, with which Jean-Louise also identifies, she is able to carve out a space through language with which to explain to her child his heritage. This tells us a number of things. Firstly it speaks to Jean-Louise's awareness that racial categorisation remains a central feature of life in South Africa and that none of the sedimented racial categories in operation in everyday life are applicable to her or her son's situations. Secondly, it speaks to the roles that parents can play in the formation of their children's identities – Jean-Louise is actively thinking about how she will explain race to her child and the terminology with which she will provide him. Thirdly, it serves to exemplify the very real ways that ideas of race intersect with understandings of family – here Jean-Louise's understanding of race has everything to do with her understanding of family and the ways in which race can serve to create boundaries within families, or bring people together. Finally, it underscores the ways in which language can be utilised to make space for racially multiplicitous families – through

utilising the term *mixed-race* Jean-Louise feels she can enable her child to understand how he is connected to the various members of his family.

### I'm a "Hindigan", 'cause I'm Mixed.

Aditi: No well I didn't really know my race when I was at my old school 'cause I just used to do what everybody else did and then I came to ISSA and then they started asking me, 'wait are you Indian or are you Coloured? What are you?' And I didn't actually know what to answer because I was never brought up in the sense of just saying like, I would never think I would just be Coloured or Indian, I would... my parents always told me I was South African, and not mixed or whatever so then I came home and I asked my mom and she was also quite surprised that they asked. And they came all the time at ISSA, asking 'what are you? What are you?' And even with the religions being Indian, and Coloured Anglican and Hindu, they would say I'm a "Hindigan" 'cause I'm mixed and they would always define me and you had to be put into groups which was a bit odd, but jah...

The quote above is extracted from a discussion I had with Aditi about her experiences with race and racial discourses in July 2013. Seated in her room, surrounded by numerous South African art works purchased by Aditi's father – an avid art collector - and photographs of Aditi with friends and family, Aditi and I spoke about her experiences at school. The quotation shows how Aditi's notions of race and of her racial identity were closely intertwined with her experiences at her the current school; "I didn't really know my race when I was at my old school..." but Aditi suggests that questions such as "what are you" caused her to think consciously about a racial identity, and highlights that she "didn't actually know..." because until then her self-identity had been framed in nationalist terms. Although not articulated, it appears that this model of identity was inadequate for her peers, and that they required her to identify herself in the racial terms with which they were familiar; "are you Indian or are you Coloured?" On being confronted about racial categories, Aditi turned to her mother, Nella. The fact that her parents had brought Aditi up to understand she was South African, and that she turned to her mother in the midst of her confusion regarding how to answer the questions being posed to her about "what she was..." speaks to the centrality of parental input in the formation of one's identity, racial or otherwise. At the same time, whilst Aditi's parents had equipped her with an explanation relating to Nation – to South Africa and being *of* South Africa - they were forced to rethink their explanation in response to the space in which Aditi was placed; her mother was also "quite surprised that they had asked"(ibid.). Here the personal moves into the social as the explanation provided to Aditi by her parents is confronted and questioned in the space of the school.

On being confronted in this way Aditi not only came to think about her racial identity in relation to the terms presented to her by her schoolmates - i.e. in terms of racial categories - but she came to think about the explanation given to her by her parents about herself. Not only does

this highlight Aditi's participation in the production of her own identity, but it simultaneously implies that our understandings of ourselves are not formed independently from the contexts in which we are placed and the people by whom we are raised. In other words, Aditi's understanding of herself was influenced by the knowledge she received from her parents as well as the information transmitted to her by her colleagues *through* their questioning. Underpinning this process are echoes of the apartheid system of racial classification.

At the same time as seeing remnants of the past in the present, we concurrently see the production of new terms with which to illustrate identity. We see Aditi's rejection of the categories provided to her by her schoolmates of either "Coloured" or "Indian" and later "hindigan", and her adoption of the term "mixed", making a distinction between how she understands herself and how the people at school understand her. On the one hand this pinpoints the continued use of categories to define ourselves – one could argue that both Aditi and her school mates have simply created new categories with which to reproduce an older system of classification -, but on the other hand the creative production of categories that are as specific as *hindigan* speaks to the ways in which the practice of categorising has evolved to move beyond Apartheid racial categories, and embrace factors such as religion as well as the intersection of notions of race and religion. In addition, Aditi's choice of the word *mixed* holds an element of ambiguity in that we do not know what her specific racial mix is, whilst simultaneously hinting at the idea that she is a mixture of races and thus perpetuates the idea that potentially pure races exist. Ultimately there remains a contradiction as whilst the practice of racial categorising is reproduced, it concurrently reflects the specificities and fluidity of people's situations.

### Oh So Pure

Tana: Ok, and then at school, like your friends. Like your friend group is very mixed, like all different kinds of people. And then I've heard you talk about, before you've talked about like um, 'the Indians' that you hang out with like...

Aditi: Ya

Tana: In the common room... (laughs)

Aditi: Yes (laughs)

Tana: So tell me about that, it seems like there are two different groups. So tell me about how you kind of negotiate that and...

Aditi: It was, it was, 'cause you know how the Indians just stuck with the Indians and now Shenaaz, she used be, she used to be but now she let (sic). Um, I used to hang out with her and now she was part of the Indian group, and if I had to go hang out with her and the Indian group some of the Indian people didn't like that because I wasn't... *fully* Indian if you know what I mean? So they kind of had a bit of a thing with me 'cause they didn't like the fact that I was

hanging out with them, 'cause I wasn't pure. But eventually, I just stayed there and they just had to deal with it 'cause...

The idea that Aditi was not “pure” because she had parents of different races speaks to the assumption that people with parents of the same races are “pure”. Discourses of racial purity have been utilised historically to justify conditions of domination and inequality in contexts across the globe. In an analysis of the portrayal of black bodies in contemporary classified advertisements, for example, Owens and Beistle (2006) discuss the historical discourse of racial purity in the United States of America (USA). They postulate that the historic and legislative disdain for interracial relationships stemmed from fears that the mixing of races could result in a child with black blood which would thus threaten a white identity (and presumably white superiority). This notion refers directly to the phenomenon of the one drop rule in the USA, which stipulated that one genealogical link to a black person made someone black. To put it bluntly – one drop of black blood negates one’s claims to whiteness, designating all those who are not white as black. In South Africa, preserving racial purity was one of the foundational aspects of the National Party’s agenda of racial classification and segregation;

“You cannot get away from the fact” said another [speaker at parliamentary debate] “that we are a country of many races and the people of South Africa have decided once and for all that in this country we must keep the different races pure” (HAD, March 8, 1950, col.2548 as cited in Posel, 2001:98).

The Minister of the Interior introduced and motivated the [Population Registration] bill as evidence of “the fierce determination of the majority of South Africa to leave no stone unturned to ensure the preservation of a white South Africa” (HAD, March 16, 1950, col. 3157 as cited in Posel, 2001:98)

Ironically, numerous scholars have noted the precarity with which the discourse of racial purity was constructed in South Africa as a result of the recognition by the Apartheid government that a significant number of white families had non-white ancestors as a result of the numerous interracial relationships that existed when European settlers first arrived in the country (see Sherman and Steyn, 2009; Posel, 2001 and Du Preez, 2004). This acknowledgement is exemplified through the use of indicators such as public recognition, behaviour and parental racial classification to determine whiteness, thus limiting notions of descent to the racial classifications of one’s parents and avoiding the recognition of non-white ancestors in order to legitimate notions of white superiority and purity (see West, 1988 and Posel, 2001).

The fact that discourses of racial purity continue to be used in post-Apartheid South Africa is noteworthy. It accentuates how such discourses can become so engrained in our understandings of ourselves and of each other that they continue to persist in a post-Apartheid space. Striking is the way in which the discourse of purity has been drawn upon by children claiming an Indian racial identity which was considered non-white during Apartheid and thus a threat to white

purity, to create margins between themselves and Aditi, who is viewed as “not fully Indian” and thus not “pure”. The discourse of racial purity has been re-appropriated in a sense to reinforce the very boundaries created by the Apartheid government to enforce a racialised social hierarchy.

The Apartheid state utilised the notion of racial purity to justify the segregation of different racialised bodies during Apartheid, as well as criminalise sexual relations between them. Thus, notions of purity become layered as the white body was seen as pure, and non-white bodies were graded at different levels of purity in relation to one another; levels that were to be maintained through their enforced separation. Miscegenation then not only references notions of purity but notions of impurity and contamination – the conceptions of contamination utilised by Aditi’s schoolmates is not restricted to white and non-white bodies, but to non-white bodies that have been allocated or claim different racial identities. Although Apartheid has ended, there remains an anxiety regarding the interaction of different racialised bodies that is exemplified in people’s reactions to children conceived under such conditions. As the product of sexual relationships between people with different racial identities, children such as Aditi continue to be understood as “almost” but not quite “pure”.

Aditi’s use of the term *mixed* is an example of the ways in which people are attempting to accommodate these ambiguities in their language – to Aditi the term *mixed* served to accommodate the fact that she was not either/or one of her parents racial identities, and thus she could not choose one racial identity over the other when asked, as discussed earlier. However, in the same conversation we catch a glimpse of the fluid nature of Aditi’s racial identity;

Aditi: It’s like, um. For example, when it’s Diwali I put henna on my hands. So then they’ll be like ‘ok, so now Aditi’s Indian’ or when it’s um, when it’s Eid- and most of my cousins are Muslim Coloured- so I’ll go out to PE and I’ll celebrate with them there and then I’m ‘Coloured’, so then they’ll see on my BBM status like if I wish Eid Mubarak and then they’ll be like ‘ok, so now Aditi’s Muslim Coloured’. So now they like, they don’t...they don’t monitor but they’ll pick up when my coloured streaks come out and when my Indian streaks come out.

Although Aditi says she is not being “monitored” by the children, she then notes that “they’ll pick up when my coloured streaks come out and when my Indian streaks come out” which implies that there is an element of observation taking place on the part of her schoolmates. It remains unclear whether Aditi is describing her “Coloured and Indian streaks” in this way due to the fact that her schoolmates understand her in that way or due to the fact that she understands her situation to be that way. Either way, the fact that her behaviour is being observed, and that

she is explicating that observation in the terms given to her by her observers has a Foucauldian edge – not only with regards to observation but in relation to the discourse with which she is engaging.

In *The Birth of the Asylum*, Foucault (2001) traces the ways in which the asylum utilised the discourse of rationality to instil guilt into the mad man for being mad and thus irrational. This process made him conscious of his madness and thus able to aspire to being rational. It references, not only the production of madness and rationality, but more broadly the ways in which we are taught to observe and understand ourselves with the knowledge given to us by others – what Judith Butler (2004) calls, “The power of regulation” (Butler, 2004:57) (see also Dubois, 2006). Further, such knowledge is never neutral. In *The Discourse on Language*, Foucault (2008) discusses how discourse is never produced from a place of neutrality but situated in relationships of power, which frame the knowledge to which we gain access. Thus, the mad man is deemed mad as a result of the discourse which defines him as such, and he is taught to ingest this discourse in order to understand and observe his condition with the aim of conforming to the norms defined by this dominant discourse. This process of observation can be used to think about Aditi’s experiences – her classmates observed her behaviour and interpreted it with the dominant discourse of race prevalent in South Africa. On coming to be aware of this observation, Aditi thus began to observe herself and explain herself in the dominant terms with which she was provided.

More broadly, this form of observation can be directly linked to the Apartheid state which classified and in so doing taught people to classify; provided the terms of classification and in so doing taught people how to classify and did so to establish hierarchical relationships of power. These processes have remained with us in our post-Apartheid state – and by state I mean our state of being -, and are referenced by Aditi and her schoolmates. However, they are simultaneously being contradicted in Aditi’s and people such as Jean-Louise’s use of terms such as *mixed*, and Aditi’s movement between various categories of race. This highlights the situational nature of racial identities and underscores their constructed nature. Therefore, whilst Apartheid practices of racial classification and the continued use of Apartheid racial categories remain prevalent in various contemporary spaces, they are not fixed – they are being grappled with in extremely complex ways.

There is no language it seems, with which to capture the possibilities of a future beyond Apartheid or even post-Apartheid – even the attempts to capture experiences such as Aditi’s

are marred by traces of the past, of a past which violently separated people and cast interracial unions such as those of our parents in a shameful light. Racial classification continues to be reproduced and to inform the ways in which we know each other, but at times we catch glimpses of the ways in which it seems to have evolved to accommodate people's creativity and specificities. This evolution is at times constrained by our language, which forces us to reference the past in order to map the present. It seems broader terms such as *mixed* reference the positions of ambiguity so many of us occupy – these terms are not as heavily weighted by the horrors of the past however they still reference it in their need to grapple with the residues of racial categorisation as well as their potentially indirect reference to discourses of purity.

# Chapter 6



## *To Conclude*

Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorising about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

For me this space of radical openness is a margin - a profound edge...I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose- to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center - but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes ones capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new world. (hooks, 1989:206-207).

bell hooks (1989) asks us to think about the possibilities from the margin; to expand our understanding of marginality to incorporate the potential it holds for resistance. She asks that if one is on the outside of the center, one should look at it with alternative eyes – eyes which offer new ways of seeing. She notes:

When I left that concrete space at the margins, I kept alive in my heart ways of knowing reality, which affirm continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings (1989:207).

These words suggest that we can remember the past without being trapped by it - the past informs the present but should not keep us from envisioning the future. To me her words offer an imperative; ‘Let your marginality allow you to envision and not freeze. Imagine alternatives.’ If we think about this in relation to the experiences of multiracial families, who are a minority in post-Apartheid South Africa as a result of decades of segregation, we can see how their positions at the margins of South African notions of family and race may allow them and others to think differently about their positions in this country.

South Africa continues to be influenced by its past. The past is visible in the landscape, in the intersection between class and race which inform the ongoing racialised hierarchies of the present - in the continued use of Apartheid racial terminology. That said, there is space to envision the future. The legalisation of racial segregation was shed and with it the illegality of loving and living across racial boundaries. The possibility exists for living differently. The experiences of my participants exemplify these possibilities. They are evident in the recognition and celebration of kinship across racial boundaries and against biological understandings of family. They are evident in the new ways in which people are configuring racial identity and in the use of kinship terms to describe non-biological relations. They are

evident in the emergence of new language with which to think about race. At the same time these possibilities continue to interact with the past as they stumble upon the skeletons of a time before and begin to decipher how to lay them to rest. The ways in which people are imagining these possibilities are no doubt tenfold – this is the task of future research.

Raymond Suttner (2011) speaks of the need for the racial categories of Apartheid to continue to be used in the name of redress – he indicates that we must hold onto aspects of the past in order to rectify the damage done by the past to our present. Whilst this may be necessary, it is not enough to simply reproduce the terms of the past – surely we should also think about the terms of the future? The experiences of the multiracial families with whom I worked allow us to gain access to the ways in which people are attempting to negotiate their positions in contemporary South Africa, without simply reproducing the discourse of race with which they have been provided, but through careful contemplation and recognition of what these discourses mean to them and in their lives. Multiracial families are uniquely situated to do this as a result of the limitations of racial categorising in South Africa, which does not make space for racial diversity within families. These limitations may confront families in ways that force them to think deeply about their configurations of racial identity and their use of racialised language. That said, everyone is capable of so doing – these tasks are not limited to members of multiracial families but can be taken up by anyone. As Alice Walker once said, “look closely at the present you are constructing: it should look like the future you are dreaming” (Walker in Robinson, 2013).

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