Article

The Impact of White Supremacy on First-Generation Mixed-Race Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract: South African white supremacy has been shaped by over 400 years of settler colonialism and white minority apartheid rule to craft a pervasive and entrenched legacy of privilege and oppression in the post-apartheid context. This paper explores the constructions of white supremacy, specifically its role in shaping the perceptions of first-generation mixed-race identity in South Africa, through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Through a critical race theory and an intersectional lens, this paper unpacks the personal, political, and social impact of white supremacist structures on the identity construction of first-generation mixed-race people in post-apartheid South Africa; specifically, societal- and self-perceptions of their identity within power structures with which they interact. Moreover, this paper aims to understand how first-generation mixed-race people understand their connections to white privilege. Ultimately this paper argues that although first-generation mixed-race people experience relative privilege, their access to white privilege and acceptance within structures of whiteness is always conditional.

Keywords: critical mixed-race studies; intersectionality; whiteness; post-apartheid South Africa; identity; multiracial identity; racialisation

> *Whiteness in itself is like something that's defined against by what it's not. So everything that it's mixed with becomes not white, not completely white, even if it's a tiny bit. So, it's like an elitist kind of weird thing is defined by what it's not.*
>
> -(Olebogeng)

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1. Introduction

Whiteness in the South African context has been created, moulded, and reproduced through historical legacies of settler colonialism and apartheid. Through specific legal strategies to entrench systems of white supremacy and processes of racialisation, the existence of mixed-race people, or even multiracial families, have always existed in a state of precarity. The legacies of sustained and entrenched practices of white privilege impact the post-apartheid space in institutional, structural, and personal ways.

As a first-generation mixed-race person, meaning a person whose parents are considered to be different races through apartheid racial classifications, born and raised with both the lasting legacies of structural whiteness and have to some extent, experienced the benefits of white privilege. Growing up with a white father and a 'coloured' mother, access to white privilege came through my father's historical social mobility, sustained through apartheid-era privileges. While both my parents attended university, my father was able to study any degree without restrictions, while my mother, if she wanted to receive funding from the apartheid government, could only become a teacher, nurse, or social worker—the jobs designated for coloured women. The trajectories of their lives intertwined with their politics, as well as being an interracial couple forced them to leave South Africa to be married (as interracial marriage was illegal at the time) and return in 1992, before the official democratic elections in April 1994. While I acknowledge that my experiences are not universal and neither are those of each mixed-race person, theirs

are worth investigating because of their intersecting identities within the specific context of post-apartheid South Africa, where limited research and representation exist. They provide an entry point into understanding the complexities of processes of racialisation and structures of white supremacy that continue to shape the contemporary space.

Currently, research that connects white privilege to multiracial identity within family structures is not a saturated field in the South African context. Studies like Pirtle (2021, 2022), Dalmage (2018), Childs (2015), and Steyn et al. (2018), have focused on how multiracial people construct their identities, as well as how they interact and experience predominantly white spaces in the post-apartheid era. Elsewhere, I have written of the experiences of first-generation mixed-race young adults raised in post-apartheid South Africa and how they have negotiated dominant narratives of whiteness and the impact that this has had on the construction of their identities (Metcalfe 2022). However, the research presented here further extends the available literature by focusing on the dynamics of the multiracial family through an intersectional lens of white privilege.

Therefore, this paper explores the constructions of white supremacy and its creation of white privilege, specifically its role in shaping the perceptions and experiences of first-generation mixed-race identity in South Africa. Through an intersectional analysis, this paper unpacks the intertwined personal, political, and social impact of white supremacist structures on the identity construction of first-generation mixed-race people in post-apartheid South Africa; specifically, societal- and self-perceptions of their identity within the power structures with which they interact. Ultimately this paper finds that although historical legacies of structural whiteness and white privilege are intertwined within first-generation mixed-race people who have a white parent in the post-apartheid context; their access to white privilege is neither automatic nor unconditional.

2. Contextualizing Whiteness in South Africa

2.1. Constructing White Supremacy

It is important to contextualize how white supremacist structures have been created and sustained in the South African context. As a result of over 350 years of colonization by two colonial powers, the Dutch and then the British, South Africa has two settler populations. The historical legacies of settler colonialism, which created the pre-conditions of the apartheid regime, and the specific conditions for structures of white supremacy to thrive, leading to lasting privilege for the white South African population. In her seminal work, “Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be”: White Identity in a Changing South Africa, Melissa Steyn (2001, p. 24) argues that there are two factors that contribute to the “particularities of South African whiteness”. These are, first, the creation of the self-image and expectations of whiteness were largely shaped by their adherence to dominant narratives of whiteness and a context in which they were outnumbered by the indigenous population (Steyn 2001, p. 25). Ultimately, this means that “white people in South Africa never achieved the comfortable reassurance of their political, cultural, and even physical survival in the land they colonized, as did whites in other deep settler colonies” (Steyn 2001, p. 25).

And secondly, the two settler populations did not trust each other, and in particular, the British did not see the Boers/Afrikaners as of the same level of whiteness as their own, mostly because of the Afrikaner’s disassociation from the Dutch and miscegenation (in many cases through sexual violence) with Indigenous populations. In an oversimplification of these historical legacies, the Anglo–Boer War was the culmination of the tensions between these two settler groups. However, both groups did not revere themselves as equals to the non-white population in any regard and continued their exploitation of this population. Ultimately, working together to entrench legacies of white privilege at the cost of the indigenous population.

At the start of the 1900s, policies to ensure the protection of the white population were further entrenched through the forced removal of the indigenous population from their land and laws that prevented non-white groups from owning land. The Native Land Act of 1913 was a seminal piece of colonial law that dispossessed colonized people, and coupled

with apartheid land laws, entrenched the legacy of white land ownership that exists in contemporary South Africa. In a Land Audit report conducted in November 2017 by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (2017), it was stated that 72% of land in South Africa is owned by the white population, even though they make up 7.3% of the population as of the National Census in 2022 (South African Government 2022).

Essential to understanding whiteness in the South African context, as Steyn (2001) has mentioned, is the false belief that white people, specifically Afrikaner people, were under the constant 'threat' of cultural eradication. The white population, through colonial laws, and then ultimately an apartheid legal framework, sought to entrench 'protections' of the white population (Afrikaners) to fortify their white supremacist ideology and the privilege they had accrued as a result. This fear of "the natives" and precarity of identity, was "recycled into Apartheid logic", which was a "rigorous system of laws that was designed to guard white supremacy" (Steyn 2001, p. 36). This logic further extended to the need to formally establish and then segregate different racial groups to 'protect' the "Afrikaner version of pure whiteness, its privilege and advantage" (Steyn 2001, p. 37).

In addition, the focus on creating separate homelands, or 'Bantustans', for different ethnic groups of the 'native' population, further ensured the continued cultural genocide of non-white groups in the removal of their land, about 3.5 million people from the cities to the countryside. And ensuring that the only economic opportunities for Black people were to work in an economic system specifically designed for the benefit of the white population through cheap and exploited Black[1] labour (Boersema 2022, p. 50). In addition, these Bantustans were created on the recruitment of cheap labour for mining, which extracted the resources of South Africa, the wealth of which was pumped back into the white population and formed the basis of mass intergenerational wealth. The socio-economic and cultural legacies of these policies remain visibly evident in South Africa today.

2.2. Sustaining White Supremacy

At the beginning of apartheid in 1948, the government sought to introduce a series of oppressive and racist laws. In addition to the laws that governed economic policies that ensured continued oppression of the non-white population, the underlying belief of the 'purity' of the 'white race' was essential for furthering the project of white supremacy in apartheid South Africa. Supported by other global white supremacist powers such as the United States, Israel, and the United Kingdom, the apartheid government's onslaught of violence on the non-white population can be understood through sustained and rigorous legislative interventions, the most prominent of which are highlighted below.

The Population Registration Act (PRA) of 1950 was designed to provide legal definitions for racial categorizations, to enforce the policy of racial segregation. Posel (2001, p. 98) argues that the PRA "was an attempt to produce a fixed, stable, and uniform criteria for racial classifications which would then be binding across all spheres of a person's life". This meant that processes of racialisation, built on colonial assumptions of race eugenics, would become a formalised way of constructing racial purity. Where, during the colonial era, racial categories had existed, these were not legislated to the same effect as was ensured in the apartheid era. A "common-sense" approach to racial classification was used. Posel (2001) argues that general understandings of race science were used at individual discretion. Thereby, officials were given "free reign to an assortment of social and individual prejudices on what was racial self-evident" (Posel 2001, p. 96). Ultimately requiring self-policing and community policing of racial classifications, which continued into the apartheid era, but was backed by a legal framework that has since become entrenched in the societal fabric in the post-apartheid space.

The racial classification system preserved in the PRA, was further implemented through the Group Areas Act of 1950, which focused on ensuring that people of different racial groups remained segregated within all aspects of life. People were forcibly removed from their homes to designated coloured or black areas, often with no compensation for their land (Boersema 2022, p. 5). Movement between designated racial areas, specifically

from a non-white area to a white area, was controlled through a system of passes that had to be obtained to 'prove' that a non-white person had permission to be in a white area. These policies for segregation extended to segregated schools, universities, beaches, benches, and entertainment facilities (as per 'petty apartheid').

To keep the white population benefitting from the comforts of white privilege—through the exploitation of the colonized population and ownership of stolen land—the apartheid government had to ensure the racial 'purity' of the white 'race'. Through two instrumental laws, namely, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the updated Immorality Act of 1950, relationships between those considered different races were made illegal. While during the colonial era, these relationships were frowned upon, these relationships did exist. The Immorality Act in particular, made the act of interracial sex at the same level as a sexual offence. These Acts were considered essential to the protection of racial purity, through further control of the lives of those oppressed by the apartheid regime.

The common-sense approach taken to understand racial categorisation, despite the formalisation of the aforementioned laws, continued to be used, in addition to a series of race science tests. For example, if a person was considered racially ambiguous, they would have to undergo specific 'tests', including having a pencil run through the hair and if the pencil fell through, this was considered a white trait. In addition to these were common sense racist understandings of racial phenotypes that were believed to belong to certain racial groups (Posel 2001, p. 97). The focus on the common-sense approach rather than the One Drop Rule, as was the case in the United States, was that Afrikaner people had been, to a large extent, racially mixed since the early years of settler colonialism. Therefore, if blood testing were to be conducted (although would never prove to be accurate in any regard), there was a risk that many prominent Afrikaner families would lose their status as white.

In post-apartheid writings on whiteness and how white South Africans have shaped their identities, scholars have argued that white South Africans have shifted their identity from denying their racially mixed heritage, by embracing a false sense of indigeneity, as an adapted response to the post-apartheid space, which they perceive as a threat to their cultural existence (Steyn 2001; Gqola 2010; Verwey and Quayle 2012; Boersema 2022). Gqola (2010) argues that white South Africans have tried to distance themselves from the violent and oppressive legacies of settler colonialism and apartheid through a faux rejection of Afrikaner nationalism of the apartheid era to intertwine their identity in with a mutated history of indigenous Khoi, San, Griqua, and Nama groups as well as formerly enslaved people, to show that they 'native' to South Africa. Regardless of the shifting nature of their identity and their conceptualization of self, "while political power is no longer the privilege of white South Africans, economic privilege continues" (Verwey and Quayle 2012, p. 568). Having contextualised whiteness and white supremacist structures within the legacies of apartheid, this has shown how white privilege has been meticulously crafted through years of white supremacist rule and how these structures remain relevant to understanding white privilege in post-apartheid today.

3. Conceptualizing Mixedness in South Africa

3.1. Coloured Identity

Mixedness in post-apartheid South Africa has a complex historical legacy. The terminology of 'coloured' stems from colonial language of a mixed-race person. Other racist terminology included 'mixed breed', 'half-caste', and specific to the South African context, 'hottentot' or 'hotnot'. These words were used to describe those born of interracial sexual relationships, whether through sexual violence or not (Adhikari 2009). The racial category of coloured became an official racial category during the apartheid regime, specifically under the Population Registration Act of 1950 (Posel 2001). In this way, coloured identity became a specific cultural identity that solidified into a racial category that has been reclaimed to a large extent in the post-apartheid era. While some prefer to use the terminology of 'so-called Coloured' to reflect the problematic nature of the term, others have claimed the

racial category as an essential part of their self-identity, and strongly identify with Coloured as their chosen racial category (Adhikari 2009, pp. 71–72).

In a broader sense, coloured as a racial category during apartheid included multiple ethnic groups under one racial category, namely, "Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian (but eventually became a standalone category), Chinese, 'other Asiatic' and 'other Coloured'" (Reddy 2015, p. 75). From the vagueness of the category and its inclusion of indigenous and enslaved groups, it is easy to see why the terminology is problematic.

In her seminal paper on coloured identity in South Africa, Zimitri Erasmus (2001, p. 7) argues that coloured identity can be understood as a form of creolization as it is constantly created and recreated in ways that are meaningful to coloured people, rather than just understood through the prism of race-mixture and as an identity imposed on coloured people by colonial structures. What is important to understand in the discussion about coloured identity, as Erasmus points out, is the false sense of 'privilege' 'given' to coloured people by the apartheid government to obtain their buy-in to the apartheid regime and the oppression of black people. The apartheid government pitted non-white groups against each other, and towards the end of apartheid, gave a false sense of comradery to coloured people because of their perceived mixed-European ancestry, by trying to include selected coloured people to join government structures in the hopes of extending apartheid.

In the post-apartheid space, these legacies remain. Pirtle (2021, p. 11) argues that the continued existence of racial hierarchies, not only shows existing racial tensions but "demonstrates that the non-racialist and colourblind push to decentre discussions of race contradicts how South Africans see race and racism as still mattering". The language of the Rainbow Nation, where South Africans born after the start of democracy in 1994 are considered to have been 'born free', is continuously used for a reconciliatory and non-racial approach to the post-apartheid space. However, the fact that the socio-economic situation of many has not been improved and the language of forgiveness and reconciliation which does not translate into tangible benefits, has increased racial tensions. Despite the perceived privilege that coloured people received during apartheid, they were ultimately an oppressed population, with no access to white privilege, and continue to deal with the impact of intergeneration trauma, as all non-white South Africans continue to do. As a result, coloured identity, as a cultural identity with its own language, culture, and food, remains in a state of adapting to the challenges of the post-apartheid space.

3.2. First-Generation Mixed-Race Identity

It is important to differentiate between coloured identity and first-generation mixed-race identity. As stated previously, coloured identity refers to a specific racial group that has over many years established a cultural identity rooted within a specific historical context. First-generation mixed-race people can be referred to as people who have parents classified as different races through apartheid racial categorisation. During apartheid, they would have been classified as coloured, as interracial relationships were illegal and therefore children from those relationships should not exist. In addition, mixed-race people, particularly in the post-apartheid space are not only born from relationships between black and white people, but they can also be born from an interracial relationship between a coloured person and a white person or a black person and a coloured person, because of the ways that racial categories have become distinct cultural and ethnic identities as well.

In another paper, I argued that first-generation mixed-race participants that I interviewed did not view themselves as coloured unless one of their parents was considered to be coloured. For example, Zandile, whose mother is white, and father is black, did not feel that she could related to the experiences of coloured identity nor coloured people, stating:

> *I go by mixed-race; I think there's an important distinction in that because I think that race is not just a skin tone thing. I think race is also very cultural. So even though I might present as coloured, I don't think I could ever call myself coloured, because I don't have that cultural background.* (Metcalfe 2022, p. 11)

As is often the case with mixed-race people, they struggle to find acceptance within the communities to which they feel that they should belong, especially as much of post-apartheid South Africa remains heavily influenced by years of spatial apartheid. In Van der Pol et al.'s (2022, p. 277) study on mixed-race people in South Africa, their participants were also reluctant to identify as coloured, and those who felt that they were rejected by the coloured community. The problem of having to 'choose' a racial identity is evident. Although we understand that race is a social construct and that as a result 'mixing' races is not real, the real impact of racism, as well as the effects of rejection of a racial group affects one's sense of self and belonging, are real to those who have that experience.

While this research specifically focuses on the experiences of first-generation mixed-race people and their perceptions of white privilege and whiteness in the post-apartheid era, it is important to note other studies on multiracial families and interracial relationships. In their study on interracial relationships and how families respond, Steyn et al. (2018) found that participants policed their behaviour depending on the space in which they found themselves. For example, if the participants were in public, they would not hold hands to avoid possible confrontation and would only socialise within circles that they found safe, mostly with other interracial couples (Steyn et al. 2018, p. 11). Similarly, in Childs' (2015, p. 23) paper, she found that attitudes towards interracial relationships remained steeped in racist apartheid rhetoric and stereotypes of cultural incompatibility, which contradict the language of non-racialism so revered by the post-apartheid dispensation. What these studies show us, is not only are interracial relationships not fully accepted in post-apartheid South Africa but given the cautiousness of those who are in interracial relationships, evident in Steyn et al., and the attitudes towards interracial relationships expressed in Childs' study, they show how apartheid rhetoric continues in the post-apartheid space which ultimately affects any children that these couples might have.

In relation to access to white privilege and mixed-race people, Waring's (2023) study of mixed-race participants in the USA with white ancestry provides a useful insight into how mixed-race people have "white privilege by proxy". Waring found that her "participants can access valuable resources (i.e., housing legal representation, etc.) through their white parent that affords them life-changing opportunities, despite never being able to pass as White" (Waring 2023, p. 63). Waring's (2023) study found that there were both privileges and disadvantages to "white privilege by proxy" for mixed-race people, which provides an interesting insight into how whiteness and white privilege affects mixed-race people, which can still be understood to some extent in the South African context, however historically different the societies and processes of racialisation are. Ultimately, this paper will show the perspectives of first-generation mixed-race people, raised in these multiracial families, in relation to their perception of self but also that even though they have a white parent, they do not have unconditional access to the privileges of whiteness.

4. Theoretical Framework and Methodological Considerations

4.1. Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is both a theoretical and practical tool used to understand how individuals experience multiple aspects of their identities across various power structures. For example, a woman who is both black and queer experiences triple layers of oppression from power systems of white heterosexual patriarchy. First coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) in the early 1990s, Intersectionality has become a useful theoretical framework for not only understanding identity but to understand multiple forms of discrimination. Intersectionality was born as a challenge to systemic whiteness within law in the US as well as a challenge to white feminism which centred on one social location, gender, as being a universal experience (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1244). In this way, Intersectionality is a framework through which to understand individuals' identity(ies) within the historical and cultural legacies that have constructed the multiple axes of power present in society. Therefore, Crenshaw (1991, p. 1265) states that she has "used intersectionality to describe the location

of women of colour both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and anti-racism".

Intersectionality has certainly progressed in the 30 years since its founding and has become a relevant theoretical framework in multiple disciplines outside of Law and the US, as a context. Prominent intersectionality scholars have argued that intersectionality has become increasingly mainstream (McCall 2005; Nash 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011; Puar 2013; Lewis 2013; Bilge 2013). Kathy Davis (2008) argues that intersectionality is a hugely successful theory because it is an accountable and inclusive feminist theory, it encourages mutually beneficial collaboration, it bridges the gaps between generalists and specialists, and it is vague or ambiguous. While I agree that intersectionality is a popular theory, I disagree that it is vague or ambiguous. Intersectionality is intentional in its focus on bringing those on the periphery to the core and locating their experiences and formation of their identity with the historical legacies that shape the power dynamics that surround them.

As a criticism of the mainstreaming of intersectionality, both Bilge (2013) and Lewis (2013) have argued that intersectionality has become increasingly 'whitened', in that it focuses on only one social location, namely gender, rather than as a holistic theory of understanding the interplay of multiple social locations at a time. Shifting emphasis from centring race, the original purpose of intersectionality, to only focusing on gender, removes the key importance that intersectionality has in deconstructing institutional and systemic whiteness that creates white privilege.

Another important theoretical framework used within this research is Critical Race Theory (CRT), also born out of a challenge to systemic whiteness within Law and co-founded by Crenshaw et al. (1995). CRT, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012, pp. 8–11), has six generally agreed-upon tenets. First, racism is an everyday experience for people of colour. Second, systems of white supremacy exist at all levels of society with a range of oppressive effects. Third, that race is a social construct. Fourth, differential racialisation means that perceptions of race can change based on different contexts. The fifth tenet is grounded within the foundations of intersectionality for analysing experiences of race. Sixth, people of colour bear the brunt of racial oppression and are therefore experts on the topic.

CRT in the South African context has been used to understand how white supremacist law (from the apartheid era) has systematically created the unequal society that is the post-apartheid era. Modiri (2012, p. 233) argues that CRT "allows us to examine racial issues more critically and directly in the context of their social, economic and political implication for law and legal rules". In addition, Modiri (2012) and Mbembe (2008) argue that the benefits of white supremacy that have been reaped as a result of the apartheid legal system, have upheld the white privilege of the white elite and thus maintain systems of white supremacy, even in the post-apartheid era. Theories such as Omi and Winant's (2014) racial formation theory in the US can be particularly useful in understanding how social identities can be enforced onto marginalised groups from dominant groups or institutions, therefore providing a useful theoretical framework to consider in further studies.

While CRT and Intersectionality are umbrella theories that expand across multiple fields and contexts, they are the most useful theories for understanding racial identity formation and how they are impacted by multiple systems of power. In this way, both CRT and Intersectionality provide useful frameworks to contextualise and discuss the legacies of racism and racialisation in South Africa in multiple layers, and in particular how they have sustained white privilege and affected mixed-race people.

4.2. Methodology and Methods

This research was conducted using semi-structured, in-depth, and open-ended interviews. An interview schedule was created to ensure six standardised questions across interviews while still allowing for follow-up questions and for participant interpretation of the questions. Open-ended interviews can be conversational in nature and thus a better way to understand the experiences of the participants without feeling confined by rigid

questions (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p. 289). Participants were given both information sheets and consent forms before the interview, along with the option to resign from the project at any stage. Ultimately, ethical clearance was obtained from the head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Cape Town in South Africa on 17 March 2017. All original recordings and transcripts are safely stored and cannot be shared due to identifying information. Data were collected and transcribed by the author, and a thematic analysis was conducted.

In total, ten participants were interviewed through a mix of purposive sampling (8), where participants were contacted directly, and snowball (2) sampling, from suggestions from existing participants. The researcher is aware that the small number of interviews is a limitation and hopes to conduct more widespread interviews at a later stage. The criteria for participants were that they had to have one white parent and one parent who was a person of colour. Interviews ranged between 1.5 h to 2 h and were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, also indicating a large amount of data to work with. Amongst the sample, five participants identified as female, and five as male. All participants had some form of higher education experience and amongst the sample were two sets of siblings (male and female pairings). Finally, all participants were born between 1990 and 1995, considered to be the 'born free' generation, all of whom have been given pseudonyms for anonymity.

While I acknowledge that this sample is not ideal, nor can it be viewed as a mass reflection of mixed-race identity, a study that aimed to create a shared experience would be flawed, as all participants had different intersectional lived realities. I position myself as a first-generation mixed-race person, having been raised by a white father and a coloured mother. In many ways, this provided me with an insider understanding of what my participants have experienced, although to a limited extent. Having a personal stake and some shared parts of identity, namely, that I and all participants identify as mixed-race, within this research can complicate the outcomes; however, it is because of my shared identity with my participants that they were more willing to share their experiences with me, ultimately leading to rich data. In addition, no participant at the time was discussing their experiences outside of their social circles, which were also made up largely of mixed-race people, adding a further challenge to sourcing participants willing to discuss their experiences. Regardless of these challenges and subsequent limitations, this research topic provides an important contribution to critical mixed-race studies as a field, and to understanding mixed-race identity in South Africa through the experiences of mixed-race people written by a mixed-race person, of which only a couple of studies currently exist.

5. Negotiating White Privilege and Mixed-Race Identity

The analysis covered in this section focuses on the interlinkages of the participant's experiences, their perceptions of their multiracial family and their interactions with white privilege. The analysis is organised into three parts that relate to spheres of power in an intersectional analysis, namely, the personal, the social and the political. While these spheres are constantly overlapping, for this analysis, they will be separated to capture the impact of white supremacist structures on each sphere and in the participant's lived experiences. Another note of importance is the use of apartheid racial classifications, where the use of these classifications has extended into contemporary South African society. Omi and Winant (2014, pp. 105–6) argue that "processes of classification, including self-classification, are reflexive of specific social structures, cultural meanings and practice, and of broader power relations as well". In this way, the discussions about race and the use of racial categories as used by participants reflect the continued processes of racial classification which are still relied upon in the post-apartheid space.

5.1. Personal

Focusing on the personal sphere of intersectional power shows us how power structures that exist in society shape the experiences of first-generation mixed-race people within their personal lives and their perceptions of self. At the personal level, first-generation

mixed-race people are confronted with the expectation that they need to choose their race, to ensure that they are not in a state of perpetual confusion. Joseph (2013) argues that mixed-race people are often portrayed to be isolated or devoid of community. Joseph (2013, p. 4) challenges this claim by arguing that cultural representation is essential for challenging these kinds of perceptions. Because of South Africa's historical legacy of making interracial relationships illegal and immoral, there is only a small number of mixed-race people, let alone those who appear in cultural spaces.

While these numbers are growing, the most prominent mixed-race person in South Africa is Trevor Noah. In his biography, Noah (2016), Noah outlines his experiences as a mixed-race person in apartheid South Africa, and the precarity of his existence, which was officially outside the law. His personal struggle of having a white parent, while not being allowed to have any contact with his white father, is of particular prominence in the book. Like Noah, the participants in this study dealt with their perceptions of their identity in multiple ways. All participants ultimately self-defined as 'mixed', but also chose to state which racial category they identified with most, as they felt that they had to 'choose' the most appropriate racial category, as mixed-race is not an official racial category in post-apartheid South Africa. These struggles to understand what their racial identity means in the post-apartheid context, intertwined with the specific historical legacies of whiteness, are evident in the impact it has had in their personal lives and their relationships to their parents:

> *When I started really interrogating what it means to be black, I also think I then had to think about what it means to be white. . .I do have to make that separation inside myself [from whiteness], but even in that, I know that, even though they are my family, I know that some of them aren't exempt from it [for being called out for racism]. In fact, none of them are, I can't think of them differently, just because they are my family, it's kind of become a thing of like, you have to prove to me that you are different.* (Zandile)

Zandile, born to a white mother and black father shares her experience navigating not only racial categorisation but also the cultural over- and undertones that came with each racial category. Although she states that she had initially felt that she could exist as both, Zandile had to understand the legacies of what whiteness has systemic produced and what it continues to reproduce. Her struggle lies in the role of negotiating the legacies of whiteness and how they appear directly in her life, from racism in her family to having to still see her relatives as family. The precarious balance here, is understanding that structures and legacies of whiteness affects her life in multiple layers (social and political) and then also in her everyday personal life. Zandile, feeling that she had to make a separation within herself, is a lasting effect of whiteness, and its impact on familial structures.

Relationships between the mixed-race participants and their families were not necessarily strained, but rather their challenge was to reconcile what whiteness means within the South African context as a system of power and the role that their families had played within that, in opposition to the experiences of the other side of their family, not limited to their experiences under white-minority rule, but in resistance to that rule and their struggle for freedom against it. This struggle cannot be reduced to a feeling of confusion or isolation within oneself because of their identity, as Zack (2010) and Joseph (2013) have warned against, it is rather the recognition of the historical legacies that affect their lived experiences, which culminate at the personal level of their family and themselves. This challenge is reflected in Pramit's discussion of his relationship with his white mother:

> *I've never hated my mom; I've always loved her and appreciated her. I just don't see her as being part of my identity in a big way because she's white, and that's scary, and that's something I need to speak to her about and come to terms with . . . she's a huge part of shaping who I am, but at the same time, by virtue of her race, it makes it difficult for me to identify with her as strongly.* (Pramit)

Pramit, born to a white mother and South African Indian father, reflects on his challenges to separate his mother from the system of whiteness in which she was raised

(apartheid) but also in the one that he has experienced (post-apartheid). The historical legacies of whiteness to ensure that whiteness was protected above all else, play a significant role in how whiteness is viewed within the post-apartheid space, where white privilege continues to be maintained. Underlying Pramit's struggle to relate to his mother are not only because she is a white person, but that she has benefited from white supremacist structures through the apartheid regime. In addition, to this, her lived experience is different to his, as he has experienced life as a brown male, in a country that continues to be shaped by racism and racial categorisations.

For Pramit, his mother is a significant part of his life and instilled the values in him that have shaped his identity; however, this does not mean that their lived experiences necessarily need to be the same. The "come to terms with" statement within Pramit's reflections speaks to the ongoing process of negotiating one's identity. Although there is struggle in that, there is both agency and resistance to decentre whiteness as core challenge to his relationship with his mother. As Sharma (Rondilla et al. 2017, p. 220) argues, decentring whiteness is "giving voice to non-whites while recognising the ways racism has structured our lives".

Both Pramit and Zandile, who both self-identify as mixed, have had to acknowledge their agency as mixed-race people and visibly non-white people and the impact that racism, shaped through the white supremacist legacies, has in their lives, while understanding that to some extent their mothers have benefitted from whiteness in ways that they never will, and that their acceptance in their white family structures is not automatic acceptance by whiteness or white supremacy. This is further expressed by Sem:

> *There is safety of family. . .when I'm with my family, I'm pretty much only focused on them and people are treating them well because they are white, so we just get umbrella included, so I think having that safety net of being with them completely shields me from any sort of problems.* (Sem)

The conditional nature of acceptance is expressed through Sem's reflections on his experiences with his family. Sem, born of a white father and a South African Indian mother, acknowledges the level of safety in being around his white family within white spaces. What lies underneath Sem's words is how he does not feel the same level of safety when he is on his own in those same white spaces. Steyn et al. (2018), in their study of interracial relationships, found that many of their participants felt uncomfortable in all-white spaces. The participants who were not white did not feel comfortable in all white spaces, despite having their white partner with them. Similarly, Sem feels the effects of what whiteness can give him, namely, safety and preferential treatment when he is with his white family, but he is not entirely comfortable because he knows that without the 'shield' of his white family, his experience would be wholly different.

What all participants have alluded to here is the precarity of their association to whiteness within their immediate family structure. While acknowledging the significant impact that their white parents and family have in their lives, they also understand that their family remains deeply important to them, despite their not being able to identify with their lived experiences as people of colour. The personal dynamics of negotiating the multiple power structures of whiteness, as well as coming to terms with what having a relationship, albeit conditional, with whiteness means for them and their own understandings of their identity.

5.2. Social

The social implications of living in a society where white supremacist structures remain largely intact have challenging effects on the lives of those who do not benefit from that system. The social system remains largely segregated and those who enter 'formerly' white spaces find themselves having to adjust. The maintenance of white spaces in the post-apartheid era, are juxtaposed to white people's adoption of the language of non-racialism while continuing to preserve their economic power, or what Steyn and Foster (2008) conceptualise as 'White Talk'. Conway (2017) argues that often white people, particularly white liberals, defend their role in apartheid by feigning ignorance to the

horrors that occurred in their name and around them. This ignorance of their complicity in receiving the benefits of apartheid does nothing to challenge the ongoing privilege that they experience (Conway 2017, p. 125).

Much like Steyn and Foster's (2008) 'White Talk' and Conway's (2017) discussion on complicity, Gqola (2001, p. 101) identifies Adrienne Rich's concept of white solipsism to understand the normalisation of whiteness and all-white spaces. White solipsism "refers to the tendency to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness described the world" and is a "tunnel vision which simply does not see non-white experience of existence as precious or significant unless spasmodic, impotent guilt reflexes, which have little or no long-term continuing momentum or political usefulness". This tunnel vision or unwillingness to understand the experiences of people who are not white, also assumes that they should perform whiteness to the level that is required in that space. Pramit speaks of his schooling years and his struggle to 'conform':

> *Because the social system in our high school was structured in a way that whiteness was praised and worshipped, I found myself being more proud of my white half, and I look back on it now and it cuts me so deep that I felt that. It's scary as well that's how I felt . . . [in] high school, I thought this whiteness thing is dope . . . I can use that to my benefit here to fit in. But again, I would be reminded by the white kids that I'm not white.* (Pramit)

From his reflections, it is evident that Pramit had assumed that his association with whiteness would offer him acceptance in the institutional whiteness that governed his school. However, what he found was that whiteness has conditions, and that by virtue of having a white mother, did not allow him full access to whiteness. While both Pramit's parents are university graduates, allowing for a higher level of privilege so that he could attend a well-resourced 'formerly' white school and that Pramit had access to understanding 'White Talk', he was still constantly reminded that he was not white, and his acceptance was in constant negotiation. The specific policies to uplift only the white population through the continued exploitation of the oppressed population, remain visible in institutions for education, like schools and universities, although no longer racially segregated, many formerly white institutions remain predominantly white. Ultimately, access to whiteness and the protection of white privilege that comes with it requires a person to be considered white, rather than an adjacent association to whiteness. These challenges in accessing the social systems of whiteness, including the schooling space, and the privileges associated with access to white structures, as a result, are further reflected by Ellie:

> *There is a part of me that's disgusted, but say there is a white person, you almost feel the need to prove that you are what they think is enough to make you a person like I am enough of a person because I can do x, y, and z things and as much as I want to prove that I don't need to have those things for you to value me, and for you to respect me. I still feel like I need to because you are going to think worse of me.* (Ellie)

Although Ellie, born of a white mother and coloured father attended a formerly all-white school, she still recognized the overwhelming systemic nature of whiteness entrenched in the institution. Feeling like she had to 'live up' to the expectations of whiteness, Ellie's own perceptions of what her social surrounding were, was that she was not valued there, purely because of her perceived race. Even though she had both access to a well-resourced school and had to some extent benefitted from the white privilege of her mother, Ellie still felt isolated and marginalised by whiteness, which was not accessible to her because she would never be accepted as white. On this, Sara Ahmed (2007, pp. 149–51) said whiteness "takes up space" and does not orientate itself to the environment it enters, rather it expects that the space shift towards whiteness". In this way, both Ellie and Pramit, who attended formerly all-white schools, which remain largely structural untransformed from institutionalised whiteness 30 years into the democratic era, shifted themselves to the white space in which they entered, where they expected to experience a certain level of acceptance, but were reminded that accessing white supremacy was conditional.

The perceptions of what whiteness is or what white characteristics are essential to understanding how white supremacy is sustained. South African whiteness was built on the racist assumption that people of colour were only capable of certain types of work and certainly not any kind of leadership position (Boersema 2022). These legacies of 'white traits' are rooted in white supremacy as a global project built through colonialism and violent racial oppression. That being said, whiteness in South Africa does have specific characteristics, as pointed out by Steyn (2001) earlier. Whiteness and the master narratives of whiteness as focused on the language of racialised science have morphed into a 'new' version of whiteness in the post-apartheid space, which are the same intact structures just with a fresh coat of non-racial paint, where South African whiteness is separated from the global context of whiteness, as though it is a relic of the past. Participants noted that this is not the case:

> *With white people also . . . you're still an 'other' . . . I guess growing up, sometimes you try to be white in some ways, or engage with white [people]... I guess you slowly realise that you'll never be part of that community. Like with my mom, she's not South African, so that helps, so that we can even criticize whiteness [in South Africa] together and she openly criticises those ideas which is very consoling and comforting.* (Olebogeng)

Olebogeng, born of a white mother and black father, realises that he will always be othered, despite having connections to whiteness through his mother Olebogeng does not find community with white people, and as a result, he no longer tries to find acceptance in a space in which he acknowledges he will never receive acceptance. He finds his mother to be more critical of whiteness in South Africa, as she experienced a somewhat different system of whiteness, as she comes from a white majority country. His relationship with his mother also changes his perception of what whiteness can look like, and why he chooses to distance her from South African whiteness. Underlying his reflections, is Olebogeng's criticism of South African whiteness to be critical about its legacy and impact, and its tunnel vision on the white solipsism train. Another participant reflects this same separation of South African whiteness from their relationship with their white parent:

> *Everything I take from him are his experiences in life, that's why it has to do with me not seeing him as white. Well, maybe it's different because I don't see him as a white South African, maybe because he is Italian [Italian-American]. I don't see his whiteness being the same as the evil whiteness in South Africa, and when it comes to white privilege when you talk about it.* (Naharai)

Like Olebogeng, Naharai, born of a white father and a South African Indian mother, also differentiates between the "evil whiteness in South Africa" and the whiteness of his American father. Naharai sees his father has a non-South African and therefore not having the same historical legacy of violence that is part of the family legacies of many white South Africans. In this way, Naharai feels he can relate to his father differently because the looming understanding of the legacies of structural and institutionalised whiteness in South Africa is not there for him. In addition, he does not see that his father has white privilege to the same extent as a white South African who has generational wealth and mass land ownership. In Naharai statements lie an underlying questioning of the tensions of being perceived as white or having associations with whiteness, which Aadilah and Pramit have both reflected on, which are in all cases perceived through negative connotations. In the post-apartheid setting, where the legacies of whiteness are acknowledged as destructive to progress, this seeps into rhetoric about what whiteness means and what it means to be associated with it in a post-apartheid space where white supremacist structures remain divisive.

In all cases, it is interesting how dependent acceptance in white social settings and the benefits of white privilege depend on the context. One could have access to some benefits of white privilege, yet, in the case of the participants here, this was always conditional and never extended to them individually. Having the social skills to navigate whiteness, because they have had experience being raised to some extent within the protection of

whiteness, the participants find an ultimate rejection by structures of whiteness despite the limited privileges (economic) it has afforded them.

5.3. Political

The political sphere, like all other spheres, is shaped by the structural conditions and legacies of the past that continue to exist in the post-apartheid era. When South Africa had its first democratic elections in 1994, an emphasis was placed on national healing. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) came the language of the Rainbow Nation. Coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rainbowism ideology centres on reconciliation and forgiveness; however, Gqola (2001) argues that it has since become an ideology of colourblindness. To this point, she argues that "the rainbow is also a reflection, a spectacular visual illusion. Within the boundaries of Rainbowism, there exist a series of possibilities that (potentially) rupture the ideal. Rainbows are fantasy, yet they remain symbolic and constitutive of the new 'truths' in a democratic South Africa" (Gqola 2001, p. 99). The illusion of the rainbow as well as its reliance on the language of non-racialism has been adopted by the white population to absolve themselves of having to confront their continued complicity in benefitting from white privilege (Conway 2017; Boersema 2022).

In the post-apartheid era, discussions of the decolonisation of apartheid structures of white supremacy and the redistribution of resources like land, have formed a major part of the political landscape. Focus is placed on the major wealth disparities from hundreds of years of exploitation of non-white bodies through systemic oppression, limited access to education, prohibition from land ownership and exclusion from public life. These also include discussions on nationalisation of natural resources and privatised industries to the decolonisation of and access to universities. The #RhodesMustFall movement was deeply significant to the South African political landscape as a challenge to institutional whiteness. Students protested for the removal of the statue of coloniser Cecil John Rhodes, as well as the decolonisation of the university curriculum and space at the University of Cape Town. These protests included mass sit-ins that led to country-wide demonstrations against structures of white supremacy and the failure of transformation by the democratic government. #RMF was founded on the principles of Black intersectional feminism, where "the importance of Black spaces that accepted Black people as whole human beings who should not have to choose which identity to bring into the movement" (Ramaru 2017, p. 92).

#RMF saw a redefinition of identities and belonging within the post-apartheid space and was a catalyst for challenging white-heteropatriarchal structures that continued to marginalise students through race, class, gender, language, and sexuality (Chikane 2018). This movement forced young people, in particular the participants in this study to consider their lives through an intersectional lens. In particular, understanding their relationship to white privilege, how they benefit from it and how they might be able to repurpose it in meaningful ways. This is expressed by one participant who came to understand her relative privilege:

> *I want people to know that I'm not white. . .it's not so much that my mom being white created this privilege, it's being middle to upper-class family with parents who speak with English accents and I'm very conscious about that and I feel very removed from lots of students especially because I've experienced a different life.* (Aadilah)

Although Aadilah, born of a white mother and a South African Indian father, acknowledged the levels of privilege that she has, she highlights the relative privilege of both her parents. As both her parents attended university and had well-paying jobs, Aadilah's access to privilege was twofold, and she felt that she could not relate to the struggles of many students in relation to class dynamics. In her phrasing "not so much that my mom being white created this privilege", Aadilah recognises that economic privilege is associated with whiteness, and is aware of the privilege that brings. But she also connects her upper-middle class background to both whiteness and her father's university education. While one could draw similarities to the participants in Waring's (2023) study, in that Aadilah recognises her unearned privilege and, in this way, has "white privilege by proxy";

however, Aadilah's father, as a person of colour raised in the apartheid regime, would have had to fight the institutions of whiteness to secure a university education and would have earned this 'privilege'. Still Aadilah recognises the enormous impact that having two educated parents who have generated access to generational wealth for her, provides. That being said, Aadilah, in the first line of her reflection is adamant about not wanting to be thought of as white. This desire to not be considered white can be linked back to the experiences of Olebogeng and Naharai who distance themselves and their white parents from South African whiteness, which they see as bad. Aadilah recognizes that she does have certain levels of privilege but in a true reflection of intersectionality, she understands that at the same time, she experiences multiple layers of oppression.

Coming to terms with what systems of white supremacy have done and what they continue to do in the post-apartheid space has been a challenge for all participants. To confront the white solipsism of the beliefs and ideologies of their white family, to the acknowledgement that while they might have acceptance from their white parents, they might not receive that acceptance in society. This journey is best reflected in Zandile's comments on understanding whiteness, and finding solidarity amongst people of colour:

> *I think that the fact that my mom is white...I don't know if it's been constructive, I think that there are some things that white people just don't get . . . having to come to that realisation by myself was just like a 'sh*t!' moment, like a 'wake up!' moment . . . I almost wish that I had been raised by my dad, I think that life . . . would have been less of a shock. And I think that there are some things that inherently people of colour come to know that white people have to be told about . . . I think that there is just this sense of collectiveness and community that comes with not being white.* (Zandile)

This sense of community and collectiveness that Zandile discusses amongst people of colour can be understood through the lens of Yuval-Davis' (2006, p. 199) conceptualisation of belonging, where belonging is "always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalised construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations". The connections and belonging that Zandile draws from being around other people of colour is another form of political solidarity. Zandile's perception of self, as both a Black and mixed-race woman, inform her search for belonging within who can relate to her lived experiences. In a country where institutional whiteness continues to dictate the public space, and the economic power remains firmly within its hold, spaces, and connections for people of colour to grow and define themselves in spaces outside of mainstream white spaces, can aid in challenging not only white supremacy but how people of colour view themselves.

In recent years, there has been an increase in interracial relationships. This is despite the negative perceptions mentioned in Childs' (2015) study, where many participants believed that interracial relationships had a low chance of success because of racial and cultural differences. In addition, a new generation of first-generation mixed-race children are coming to terms with their identity and what that means. Recently, I was a guest on a podcast about mixed-race identity with a mixed-race person 12 years younger than me. Although I was saddened to hear that his experiences were so similar to mine, I was glad to see, unlike me, that he had access to both the language to understand his identity and the representation to see what he could be. However, mixed-race people remain few in the broader scheme of South African politics, and many exercise their resistance and solidarity in ways that challenge the current system to find new solutions for South Africa, like all young South Africans. The mix of privilege, though in many regards' conditional, with mixed-race identity and its place in post-apartheid South Africa, which still has a way to go, are best summed up by Sem below:

> *I know quite a lot of mixed people, I'm seeing in the youth, that there is a lot more mixing of races and genders and things like that, the part was like the nation—that everyone is doing that, and I don't think that's on a national scale, that's very much in woke spaces, in particular youth and particular enclaves of people, as a mixed race person, for me, it would be easy to say that it is present, because in my circles and in my experiences it's*

> *always been there, and it's only through exposure to a greater reality, that I can see that it isn't actually a true representation of our country.* (Sem)

6. Conclusions

This paper has unpacked the connections between white supremacist structures and first-generation mixed-race people's perception of themselves and the context in which they live. Still reeling with the effects of settler colonialism and apartheid, the post-apartheid space is one where structural whiteness remains and is deeply visible in systems that have remained largely intact. The experiences of white privilege from mixed-race people can be considered twofold. First, because of their access to whiteness, and in some cases a parent of colour that is highly educated, mixed-race people have experienced levels of privilege that many people of colour have not. Despite this, however, which comes to the second point, white privilege that extends beyond economic means is trickier to access. The conditional nature of whiteness depends on the person being accepted as white, for all participants, despite their relative privileges, they were/are never considered to be white, and are constantly reminded of this. Through intersectional analysis, first-generation mixed-race people engage within the multiple axes of power on a personal, social, and political level. In this way, the intersections of their identity allow them to experience both oppression and privilege at the same time. However, the pervasiveness of white heteropatriarchal structures entrenched in the post-apartheid landscape ensures that those relative privileges are always conditional.

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Note

1. The use of 'Black' instead of black is to refer to Black as an all-encompassing term for people of colour or non-white people in South Africa, first used by the Black Consciousness Movement. See (Biko 1978).

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