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Mothering 'Outsider' Children: White Women in Black/White Interracial Families in Ireland

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Abstract: The mixed-race family constellation has emerged as a regular feature of the Irish familial landscape. Such a demographic change invariably leads to the increased presence of white women who are mothering across racialised boundaries. Moreover, in the Irish context, the racial category of whiteness is privileged at a structural level and remains a central organising principle of Irishness as a mode of national belonging. This paper, therefore, sets out to address the specific gap in the literature related to the racialised experiences of the white mother of mixed-race (i.e., black African/white Irish) children in contemporary Ireland as these women are, in effect, mothering 'outsider' children in a context of white supremacy. More specifically, how does the positioning of these women's mixed-race children impact their subjectivities as mothers categorised normatively as white and Irish? Framed by critical whiteness literature, this paper draws on in-depth interviews with twelve white Irish mothers. Data analysis broadly revealed three themes as relates to the women's negotiations of the racialising discourses and practices which impact their family units. Findings suggest that these women no longer occupy the default position of whiteness as a category of racial privilege and a condition of 'structured invisibility'. Perhaps, most significantly, the lived reality of these women disturbs the hegemonic conflation of the categories white and Irish. This paper, therefore, extends our theoretical understanding of both whiteness and mixed-race studies.

Keywords: family; interracial; Ireland; mixed-race Irish; racialised binary; white mother; whiteness

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the mixed-race (i.e., black African/white Irish) family constellation has emerged as a regular feature of the Irish familial landscape (CSO 2017). Such a demographic change invariably leads to the increased presence of white women who are mothering across racialised boundaries (O'Donoghue 2004). Moreover, these families encounter distinct challenges in terms of negotiating the black/white divide and its traditional impermeability (Dalmage 2001). More specifically, the white mothers may, in fact, come to experience a unique relationship vis-à-vis ideologies of race as their identities potentially shift from occupying a position as 'insiders within their own dominant culture to becoming outsiders within' (Luke 1994, p. 58). Whereas the white mother may not possess the experiential or the embodied knowledge to negotiate issues of race and racism, it is indeed worth noting that she too, as a member of a mixed-race family, is confronted by the material, emotional and social impact of racism, albeit in a relational sense (Allen 2017). Although not an automatic consequence of mothering in a mixed-race context, their relational experiences of racism may, therefore, prompt these women to re-examine the meaning of whiteness in their lives (Britton 2013).

Yet, whilst the white mother in the mixed-race family formation has appeared in race literature, there has been a marked tendency to regard her solely as 'a heritage marker' for her children rather than a person who can bring to bear her own racialised dynamics (Luke 1994). More recently, however, there has emerged a body of literature which relates to the racialised experiences of the mixed-race family with particular focus on the white mother's (re) negotiation of her whiteness (Britton 2013; Harman 2010; Mckenzie 2013; Twine 2010).

In the Irish context, the racial category of whiteness is privileged at a structural level and remains a central organising principle of Irishness as a mode of national belonging (Garner 2007). In a nation which is racialised exclusively as white, therefore, the existence of the mixed-race subject is an 'unsettling presence' (Enright 2011) who is generally regarded as manifesting incompatibility with an authentic Irish identity (Morrison 2004). This form of racialised exclusion almost certainly has repercussions for the family units of white Irish women who mother children fathered by black African men.

This paper sets out, therefore, to address the specific gap in the literature related to the racialised experiences of the white mother of mixed-race (black African/white Irish) children in the Irish context. This paper further aims to build on the body of existing literature related to the white mother in the mixed-race family formation whilst further contributing to the wider field of both whiteness and mixed-race studies.

The article proceeds as follows: firstly, I trace the significant moments and features that have shaped racialised belonging in the Irish context before discussing the analytical framework which draws on critical whiteness studies. The materials and methods which provide the basis for this analysis are then outlined. I, then, consider the empirical findings and conclude with a discussion of the paper's wider implications for extending our understanding of both contemporary theorisations of whiteness and mixed-race studies.

2. The Irish National Landscape of Racialised Belonging

Since the emergence of the independent Irish state in the 1920s, nation-building discourses have promulgated notions of ethnic and religious homogeneity (Fanning 2012). The deeply embedded association between whiteness and Irishness has also been a key feature of Irish nationalism (Fanning 2012). This dominant ideology of homogeneity has produced what O'Connell (1995) refers to as the 'myth of Irishness', thereby perpetuating an historical tradition of exclusionary racial politics, which means that racism continues to be produced both institutionally and at the quotidian level as minority groups such as Travellers, black/mixed-race and Jewish people are excluded from dominant constructions of the Irish nation (Fanning 2012).

The experience of emigration and involvement in British colonial processes has also exposed Irish people to racist doctrine, both as recipients and perpetrators of processes of racialisation (Garner 2004). In fact, Garner has suggested that 'the Irish have "appropriated" racism as a postcolonial instrument of domination' (Garner 2004, p. 26); a racism which is now targeted towards minority groups (or more specifically, visible minorities) who, as 'racialised outsiders' (McVeigh 1992), must bear culpability for the phenomenon of racism in Ireland (Lentin and McVeigh 2002). This increases our understanding of how the racialisation of the Other is both informed by and interconnects with the racialisation of the Irish (Lentin 1999). For, as Lentin (1999, p. 3) argues, 'we cannot understand Irish racism, or the Irish racialization of the Other, without understanding the racialization of the Irish self'. Indeed, the historical racialisation of the Irish (vis-à-vis other white groups) provides a useful starting point in any discussion of the social construction of race (Garner 2004). In this regard, Ignatiev (1995) examines how Irish emigrants to America during the 18th/19th centuries, although enduring material conditions comparable to African Americans, actively differentiated themselves through 'an instrumentalization of whiteness' (Garner 2004, p. 139). In fact, it is only in the 1990s, as Ireland witnessed the emergence of new black Irish or minority ethnic communities, that Irish identity became explicitly linked with whiteness for the first time (Lentin and McVeigh 2006).

During the last three decades, the phenomenon of migration has dramatically impacted the overall demographic profile of the Irish population (Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2021). In particular, the arrival of immigrants from non-white minority ethnic groups has posed a fundamental challenge to the narrow racialised constructions of Irish identity (Connolly 2006). In fact, Census 2016 reports that the number of 'Black or Black Irish–African' residing in Ireland is 56,968 persons or 1.2% of the total population (CSO 2016). In terms of available statistics regarding households where the adult partners are from different racial

backgrounds, Census 2016 further indicates the presence of 656 married couples where the man is black or black Irish and the woman is white Irish (CSO 2016). In addition, the fastest growing ethnic group since Census 2011 has been 'other, including mixed background', which has displayed an annualised growth of 14.7 percent (CSO 2016).

The phenomenon of the racialisation of migration in the Irish context means that there further exists a tendency to racialise asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants as black (Lentin and McVeigh 2006). Indeed, the re-configuration of Ireland's citizenship regime in the 2004 referendum could be said to be a governmental response to the increasing levels of vitriol being directed towards black asylum-seekers and/or the negative framing of childbearing African women (Lentin and McVeigh 2006). In the June 2004 referendum, the Irish electorate voted (in a four to one majority) to remove the constitutional right to jus soli (i.e., law of soil) citizenship and to opt instead for the incorporation of jus sanguinis (i.e., law of blood) principles of belonging in constitutional law (Lentin 2007). The re-configuration of Ireland's citizenship regime sought, therefore, to re-affirm Irishness as firmly located within the realm of 'blood-ties' and kinship: a purity of race that has evolved across generations (Crowley et al. 2006). Moreover, the referendum, with its denial of the constitutional right to citizenship to Irish born children of non-Irish nationals, further highlights the vulnerability of the migrant children who have been denied a sense of belonging in the state (Mullally 2005). Despite the sanctity of family life enshrined in the Constitution, the state removed citizenship rights from future generations of Irish-born children, who were unable to prove a 'blood' connection (Mullally 2005). Instead, the value of connection to a territory is evaluated according to 'the length and depth of past association, rather than the salience or value of future connections' (Bhabha 2003 cited in Mullally 2005, p. 600). In fact, Lentin regards the citizenship referendum as a 'turning point in the recent history of racism in Ireland' (Lentin 2007, p. 601) and as a marker of the political significance of gendered reproductive work (Lentin 2007).

This section has, therefore, located the white Irish mother of mixed-race children within the wider social, cultural and political context of public debates and discourses and constitutional and legislative initiatives that shape belonging in and through race in twenty first century Ireland.

3. The Relationality of Whiteness (and the White Mother)

This paper draws on the critical study of whiteness, which provides an understanding of the ways in which the notion of whiteness has been produced simultaneously as both unmarked and invisible but yet as a normative and dominant social category (Dyer 1997). In fact, it is argued that much of the power of whiteness lies in its ability to escape definition whilst systematically defining the other at the same time (Bonnett 2000).

It is also fair to say that dominant conceptualisations of whiteness emphasise an equally experienced location of structural advantage and power (Garner 2007). But, as Garner states below:

> The relationality of whiteness involves two simultaneous border maintenance processes: one between white and people of colour and the other between white and not-quite white. All white subjects are located somewhere on this spectrum, which is an outcome of the ongoing classificatory process conceptualized as racialization.
>
> (Garner 2007, p. 175)

There exists, therefore, a variety of positionings *within* whiteness and hence, the privileges which invariably flow from such a status are not evenly distributed (Garner 2007). As an example, the Irish have occupied a paradoxical position in relation to mainstream white identity in both the U.S. and Britain (Hickman 1998; Ignatiev 1995; Walter 2011). As Frankenberg (1993, p. 236) further notes, 'the range of possible ways of living whiteness, for an individual woman in a particular time and place, is delimited by the relations of racism at that moment and in that place'. Any theorisation of whiteness, therefore, needs

to attempt to resolve the ever-present tension between the hegemony of whiteness and the diverse ways that whiteness is lived (Moran 2004).

Yet, it remains important to note that, in relation to non-whites, those positioned as white do occupy a location of relational privilege (Moran 2004). Moreover, it is the white person's lack of cognisance of this fact which operates as 'a central mechanism in the reproduction of racialized systems of knowledge, power and privilege'; with it being regarded as 'just the way things are' (Moran 2004, para. 18).

This paper further draws on third wave whiteness studies which has, as its central focus, the objective of rendering whiteness visible by exposing the workings of white supremacy (Gallagher and Twine 2017; Garner 2017; Twine and Gallagher 2008). This is particularly crucial when one considers this moment in history and the phenomenon of the mainstreaming of white supremacy as part of the backlash politics of Trumpism and Brexit (Garner 2017). In addition, the third wave perspective facilitates an understanding of 'the nuanced and locally specific ways' (Twine and Gallagher 2008, p. 13) that whiteness manifests in different national contexts.

Frankenberg's seminal study of white women in the U.S. represented a sustained attempt to map out and examine 'the terrain of whiteness' (Frankenberg 1993, p. 2) by analysing the significance of race in the women's lives. This was the first study of race by a white feminist which shifted the research focus from ethnic minorities to white women. Her findings indicated that the women's perspectives on race and racism in America could be broadly categorised according to three discursive repertoires—'essentialist racism, color and power evasion and race cognizance' (1993, p. 188)—with 'evasion' being the most dominant. Whilst essentialist racism may be understood as referring to biological notions of race, colour and power evasion involves a selective attention to difference (e.g., cultural diversity), but in a manner that leaves racial hierarchies intact ('the production of the white self innocent of racism' (1993, p. 188)). The discursive repertoire of race cognisance, on the other hand, both acknowledges the everyday existence of racial inequality and frames this issue within historical and political discourses (as opposed to essentialist differences) (Frankenberg 1993).

During the 1990s, a new genre of race-related literature began to appear: the autobiographical memoir written by white mothers of black/mixed-race children (Lazarre 1996; Reddy 1994; Segrest 1994). In these publications, the white women elucidate their growing racial awareness and subsequent re-negotiation of whiteness as their routine mothering practices become circumscribed by discourses of race and racism. In fact, Lazarre explains how everyday mothering forced her to come to terms with 'the blindness of whiteness' (Lazarre 1996, p. 49) vis-à-vis the historical legacy of slavery on the racial stratification of American society.

Twine (2010) conducted an ethnographic analysis of the white mothers in mixed-race families (in Leicester, England) as they encounter aspects of racism in their daily lives. These women can be regarded as 'insider-outsiders' (Twine 2010, p. 93) who, through their intimate association with blackness, have come to understand the pernicious effects of racism. Twine established the concept of 'racial literacy', which she defines as a response to racism that 'generates a repertoire of discursive and material practices' (Twine 2010, p. 92). Through the acquisition of 'racial literacy', the white mothers develop a critical racial frame for an analysis of how both their public and private lives are structured by a racialised hierarchical system. The mothers also demonstrated an increased recognition of 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991) and a growing ability to assess the influence of class and gender on racial hierarchies. Finally, these mothers also learned to see beyond their own whiteness as they re-evaluated its social, political and cultural implications.

It is also worth noting that, unlike white mothers in monoracial family units, these women are, oftentimes, confronted by 'a critical, racialized social gaze' (Britton 2013, p. 1314) in relation to their maternal competence (Caballero et al. 2008; Harman 2010; Twine 2010) as they are 'subjected to forms of surveillance, discipline and moral censure usually

restricted to women of color' (Twine 2010, p. 60). More broadly, the notion of the good mother is denied to women who have transgressed racial boundaries (Britton 2013).

The above studies, therefore, provide evidence that whiteness as an advantageous social location is not equally experienced by these mothers (Britton 2013). In fact, Britton asks us to extend our analysis of the racialised positioning of the white mother to a consideration of how her whiteness may impact racialised power relations within the context of the family unit. That is, to what degree are everyday mothering practices structured by, and structuring of, whiteness (both as a discourse and as a practice)? Such a nuanced analysis of the implications of whiteness may provide unique insight as to how race impacts all members of mixed-race family formations (Britton 2013).

4. Materials and Methods

In this paper, I report on empirical findings from individual interviews with twelve white Irish mothers of mixed-race (i.e., black African/white Irish) children (aged 4–18). The mean age of the mothers was early 40s and they came from a range of geographical (i.e., town, cities and rural settings) and class backgrounds. The majority of the mothers (seven) had one child and the remainder (five) had two/three. Also, eight of the mothers were in single parent households. The interviews were conducted by the author between 2016 and 2019.

In order to access this 'hidden' population group, I used a non-random strategy for participant recruitment; that is, snowball sampling. I also complied with ethical protocol in relation to such provisions as informed consent, voluntary participation, principles of anonymity (e.g., use of pseudonyms) and confidentiality (Hennink et al. 2011). In fact, due to the population under study being a distinct minority group, I exercised particular vigilance as regards the anonymising of interview transcripts so as not to inadvertently disclose the identity of participants (Hennink et al. 2011).

As per feminist principles, in-depth interviewing was utilised as the main strategy for data collection in order to capture the previously silenced experiences of the white mothers of mixed-race Irish children (Doucet and Mauthner 2006). The interviews largely began with some general opening questions related to the everyday lives of the mothers and family (e.g., ages of children, schools attended) before progressing to more open-ended questions (such as 'what is it like to mother a mixed-race child'?). All interviews lasted approximately 90 min and were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

My positionality, as a white mother of mixed-race Irish children, was helpful in terms of creating flow and rapport between myself and the interviewee. Ostensibly, this shared experience located me as an 'insider' who possesses lived knowledge and/or sensitisation to the particular manifestations of race and racism in the Irish context. However, it is further important to acknowledge that, as the interview is filtered through the lens of my personal lived experience, it is crucial to employ reflexivity in order to better understand the role of the self in knowledge creation (Pillow 2003).

Data analysis was guided by the principles of thematic narrative analysis (Riessman 2008). The process of transcription served as the initial interpretive tool as I noted any preliminary themes and/or personal reflections. A systematic process then began whereby the recording, coding and collation of data occurred simultaneously with the development, review and refinement of the thematic framework (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic narrative analysis broadly revealed three key themes as relates to the mothers' negotiations of racialising discourses and practices: the 'resistance to racialisation as black', 'multicultural framings of difference' and 'reflexive white subjectivities'. These themes are explored in detail below.

5. Resistance to Racialisation as Black

The findings from the in-depth interviews highlighted that all the mothers, to a greater or lesser extent, struggled to ascribe meaning or a narrative to the racialisation of their mixed-race family and further articulated feelings of anxiety as to how this de-stabilised

their own sense of racial and cultural belonging. In fact, the most common pattern was for the mothers to be located within a complex web of intersecting discourses. At certain points, traces of all three themes were present in the mothers' articulations of race. This gave rise to ambiguities and tensions in the interview narratives as the mothers worked through their shifting subjectivities and, oftentimes, conceptualised this process in terms of a racial awakening (e.g., I just didn't see it before but I get it now'). Moreover, there exists a relative culture of silence around discourses of racism in the Irish context which means that the subjectivities of these mothers are effectively rendered silent by the dominant culture.

In this section, however, I briefly examine the narratives of the two women who, in relation to both their children and to mixed-race black people more generally, actively resist racialisation as black. Tina, mother of Margaret (18) and Joe (16), asserts:

> His [Tina's husband] family tell her [Margaret] constantly, 'you're black'–so, anyway, when she was young, my husband's family would tell her over and over 'you are black, you are black' and she would say, 'I'm Irish-African'–and they'd say to her, 'say it, I am black and I am proud' and she'd say, 'I am light brown'.

Interestingly, Tina chooses to narrate episodes in her daughter's life when she (Margaret) resisted and/or disrupted the readings of her racialised body. Eavan, mother of Dick (16) and Jim (7), continues this theme in relation to her partner's family:

> My partner's family in [Africa] very much feel that he [Dick] is theirs–'you can go and get another one, he is black, he is ours and this is so because of his colour–because he is so dark–like it actually happened a couple of times that his extended family told me to give the child back–'give him back to his people, he is not yours'–they were trying to claim him–I found it so upsetting–because he is not black, he is mixed–but they kept insisting that he is black–but I definitely see it in him–even though we live in Ireland, he does not identify as being Irish.

The above narratives capture how essentialist notions of race persist in the public imaginary or more significantly, how racialised bodies are constructed by processes of racialisation and are regarded as possessing a permanent, fixed essence (Ahmed 2002). Moreover, as stated earlier, in the context of Ireland's racialised discourses of inclusion and exclusion, blackness has become associated with outsider status. We can, therefore, see how Tina and Eavan are unsettled by the fact that their children are located 'outside' on the basis of biological signifiers and are at some level, being claimed by the African extended family. The issue then becomes how to 'anchor' their children in the Irish national space within the constraints imposed by the workings of the racialised insider/outsider dichotomy.

In a more general way, both Tina and Eavan speak below about how whiteness can be engulfed, or even annihilated, by blackness.

> The reality is that they [mixed-race young people] are going to be identified as black–whatever way–I mean, when people look at Obama they see a black man–and again, I have really mixed feelings about that–I think it's wonderful that he's seen as black because it's so positive but on the other hand, I think 'he has a white mother'–where is she?–he's not black, he's mixed-race–I'm not saying that I don't see myself as my kids' mother–it's a tricky one–like the mixed-race child is definitely not equally white or equally black–it certainly upsets me about Obama–I mean, where is his mammy? (Tina)

> I get pissed off when people refer to my boys as black–my friend refers to both of them as black–and I kind of think, 'I'm a white woman, how can my biological sons be black'?–that is denying that I am even there–I mean, my boys are just as much me as they are him [husband]. (Eavan)

By their articulation of their struggles to retain a sense of their own whiteness, these mothers narrate lives subsumed by the visual and political weight, or valence, of discursive blackness. Both Tina and Eavan must, to some extent, relinquish their whiteness and re-constitute a sense of self. But, in order to re-align her racial vision with that of her child, how much whiteness must be relinquished?

6. Multicultural Framings of Difference

Discourses of liberal multiculturalism also feature prominently in the majority (seven) of the mothers' narratives. The basic tenet of this political theory is that multiculturalism is regarded as an approach to the accommodation of diversity on the basis that it upholds liberal democratic norms (such as equality, freedom, tolerance and anti-discrimination) (Ivison 2010). In fact, throughout her interview, Nessa, mother of Colum (12), Rian (9) and Mary (6), actively constructs a discourse of the 'new' Ireland where we 'celebrate differences'. She talks at length about how 'we have to keep acknowledging and celebrating the fact that Ireland is diverse'. It seems that, at some level, the multicultural mantra ('we are all different but equal' (Ali 2003)) acts as a source of comfort for Nessa; as if the words themselves performatively create a more inclusive Ireland:

> I mean, a lot of their friends would have parents from other countries–say, for example, Poland or Spain or that–so we compare it in that it's equal to that–y'know, isn't it great that their dad is from this country and your dad is from this country–but we're not discussing the colour of it, you know what I mean–it's just that there are all these major cultures coming together.

However, this liberal discourse of tolerance is imbued with a racialised subtext as whiteness is retained as the norm ('we're not discussing the colour of it'). As both race and racism are culturalised in public, political and media discourse, Nessa takes up this discourse as a means of making sense of her world ('there are all these major cultures coming together'). Indeed, the tendency to frame race in cultural terms (Lentin and Titley 2011) was a significant feature across several interviews. The mothers also tended to refer to Ireland as 'so multicultural' at various points:

> Like, we live in [name of area] and to be honest, it is so lovely and so (emphasis) multicultural–if anything, my kids are the norm–there's a huge Muslim population and because of my kids' colour–people from Algeria and stuff think they are Algerian and then like, I don't know how to explain it–you go into the playground and there's like half-Spanish kids, half-Brazilian kids, like half-African–like, I love it–it's brilliant–it's so multicultural. (Noreen, mother of Aaron (12), Justine (5) and Saul (3))

Noreen continues by describing her son's friendship group:

> His group of friends is Belize–one of his friends is half-Turkish, one is Portuguese–one is half-Japanese. It is just so multicultural around here.

Or, as Jane, mother of Sam (8), notes:

> I suppose what is so great about this town is that it is so multicultural–that is what is so great about it.

There is a liberal, celebratory tone apparent in the above accounts (Fortier 2005) as race is framed in cultural terms. In fact, both Noreen and Jane recite the various nationalities, cultures and ethnicities they encounter on a daily basis as 'markers' of a life lived in the 'new' Ireland. Of course, this invocation of liberal discourse is compatible with Ireland's (supposed) nascent multiculturalism (although, as stated earlier, there has long been a presence of racialised minority groups such as Travellers). Yet, if culture is indeed substituted as a euphemism for race, then this discourse offers the mother and child(ren) a de-racialised way of being in the 'new' Ireland. That is, as a multicultural subject of the 'new' Ireland, her child could be positioned inside national discourses, albeit on 'different but equal' terms. In short, he/she can be 'in' and 'of' the country.

It is also worth noting that, throughout the interviews, there was a constant disjuncture between the espousal of liberal multiculturalism ('we are all different but equal') and the assertions of biological belonging enunciated by mothers on behalf of children and/or their negative characterisations of minority groups. At some level, of course, it seems that such statements reflect not only the inherent contradictions and ambiguities of liberal discourses in general but also speak to the lack of availability of counter-narratives which may pose

a challenge to the mother's conceptual framework (Allen 2017). For example, Maggie, mother of Tom (10), asserts that mixed race children

> belong here as much as any of us–it's not like someone coming over here from Africa–they are born here–it's different.

In fact, several mothers established a differentiation between the positioning of their children and African immigrants, and perhaps, even more powerfully, the positioning of Travellers as articulated below by Helen, mother of George (17) and Liam (15):

> In fact, we are surrounded by council housing and social housing estates where immigrants and Travellers are packed in, and then, my children get tarred with the same brush. Liam was mugged by two Travellers.

She continues by stating:

> At this stage, there was a real surge in immigrants–it had started to happen–so, suddenly, you had lots of black people around and that actually caused more (emphasis) problems because there was a lot of racism directed towards the Nigerians, particularly–I mean, George and Liam have really suffered as a consequence of the general racism directed towards African kids.

As noted earlier, in the Irish context, state discourses regarding immigration have consistently promulgated the notion of 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees' who are racialised as black (Fanning 2012; Garner 2004). Thus, as we can see in the above extracts, Helen is refusing to be positioned by immigration as a racialising discourse, whilst at the same time, invoking racialised discourses of Travellers. Noreen further differentiates between her children and refugees:

> I think, at the moment, there is a big issue with refugees–I suppose my kids have been privileged because they have moved in one circle–and I suppose sometimes my concern is when they move out of that circle–thankfully, my kids are fine and get on fine but I suppose they are quite light-skinned and maybe, if you are mixed or lighter then you get on OK.

In the above accounts, both Helen and Noreen seek out 'markers of difference' as a way of protecting their children from the negative racialisation experienced by African immigrants, refugees and Travellers. Such markers include an appeal to the racialised principles of jus sanguinis belonging, a depiction of Travellers as the 'real' outsiders, a nuanced allusion to class differences ('my kids have been privileged because they have moved in one circle') and even an implicit engagement with the workings of shadeism ('maybe if you are mixed or lighter then you get on ok') which, of course, provides some proximity to whiteness.

7. Reflexive White Subjectivities

Three of the women incorporated a critically reflexive relationship to whiteness in their interview narratives. These mothers, by articulating moments in which their white 'insider' positioning is de-stabilised, demonstrate awareness of the micro-politics of racism impacting their everyday lives. In this regard, Ellie, mother of Maya (4) notes:

> It will often come up in conversation that my husband is African and my daughter is mixed–and sometimes people will say, 'do you ever experience any racism'? and I say, 'not the kind of racism you are talking about'–I mean, I had friends say things to me like 'I wouldn't live out in (area), it's full of Africans–oh, no offence, I didn't mean Africans like (husband), you know what I mean'–'well, no, I don't know what you mean'–or 'I wouldn't have my baby in (hospital), there are too many Africans'.

She continues:

> Sometimes, I come away thinking, I didn't protect her (daughter) there–I failed her in that moment–funny enough, it only happened at the weekend–we were around at a friend's house and I had Maya's hair in 4 little ponytails–she came

> in and everyone was like 'oh my god, look at her hair'–as if it was something amazing and I thought, 'it's just a hairstyle'–and then, one of the men in the group said, 'oh, imagine doing that hairstyle on (his son), he'll be a gangsta' and then someone says, 'oh yeah, straight out of Compton, whaa' and all this kind of stuff and I was just standing there and I could feel my heart racing and I was thinking–'I just want to tell you to shut up'–'what's gangsta' about my child's hair'?–and what's 'less than' about it'?–if you're talking about gangsta', then you are talking about drugs and crime and people getting shot–but I just stood there nervously and laughed–I went 'aaaaahhhaaa' (nervous laugh)–why the hell did I just do that? Why didn't I say shut up? Because I didn't want them to feel awkward but why should I care? I should care about my daughter because first and foremost, it is about how she feels.

Racism is articulated as a signifier of change in the above account as Ellie demonstrates a nuanced analysis of the workings of discourses of racism as relates to her everyday lived experience. Or, indeed, in Twine's (2010) terms, she has acquired 'racial literacy'. Ellie continues by narrating a racially charged episode where she finds herself situated along a continuum between the oppositional discourses of blackness and whiteness. In fact, Ellie's account suggests 'cultural insider—racialised outsider' status as she attempts to re-align her racial vision in order to incorporate the world view of her mixed-race child. Twine (2010) compares this process to Du Bois's concept of double consciousness (which describes 'the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 2004, p. xiv)). It is as if Ellie must now carry her daughter's blackness with her (for Maya was definitely hailed as black in the above episode and no doubt, in others). This certainly highlights the specific role of white mothers in mixed-race families as relates to the reproduction of black subjectivities (Britton 2013).

So, what happens to the mothers' white subjectivities in scenarios such as that related above? The mothers' whiteness is irrevocably disturbed in a process which Twine and Steinbugler refer to as lifting the 'white veil' (Twine and Steinbugler 2006, p. 360). These mothers must now live out a new version of whiteness; a whiteness that is 'raced' through intimate association with blackness. Indeed, Ellie's internal narrative provides insight into that moment of emotional intensity (i.e., when her daughter 'becomes black' (Lewis 2007)) and Ellie is forced to negotiate the ambivalent positioning of cross-racial motherhood.

However, Ellie was ultimately silenced by fear of becoming the 'affect alien' (Ahmed 2008, p. 6) who, by bringing a critical analysis of racism to bear on the above scenario, becomes the harbinger of discord and ill-feeling and has the temerity to 'trouble whiteness' (Ahmed 2000, p. 102). Rachel, mother of Michelle (12), further expresses her frustration and exhaustion:

> The biggest issue is to break the stereotype–it's tiring–it's tiring to break the stereotype because I've been trying to do that for the last five years–I do have days when I think 'oh, to hell with the lot of it, I'm leaving the country'–you get so tired of it–I feel like saying to people, 'why can't you just think outside the box and think, maybe, maybe my life is not that different to yours'?–'my relationship is not that different to yours or my child is not that different to yours'.

In Rachel's view, her family constellation is 'fixed' by racialised stereotyping (Fanon 2008)–a process of racial reduction, a one-dimensional view that renders the depth and complexity of their lives invalid. She describes a family which is unable to resist the defining power of racial categories and whose lives must be lived as possessing essentialised properties. As Rachel's narrative further attests, the white mother experiences the racialised stereotyping attributed to her child and family–she is, indeed, living a different type of whiteness. It is as if she must re-constitute a sense of self which accords with how her family is perceived and responded to by Irish society. Finally, Rachel's tone of despair is evident as she recalls her friend's reaction to the structural racism experienced by her husband:

> I remember saying to a friend, 'I don't know what we're going to do like' and she said, 'but, Rachel, that was gonna happen, y'know, what do you expect'?–well, I expect him to be treated as an equal and then, when someone says that to you, it crushes you–maybe I am stupid to expect more–maybe I am stupid to expect that we are entitled to the same respect as everyone else?

We can note Rachel's awareness that discourses of progressive liberal multiculturalism, which espouse values of equality and respect, fail to cohere with her family's lived reality of lack of legitimacy in the public sphere. Rachel is also grappling with the loss of whiteness as there is a realisation that the privileges accrued by her white status are not simply transferable to her partner and child. Alice, mother of Dan (10), also comments on how she perceives routine and subtle forms of racism that were not previously visible:

> It's quite invisible stuff really–you know, the kind of racism where people are throwing eggs at your front door–that would be almost easier to deal with–you know–otherwise, it just becomes the normal stuff that goes on every day.

Alice continues by citing an example of how racism has become embedded in the minutiae of daily life:

> You know, my mother rants about all 'the foreigners' coming into Ireland and I look at her and I go 'hello' (emphasis)–and she says, 'I didn't mean him' (husband)–I can't even get my head around that–I mean, what do you think my husband is–they say, 'of course, I didn't mean him' (emphasis).

Besides the fact that, in the above account, her husband is regarded as being 'whitened' through association with her family and thereby, co-opted into a logic of sameness (Fanon 2008), such scenarios must impact on Alice's self-construction as white and Irish. In fact, Alice is effectively positioned as the 'outsider within' (Hill Collins 1990) as she must, at some level, re-negotiate the meaning of whiteness in the context of Ireland's racism and shifting social order. Alice further relates the following episode:

> An {African} kid used to give Dan an awful time–one night, I thought, 'I cannot do this anymore' and I went to see the mum–and the mum basically said to her son, 'look, that's your brother, that's your brother, you need to defend one another, you should not be in a position where you are going to give each other a hard time, there's enough white people who will give you a hard time, that is your brother'–I was really amazed she said that–it was quite powerful–now, I'm not saying that her son espouses that on the street but the mother was saying that–I mean, she was taking my son under her wing in the sense of 'you're with us'.

This account highlights the different ways of being interpellated as a white woman. Indeed, Alice's sense of whiteness must be unsettled by the above incident as discourses of white Irishness, immigration and blackness all intersect and collide in her experience. Alice articulates that raw, powerful moment when she is forced to confront how her family constellation is discursively positioned–that is, she is mothering a racialised 'outsider'. Moreover, as a white woman, she is excluded from the moment of intimacy which unfolds between the African mother and her [Alice's] son, Dan, as he is claimed in terms of kinship, as a 'brother'.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper, by examining the lives of white women through a specifically racial lens, has provided insight into the variety of ways that race (specifically, whiteness) is lived in contemporary Ireland. In particular, I have examined how the positioning of these women's mixed-race children, as racialised outsiders, has impacted their subjectivities as mothers categorised normatively as white and Irish.

Like the white women of Frankenberg (1993) and Twine (2010), these mothers draw on a variety of discourses as part of their sense-making vis-à-vis the racial meanings attributed to their mixed-race family. Some of the mothers resist and/or are critical of efforts of extended family and wider society as a whole to racialise their children as black. Yet,

throughout the interview process, several women acknowledged that their children are generally recognised as black in the public domain, which locates them 'outside' narrow, racialised definitions of Irish identity. The mother's refusal of discourses of blackness may, therefore, speak to her fears for her child whose experiences of racialised exclusion may interrupt his/her interpellation into the national framework. Yet, we can see how negotiations of insider status on behalf of her child will be constrained by the workings of the racialised insider/outsider dichotomy. Indeed, it is further apparent that there is an implicit engagement by the mother with her own shifting sense of belonging. What, then, are the implications for the mother's positioning as a white Irish insider if she is indeed parenting a racialised outsider? Moreover, what are the implications for the intimate mother-child bond?

Discourses of liberal multiculturalism featured in the majority of women's articulations. In fact, the mothers make constant appeals to a multicultural cosmopolitanism in the making ('we are all different but equal') which, indeed, may offer the potential for the children to occupy 'insider' positioning (however tenuous). Yet, whiteness is largely retained as the reference point and there is also a corresponding disengagement with the structural dimensions of racism. This finding resonates with Frankenberg's (1993) discursive repertoire of 'color and power evasion' whereby the white women exercised selective attention to notions of difference (e.g. celebrations of cultural diversity etc.). As Frankenberg (1993) has further noted, 'the struggles between power evasion and race cognizance are being fought on the terrain of multiculturalism' (p. 15). Indeed, the prevalence of liberal discourses may also be due to the fact that there is a paucity of public language by which to articulate everyday racialised experiences in the Irish context. Yet, nevertheless, a de-stabilisation of totalising whiteness has occurred. In this regard, we can particularly note the mothers' allusions to the Irish Traveller as the absolute 'racial other', which serves to demonstrate their awareness that a white phenotype is not in itself enough to secure inclusion into the social category of whiteness (Lewis 2007).

The third theme examines how several of the mothers engage in reflexive white subjectivities. Similar to Twine's (2010) concept of racial literacy and Frankenberg's (1993) notion of race cognizance, the women's critical reading of the manifestations of racism generate a series of questions relating to the ways in which whiteness is implicated in networks of power. In general, the women who demonstrated understanding of the relevance of whiteness adopted a politicised stance in their interviews, both around issues of race and racism and broader social justice concerns.

Most significantly, by the re-articulation of the meaning of whiteness in their lives, these women, to varying degrees, no longer occupy the default position of whiteness as a category of racial privilege and a condition of 'structured invisibility' (Frankenberg 1993, p. 6). In fact, their lived experiences further disturb the hegemonic conflation of the categories white and Irish. I suggest that it is important to think through whiteness in Ireland particularly because it continues to provide the racialised subtext of Irish national identity. The women in this paper, by mothering across racial borders, have failed to perpetuate the nation and, subsequently, have dis-articulated the connection between whiteness and Irishness. This paper has, therefore, contributed to an understanding of the complexities that being a white Irish woman with mixed-race children brings to bear on the category of 'white Irish insider'.

Finally, this paper contributes to a wider body of literature which focuses on the lived experiences of white mothers of mixed-race children and, at a theoretical level, extends our understanding of both whiteness and mixed-race studies. In terms of future research, the findings of this study also have implications for the racialised experiences of different groups of white parents of mixed-race children (e.g., white fathers of black/white children; white mothers of mixed Asian children). Research in this area could further advance current theoretical understandings of white racial identity in Ireland and beyond.

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