

An Exploration of Social Media as a Key Site for the Expression of Post-Racial Politics

By Joshua Bell

Supervisor: Tarryn Alexander

G14B3791

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## **Abstract**

This research sets out to examine colourblind racism in contemporary South Africa, specifically, as expressed on social media networks. In South Africa, a nation lauded for its transition from Apartheid to liberal democracy, racism still continues to exist. In the new democracy, racism continues in old, familiar forms but it has been suggested that racism also assumes new and emergent forms such as ‘colourblind’ racism. This is evident in recent controversies involving local public figures and their expressions of ‘soft’, ‘colourblind’ racism on Facebook. It is the new platforms and modes of racism unique to democratic South Africa which this thesis attempts to explore. Specifically, this study is framed by ‘post-racialism’, a concept developed by scholars globally to capture the suggestion that in liberal democratic societies across the world, racism continues with racial inequality now underpinned by an ideology of colourblindness as opposed to overt policies of segregation.

Colourblindness denies the relevance of race as a collective issue, proposing instead that other social factors such as class are more pertinent in considerations of social inequality. The purpose of colourblind narratives may be identified as the reduction of racism to mere individual action, denying systemic white privilege and historical responsibility for reparation as well as preventing racially subjugated groups from critically interrogating racial power and privilege (Goldberg, 2015: 28-30). Post-racial theorists agree that the projection of colourblind politics which claims to no longer ‘see race’ has instead served to secure the normalisation of white privilege and black subjugation (Bonilla-Silva *et al*, 2004: 559-560). The purported existence of colourblind /post-racial racism and its impact requires exploration in the context of South Africa today. In expanding on the definition of racism, we are able to see that racism is an adaptive system of power that is able to reproduce and reconceptualise itself to changes within society.

As modalities of racism have evolved, so have the platforms for its propagation. This research offers social media as a site of exploration for post-racial narratives. The case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen are presented in this study as exemplars of post-racial liberalism, denial and exclusion. This research calls for the expansion of racial understanding so as to contest racial power structures as a continuing systemic issue in contemporary South Africa

# **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

South African democracy was forged in the wake of the Apartheid regime, a system renowned for being one of the harshest examples of racial oppression in world history (Mathews, 2012: 172). The relatively peaceful transition from Apartheid to a constitutional democracy is heralded as a monumental victory in the fight against racial oppression (Makhulu, 2016: 256). This transition is celebrated as the keystone of modern South Africa and provides hope that oppression may indeed be overcome even in the most brutal and unjust of regimes (Barnett, 1999: 274-275). However, as post-Apartheid democracy matures, numerous racial issues have come to the fore. In recent years, many deeply racialised protests have arisen in the South African context, with student protests such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall capturing the attention of national public discourse (Sikhosana, 2017: 8). These protests have challenged coloniality in a post-apartheid South Africa, calling for racial transformation within the democratic order (Mirzoef, 2017: 13).

While anti-colonial protests have captured the attention of the South African public, there have correspondingly been many instances of racist expression- with many of these cases appearing over social media platforms such as Facebook (Marais, 2017: 26-30). Among these cases, Penny Sparrow (Hornmoen, 2017: 61), Helen Zille (Dolamo, 2017: 3) and Mabel Jansen (Marais, 2017: 26) have featured amongst the more notorious. With the rise of racial discontent among the public, it is increasingly becoming apparent that the issue of racism has followed into democracy (McKaiser, 2015: 45). Mangcu (2017: 239) describes racism as a “scavenger ideology”, explaining that it reproduces itself in “different temporal and spatial contexts by revivifying age-old prejudices and using them to justify discriminatory practices”. This definition positions racism as an evolving, self-producing ideology so that the racism that enabled slavery and colonialism is fundamentally unified with the racism that persists within liberal modernity (Amin, 2010: 6). However, as Mangcu (2017: 242) has further noted, racism reproduces itself in the form most appropriate to the time in which it exists.

It is argued that in a South Africa which is “post-Apartheid” and “post-colonial”, there is no need for white power to actively enforce racist infrastructure at an economic, spatial or political level as this infrastructure has previously been established (Mangcu, 2017: 244-246). Jansen (2002: 199-200) argues that the form of racism most appropriate to a time which aspires to be “post” the structural racism of the past is one that defends and justifies (as opposed to enforces) inequality. Thus, as the dominant forms of racism change from overt to covert in the shifting light of time and context, so change the methods of identifying and contesting racism.

Goldberg (2015: 7-9) has theorised that similar to the way in which liberal modernity is so often distinguished by the term “post”, so the modality of racism that has arisen as a product of this time can be captured by the concept of ‘post-racialism’. ‘Post-racialism’ is a widely used concept by theorists of colourblind racism (Chin, 2012: 371). Colourblind racism suggests an adaptation in the control of racial language for the maintenance of white racial power and privilege (Gqola, 2001: 94-95). For Bonilla-Silva (2015: 1365), language is a mechanism of power, in that controlling the language of racial meaning entails a control of how racism is identified and addressed. This is important to consider as ‘post-racial’ ideologies utilise an aspirational language in proposing that we have overcome systemic racial oppression (Gqola, 2001: 94). Post-racialism effectively frames colourblindness as a privilege of contemporary society and undermines collective claims of racism as being baseless and unnecessary (Lentin, 2011: 161).

The primary aim of the study is to explore changing modalities of racial meaning within a contemporary South Africa. In doing so, this research illustrates a need to expand the scope of South African definitions of racism beyond explicit expressions of racial prejudice to incorporate subtler and more indirect expressions. The case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen will be used to apply a post-racial perspective. As this research is concerned with racial constructions, the methodology utilised will follow a qualitative approach. Research data will be collected through the use of in-depth interviews as well as through the collection of user-generated Facebook comments relating to the case studies. Research data will be analysed through the use of interpretivism, with in-depth interviews being interpreted through a thematic analysis and with the Facebook comments being interpreted through a narrative analysis.

## **1.2 Goals of the Research**



This research aims to explore new modalities of racism detailed in contemporary sociological theories of race and observed in contemporary South Africa. This involved cases studies of online racism as a platform for the application of post-racial perspectives. The aim of this perspective is to illustrate the need to expand the understanding of what racism means in a modern South Africa beyond the conventionally understood overt and direct expressions of racial power.

### **1.2.1 Sub-Objectives**

- a) To explore the charge that colourblind racism constitutes an emergent modality of racism in the South African context.
- b) To interrogate the overlapping phenomena of post-racial expression with social media platforms.
- c) To conduct fieldwork which captures individual perceptions of popular local cases of online racism.

### **1.3 Methodological Paradigm**

The purpose of data collection for this research is to depict changes and continuities in South African racial perceptions using the framework of post-racial theory (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 4). In this sense, a qualitative approach will provide the means to witness the meaning making process of racial opinion and to gain a sense of the public discourse regarding race in contemporary society (Goldkuhl, 2012: 4-5). The epistemological approach of this research will be interpretivism (Williams, 2000: 218-219). Interpretivism is based upon the assumption that the social world is not a given, but is instead constructed and constantly reinforced by human action and perception (Goldkuhl, 2012: 5). The value of this approach is that it views people as capable of creating ever changing and interactive social structures as well as operating through them (Schwartz, 1984: 1118-1119). Interpretivism also importantly highlights that the basis of social knowledge is not objective fact, but history, culture and ideology (Williams, 2000: 221). While this research looks to analyse individual racial meaning making processes, it does not assume that this occurs in a vacuum, looking instead for the ideologies and historical processes that these constructions are a product of.

## **1.4 Case Studies**

Data collection for this research is based on three case studies of online racism which includes the cases of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen. These three cases have been selected on the basis of their notoriety within public discourse and for the impact that they have had in bringing ‘post-racial racism’ to the fore. These cases have occurred quite recently and have subsequently generated academic discussion and public debate (Marais, 2017: 54-61). The data collected is taken from in-depth interviews and from user-generated comments. The use of online media to gain an understanding of the case studies provides access to considerably more perspectives than would be possible through only face-to-face fieldwork.

## **1.5 Research Methods, Procedures and Techniques**

### **1.5.1 In-Depth Interviews**

In-depths interviews were conducted with Rhodes University students. In recent years Rhodes University, like other historically white universities, has been a site of intense cultural contestation against coloniality unparalleled in the history of South African higher education. Student protests such as the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and #RhodesSoWhite movements shook the foundation of white institutions, challenging the Eurocentric ethnocentrism in campus cultures and taught knowledge (Sikhosana, 2017: 8). These have been student led movements against the University, challenging the whitewashing and coloniality of this institution (Makhulu, 2016: 256-258). ‘Fallists’ have contested the embeddedness of white power and privilege in academic spaces which historically barred the inclusion of students of colour (Isdahl, 2016: 20-24). While many assumed that public institutions were transformed in 1994, the student movements proved otherwise (Noyoo, 2018: 2-3). This is reminiscent of Steve Biko’s (1987: 3) time at Rhodes University, where his inclusion was one severely limited by the domination of the epistemological space by white liberals. While recent protests have not directly challenged ‘common sense’ definitions of racism as this thesis seeks to do, they have indeed provided new groundwork for the consideration of post-apartheid politics and emergent definitions for racism in the ‘new’ South Africa (McKaiser, 2015: 45).

The aim of this research is to illustrate colourblind racism as an instrument for maintaining (relatively enduring) social hierarchies as a grievance reflected in the ethos of the national

student movement of 2015-2016. The national student movements exposed subtle cultural and epistemic reproductions (not overt exclusions) as the devices which today maintain white domination (Isdahl, 2016: 26). As one of the greatest post-Apartheid movements, the student protests have importantly illustrated the adaptive nature of racism by highlighting how important racial barriers that excluded figures such as Steve Biko find continuity in the present (Makhulu, 2016: 260).

Rhodes University is an important site of interrogation in that its claims of racial transformation have been called into question by recent years of racial discontent (Nattrass and Seekings 2001: 65-66). It is further important to consider that these protests have been inextricably linked to social media (Noyoo, 2018: 4-6). Isadahl (2016: 10) notes that student movements have utilised social media to draw attention to issues that are otherwise silenced. For Robin (2014: 32) the integration of protest action into the digital age has signified a shift from 'slow activism', that requires intricate planning and organisation, to 'fast activism' that rapidly draws attention to issues and creates dramatic events through 'trending' hashtags and posts. Rhodes University students therefore are able to provide insights regarding the emergence of 'post-racialism' as a modality of racism and the implication of the contemporary proliferation of social media in contesting racism.

The in-depth interviews are semi-structured to allow for the exploration of participant racial perceptions and constructions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 78). The sampling method for participants has been purposive according to the judgement of the researcher (Noy, 2008: 330). Students have been chosen on the basis of being above the age of 18 and enrolled at Rhodes University. Students have been selected across race and gender in a manner broadly representative of South African society and the student enrolment of Rhodes University (Jacoby and Siminoff, 2008: 146). This includes: 4 black African participants (2 female, 2 male); 4 white participants (2 female, 2 male); 2 coloured participants (1 female, 1 male); 2 Indian participants (1 female, 1 male). All participants have previously interacted with myself (the researcher). Participants, within each group, have been selected on the basis of having previously expressed opinions that are either critical of contemporary race relations or have expressed ideas of a 'post-racial' South Africa. The purpose of this criteria is to explore diverse opinions that may provide a widely formed understanding of South African racial meanings. Participants have further been selected as having come from small towns as well as large cities within their respective groups. The purpose of creating this contrast is to gain an understanding of racial meanings and experiences from varied contexts within South African society.

Each participant was provided with an excerpt of the respective Facebook and Twitter posts from the three case studies. In-depth interviews have been conducted for the purpose of understanding what race means to individuals within contemporary society, and how these definitions shape participant understandings of post-racial narratives (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 568-572). In-depth interviews offer testimonials of lived racial realities. The interviews sought explanations specifically of student's understandings of what race means in a contemporary South Africa, the detailing of racial experience and the interpretation of the case studies. Noy (2008: 329) notes that the socio-cultural and racial positioning of the researcher inevitably exists as an influencing factor with regard to participant responses, potentially creating a divide in social knowledge and power. My positionality (as the researcher) is benefitted by the fact that there is degree of familiarity with participants in terms of previous personal interactions as well as from a shared student status between researcher and participants.

### **1.5.2 Facebook Comments**

Alongside in-depth interviews, the second data source for this research was Facebook comments. These comments were collected unobtrusively from the comment sections of Facebook articles relating to the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen. The unobtrusive data collection of social media comments is defined by the British Psychological Society (2017: 3-5) as:

“Alternatively, they may be non-reactive where data about individuals are collected unobtrusively (e.g. analyses of ‘found text’ in blogs, discussion forums or other online spaces, analyses of hits on websites, or observation of other types of online activity such as search engine histories or digital traces stored as a by-product of mobile app usage).”

Comments utilised in this research were constituted as ‘found texts’ which will be analysed without the use of the commenter's name (Champoux *et al*, 2012: 22-25). Facebook comments were taken from articles and posts shared to public Facebook pages. Where specific Facebook articles are referred to, the comment sections will be analysed in terms of the quantity of comments that may be identified under the racial storylines defined in this research (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 562-563).

Scholars such as Djuric *et al* (2015: 29-30) have engaged with social user comments using analysis programs that base their findings on keywords and algorithms, this will not be the approach taken by this research. Each comment will be analysed by myself (as the researcher) and the collective patterns observed will be a product of interpretivism (Goldkuhl, 2012: 5). As this research concerns the interrogation of covert racial language, analysing these narratives often requires an interpretation of hidden meanings, rendering programs that base their analysis on keywords inadequate (Gitari *et al*, 2015: 217-219). Furthermore individual comments will be read in the context of group discussions so that the responses of other commenters be they supportive, apathetic or critical, will ultimately change the meaning of each discussion thread. Interpretivism is therefore crucial in this process as, while the wording may change, user comments may express fundamentally similar sentiments (Williams, 2000: 218).

## **1.6 Ethical Considerations**

This research will be conducted under the ethical guidelines set by Rhodes University. Participants will remain anonymous and will only participate having provided informed consent. Interviews will be recorded for the purposes of creating transcripts and will be subsequently deleted. The case studies used in this research make use of the personal identities of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen. This has occurred on the basis that these figures, within the context of the case studies, have entered into the public sphere through the use of news articles and academic research (Hornmoen, 2017: 61; Dolamo, 2017: 3; Marais, 2017: 26). The scope of interrogation of these case studies is limited to what has been reported. This includes the excerpts that will be provided to participants within the interviews.

Consent for the use of Facebook comments comes with Third Party Access policies, which all users agree to as a part of the terms and conditions- which permits the use of information provided to the site for the purposes of educational use (Staff *et al*, 2016: 16-19). As users have agreed to the terms and conditions of Facebook in order to create an account on the site, consent is provided in the form of the gatekeeper access provided by the sites third party access parameters (British Psychological Society, 2017: 3-5). Information has further been taken from the public Facebook pages of news outlets and not of the personal accounts of individual users. As a result, data collected from these pages constitutes information in the public sphere, rather than private (Dekay, 2012: 293-296).

## **1.7 Challenges and Limitations**

One of the major challenges of the research was drawing inferences and making inductions about ‘collective patterns’ from a sample size of twelve participants. Engagement with participants however proved to be in-depth and extensive, allowing rich insight into individual perceptions.

A further challenge was navigating the sensitivity of the race issue in South Africa. As a contentious issue, some participants expressed restraint when disclosing fully their opinions of race. Everatt (2012: 8-12) has noted that, within South Africa, there is a tendency for research participants to display discomfort when discussing race, as many believe that their opinions should satisfy the ideals of non-racialism. Due to the controversial nature of these case studies, interview questions have been worded carefully so as to minimise the risk of biasing research participants. The intention in this, is to allow participants to provide answers without having being influenced by the researcher.

The use of social media as a platform for fieldwork also presented novel challenges. One such interesting challenge presented by the new research source was that documented opinions are not permanently archived. For instance, Facebook comments may be deleted by the users as well as the administrators of Facebook pages. Marwick and Boyd (2010: 114-116) describe the commentary on posts as a conversation with a “networked audience”, where the occasional removal of comments results in the silencing of certain aspects of the dialogue which may potentially be crucial to the research. These are challenges which are sure to be fully theorised in research theory in the future but for now presents a novel methodological challenge. It is important to further consider the meaning of these comments is limited to the wording of the comments themselves, without the user being able to elaborate on or clarify the meaning of the comment. The study (like other Facebook-based studies) encountered for instance the difficulty of deciphering meaning from comments without the user being able to elaborate on or clarify the meaning of the comment (Champoux *et al*, 2012: 24-27). While the use of online platforms as a site of data collection presents an ambitious task, it is necessary in the discussion of the emergent field of post-racial research. As post-racial analysis directly interrogates contemporary society, there is a pertinent need to include contemporary platforms of communication and social engagement such as social media (Goldberg, 2015: 29).

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**THEORETICAL CONTEXT**  
**AND**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1 The Development of Race Theory**

Conceptions of race have been instrumental in the very construction of most societies and have, alongside other factors such as class and gender, dictated the development (and underdevelopment) of the world as it exists today (Hage, 2010: 113-114). However, neither race nor our understanding of its influence have remained static. Race as signifier of locale, power and identity has indeed evolved with the development of modernity (Goldberg, 1993: vii-4). Race is also instantiated differently across the various societies in which it is embedded as both lived phenomenon and intellectual concept (Zamudio *et al*, 2011: 3-5). Sociological inquiry into race as modern phenomena has condensed in the form of an academic framework known as “Race Theory”. Understanding the development of race theory is integral to understanding the logic and design of current manifestations of power and inequality in society.

Goldberg and Solomos (2002: 3) define race as “a medium by which difference is represented and otherness produced, so that contingent attributes such as skin color (*sic*) are transformed into supposedly essential bases for identities, group belonging and exclusion, social privileges and burdens, political rights and disenfranchisements”. Morris-Reich and Rupnow (2017: 33-34) similarly define racialisation as a socially constructed method of human categorisation. They further suggest that race has historically been most commonly categorised as a natural signifier of biological human difference. The definition of race as ‘natural’ method of distinction gained traction with 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists, such as Charles Darwin, overlapping concepts of biological organisation with understandings of social organisation (Amin, 2010: 4-6). The following section establishes biological essentialism as the foundation for future developments in race theory, including the present day theory of ‘post-racism’.

**2.1.1 Biological Essentialism**

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the period of the Second World War in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most dominant social understanding of race was positivistic, with many thinkers of the time believing there to be an overlap between the social world and the biological world (Goldkuhl, 2012: 1-4). This entailed understandings of race theory being joined with understandings of evolutionary theory, as physical differences of birthplace, skin colour, language and hair texture were commonly thought to signify a difference in the human species rather than being socially constructed (Morris-Reich and Rupnow, 2017: 2-13). These visual differences developed into a phenotypical understanding of race, wherein these visual differences were thought to be indicative of biological differences in skeletal structure and brain size between racial groups (Amin, 2010: 7-9). The life and death of Saartjie Bartman stands as an example of this, as colonists tore her from her place of birth so that she may be paraded, as an exotic animal, in ‘freak-show’ British exhibitions (Abrahams, 1996: 106-110). Labelling her as the ‘Hottentot Venus’, these exhibitions confirmed the white conceptions of inherent black inferiority, as onlookers extended their colonial gaze over her black body (Crais and Scully, 2008: 3). These ideals of white superiority and black animalism continued in her death, where her body was dissected and examined for perceived biological differences (Abrahams, 1996: 90).

In imperial conquests such as with colonialism and slavery, phenotypical theories of race served as a justificatory framework for the racial subjugation of black people in portraying inequality as an inherent aspect of the natural order (Schraub, 2017: 610-612). In a period that set the foundation for modern society, racial domination was seen as not only something that was justifiable, but something that was logical (Probyn, 2003: 61-63). This has meant that racism has been integrated into the very structure of society, as it has acted as a lens through which societal “development” has operated (Essed and Goldberg, 2002: 39)

While understandings of race, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, based itself in evolutionary theory, it remained a social construction used for the purpose of racial domination (Lentin, 2007: 30-31). Phenotypical racism has been most notably expressed in the ‘science’ of eugenics (Morris-Reich and Rupnow, 2017: 2-13). Eugenics utilised phenotypical racial principles of biological difference to justify the imprisonment and genocide of Jewish people among other groups (Lentin, 2007: 32). Race was repurposed within Nazi-Germany eugenics to place Aryan people as a race superior to ‘lesser’ human groups (du Rand *et al*, 2017: 37). Its implementation during the Second World War resulted in the Nazi Holocaust, a defining moment for humanity as the horrors of its genocide shook the world (Lentin, 2015: 1401). In explaining why the



genocide of predominantly Jewish people instigated progressive social change while colonisation and slavery failed to initiate such change, Frantz Fanon (2008: 87) reasoned that the Jewish person may still lay claim to the title of being white, while a black person will inevitably be bound by this distinction. The purpose of noting this is that, while eugenics made the attempt to characterise and stereotype Jewish people, its integration of class and phenotypical racial prejudice represented an inherent contradiction, as this remained the persecution of white people (Mitchell, 2012: 71-76). In the imprisonment, torture and genocide of a group that occupied a white space fundamentally under biological essentialism, the Western world had to contemplate the cognitive dissonance in the social restructuring of biological 'facts' under eugenics (Lentin, 2007: 27). This signalled an evolution in race theory, as there was now a need to reconceptualise what race meant in the wake of an event such as the Holocaust.

### **2.1.2 Racial Constructivism**

The period directly following the Second World War featured two critical realisations for international communities: there was a distinct danger in the essentialist racial reasoning of the past and that there had been a global shift- as countries were now inextricably connected in international relations (Hall, 2011: 707). International race theory thus moved from biological essentialism to racial constructivism as dominant understandings of race shifted away from race 'as biological fact' to race as fundamentally an ideological construction (Williams, 2000: 219-221).

Ideological construction of race entailed the acceptance that human beings are equal biologically. Racial constructivism disowns the ideology of biological essentialism and, instead, argues that race is foremostly a symbolic and political marker for describing cultural differences between different groups (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 217). While many countries engaged with this evolution of race theory, it is important to note that South Africa reinforced biological essentialism from 1948 through the overtly institutionalised racism of the Apartheid regime (Motha, 2010: 286-288).

Despite the exception of South Africa, global trends saw the recasting of race theory from being based on 'natural' and 'physical' markers, to being understood as ideological in nature (Bonilla-Silva, 2001: 21-22). Those who regarded race as primarily ideological in nature are referred to as constructivists (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011: 191). For constructivists,

racism exists only so long as people acknowledge the existence of race (Lentin, 2000: 97). Constructivist discourse on race was manifold. For anti-racists it served as a more progressive and culturally-based explanation of what race was, but for the less progressive it could also serve as a new justificatory discourse for racism (Amin, 2010: 5). The shift in justificatory discourse for racism from universal/biological to ideological/constructivist intensified globally following the civil rights era, as it was assumed that systematic racism had come to an end—with many nations often using South Africa's Apartheid as a comparative example (Goldberg, 1993: 54-56). As a result, dominant justificatory narratives turned to attributing white triumph and black subjugation to 'cultural deficiencies' in black life rather than to biological inferiority (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011: 191-192). Where perceptions of black people under Apartheid and Jim Crow governance highlighted ideas of inherent racial superiority, social constructivist conceptions of race featured ideas of black laziness and inaction as a justification of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2006: 41-42). Clearly, while the constructivist phase in race theory highlighted the fallacies of biological essentialism it had the potential for reproducing racism on new terms as indicated by the aforementioned examples.

By focusing on the cultural, it overlooked the violent structural and economic foundation for racial inequality laid by colonialism and state segregation (Miles, 2000: 136-137). The inherent shortcoming of this reasoning is highlighted by the quote of W.I. Thomas (1928: 572) that where people "define situations as real, they are real in their consequences". While racial difference is indeed fundamentally ideological, this realisation of the social constructedness of race has historically not been wielded primarily for freedom but instead manipulated to justify the division of land, the capturing of resources and the divisions of labour (Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999: 151-153). It is in the shortcomings of racial constructivism that a new school of racial thought emerged, Critical Race Theory.

### **2.1.3 Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory describes a movement of scholars that have aimed to contest racism as a system of power that exists in a broader perspective of economic and historical contexts in addition to inter-personal social relations (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 2). This academic framework addressed the shortcomings of constructivism in accounting for the political implications of race's ideological nature (Zamudio *et al*, 2011: 2). Emerging in the early 1970's, Critical Race Theory challenges racial constructivist interpretations in interrogating the

structural implications of racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 2-3). Critical Race Theory considers racism within a broader perspective of historical, political and socio-economic dynamics (Solorzano *et al*, 2000: 61). The aim of this broader perspective is to create a discussion of race that considers collective interests as well as individual interests (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 18). This is with the purpose of providing a theory of race that speaks to lived experiences within modern society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 4-8). The basic tenets of this theory are: the centrality of race and racism and how that intersects with other forms of subordination; the contestation of dominant ideology; the advocacy of social justice; the emphasis on experiential knowledge; and the use of a transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano *et al*, 2000: 61). Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 7-11) recognise that as Critical Race Theory prioritises context in racial understanding, race critical understandings must be adapted and expanded to different contexts and era's. It is in light of this reality that the application of Critical Race Theory has splintered into Queer-interest, intersectional and 'post-racial' analysis among others groups under its umbrella (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 6)

### **2.1.3.1 Post-Racial Theory**

Fundamentally, post-racial theory problematizes the tendency of people to deny further engagements with the question of racism simply because certain historical racial barriers have been overcome or mitigated. For instance, 'post-racial moments' which are used to justify colourblindness can include such events as the end of colonialism, abolishment of racist legislation and disbandment of segregation (Lentin, 2011: 161). At an everyday level, advocates of colourblindness may see equal access to education, shared public space and inter-racial relationships as 'post-racial moments' (Hollinger, 2011: 176).

For Goldberg (2015: 29), racism historically manifested through 'exploitative' and 'eliminationist' modalities. Exploitative racism refers to the abuse of black labour from racially subjugated groups, exhibited by slavery (Goldberg, 1993: 26). Eliminationist racism refers to the creation of white-only spaces through the exclusion of oppressed groups, as exemplified by Apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act that socially, spatially and economically segregated people through distinctions of race (Kgongoane, 2017: 9). What makes post-racial theory distinct from both exploitative and eliminationist racism is that it emphasises an emergent modality of *dismissive* racism (Cho, 2009: 1593). Dismissive racism refers to the rejection of experiential and structural claims of racial subjugation through the use of

colourblindness (Lentin, 2011: 161). Goldberg (2015: 29) describes dismissive racism as operating through a “dual logic of reversal” that charges historically subjugated black groups as the contemporary perpetrators of racism while rejecting the experiences of these subjugated groups as inconsequential in the current context. The dismissive nature of post-raciality is important to consider in the current context as it upholds systems of power and privilege established historically through exploitative and eliminationist forms of racism (Goldberg, 2015: 107-108).

### **2.1.3.2 Colourblindness**

Colourblindness is widely seen as an example of how post-racism manifests as an attitude in society. Colourblindness is simply defined as the belief that race should not be considered as a collective issue or factor in legal, political, educational and or social processes (Afelbaum *et al*, 2012: 205). Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011: 191-192) outline colourblindness as a form of racism that aims to defend and justify the current racial order and the inequality within it. Brown (2003: 193-195) sees it as an important aspect of Critical Race Theory because in the interrogation of how racism is normalised in society, colourblindness maintains racial inequalities through its refusal to acknowledge it as problem.

Post-racial colourblindness, particularly in contexts such as South Africa, uses ‘post-racial’ moments such as the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela to authoritatively state what racism now is (Lentin, 2011: 160). However, post-racial colourblindness still denies collective issues of race by denying race as a contemporary systemic issue (Bonilla-Silva, 2015: 1360). Mangcu (2017: 246) provides an example of post-racial colourblindness in the University of Cape Town’s attempts to remove racial affirmative action as part of the criteria regarding admission with Vice Chancellor, Max Price, arguing that emphasis should be placed on economic disadvantage rather than race. The post-racial colourblindness applied in this example assumes that the end of Apartheid has afforded South Africans an equal opportunity to enter academic spaces, with economics being the only factor that is necessary to consider. In overlooking the socio-economic, spatial and psychological barriers that people of colour are still faced with in the South African context, assuming colourblindness in this situation resists the entry of black people into this university (Motha, 2010: 294-295). This colourblind argument relies on South Africa’s liberation from legislation and policy that have historically restricted black groups

from entering places such as the University of Cape Town to argue that this racial barrier no longer exists (Sikhosana, 2017: 30).

### **2.1.3.3 South African Race Theory**

South Africa presents a particularly unique landscape for the application of race theory. While the post-World War Two period saw most nations shift theories of race from relying on biological essentialism to racial constructivism, South Africa saw biological essentialism reinforced as a framework to construct the Apartheid regime (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 74). Biological essentialism remained the dominant means of racial understanding until the first democratic South African election, in 1994, signalled a change to constructivist non-racialism (Ferree, 2011: 17-25). South Africa's shift from essentialist to constructivist framings of race in the public sphere has occurred both recently and suddenly (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 75-80). This highlights certain disjuncture's between global (western) Critical Race Theory and local realities.

For instance, in western Critical Race Theory colourblindness is seen as a longstanding and conservative take on race. Cho (2009: 1598) describes colourblindness as "your father's Oldsmobile" of racist ideology. Colourblindness, in this sense, was used in post-World War Two society to argue against there being a need for Civil Rights movements, racial integration and affirmative action (Essed and Goldberg, 2002: 81-83). In contrast to this, colourblindness in South Africa is seen as a liberal ideology. Sikhosana (2017:32) notes that colourblindness featured as an ideology of resistance to the Apartheid regime by the African National Congress and was herald as the answer to the racial subjugation within South Africa. It is contended that colourblind rhetoric's are now utilised within South African post-racial ideology with the purpose of providing justificatory framework for persisting racial inequality (Motha, 2010: 294-295). Gqola (2001: 98-99) argues that this post-racial ideology forms a racial language that serves to: liberalise racism through reducing racism to exclusively mean only overt, hateful prejudice; thereby denying the existence of a systemic, subtle, everyday racism.

## **2.2 Key Theorists**

As contemporary society is faced with racial discontentment and de-colonial discourses, various theorists have argued that 'post-racialism' has emerged as a new modality of racial

oppression (Young, 2012: 501). This modality of racism is thought to be unique to liberal modernity, in utilising ‘post-racial moments’ such as the implementation of South African constitutional democracy to justify contemporary racial inequality and deny charges of contemporary issues of racism (du Rand *et al*, 2017: 23) Among the theorists that have identified and contested this contemporary modality of racism, Derrick Bell, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Alana Lentin and David Theo Goldberg remain at the forefront in the analysis of post-racialism within liberal modernity.

### **2.2.1 Derrick Bell**

In exploring post-racial theory, Derrick Bell offers a useful place to begin the discussion. As a founding member of Critical Race Theory, Bell wrote from the early 1970’s and in the wake of the Civil Rights Era (Zamudio *et al*, 2011: 25). His work includes: *Race, Racism & American Law* (2008); *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (1987); and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1993). Bell (1990: 393-397) is distinguished from other post-racial theorists in that his work on post-racialism occurred prior to its popularisation as a concept in race theory and can therefore be seen as predictive. Bell’s (1999: 315-323) work represents a departure from the reasoning which holds racism as equivalent to individual hatred as he proposed instead that race exists as a structural, rather than purely ideological, condition. In his reasoning, while racism may be visible in individual expression, it is not grounded in it, but is instead rooted in structures that order and reproduce it (Bell, 1987: 86). These structures include socio-economic, spatial, psychological and political systems of power that have been historically constructed with the purpose of serving whiteness (Fanon, 2008: 133-134).

Bell’s articulation of racism as a social structure effectively set a foundation for what has come to be post-racial theory, as it is only through recognising racism as an embedded characteristic of modern social power that race as a problem may be identified beyond individual characteristics (Freeman, 1981: 1880). Bell famously used allegory and storytelling to illustrate post-racial relations (Bell, 1999: 315-317). Among his more controversial work, Bell’s Interest-Convergence thesis has presented an understanding of whiteness that suggests that racial progress, such as the end of Apartheid, occurs where it may benefit white interests (Driver, 2011: 160). For many liberals and conservatives alike, the Interest-Convergence thesis provided an undesirable concept as it seemingly delegitimises racial victories (Freeman, 1981:

1801-1802). In the South African context, this thesis seemingly undermines the most defining ‘post-racial’ moment in South African history, proposing that the implementation of constitutional democracy has maintained systems of white power and privilege (Driver, 2011: 154). However, it is important to consider that Apartheid, due to international sanctions and an unmaintainable infrastructure, represented a failing system (Stapleton, 2010: 152). This issue was only compounded with the impending civil war (Ferree, 2011: 7). Apartheid no longer benefited whiteness. However, in the transition to democracy, South Africa has averted civil war, white monopoly capital has been able to thrive with the lifting of international sanctions, and the socio-spatial privileges enjoyed by white South Africans has gone largely unchallenged (Ferree, 2011: 25).

Bell’s Interest-Convergence thesis reveals the nature of racism to be a system of power. While post-racial narratives observe ‘post-racial’ moments such as the South African transition to democracy to signify a victory over racism, Bell offers the alternative understanding that the essence of racism is not in laws or regimes, but in the maintenance of white power and privilege. Understanding this as the driving motivation of racism presents it as something that is able to endure and adapt to ‘post-racial’ moments such as the establishment of a constitutional democracy in South Africa.

### **2.2.2 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva**

Similarly to the work of Derrick Bell, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s perspective of post-racial theory has largely been focused on the use of narratives to illustrate the persistence of racism within society (Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000: 54-69). However, where Bell produced narratives to illustrate structures of racism, Bonilla-Silva looks to narratives within society in the interrogation of racial power structures (Bonilla-Silva, 2015: 1362). He notes that in a modern society of state-promoted racial equality, white people are becoming increasingly dependent on the non-recognition of race so as to defend against accusations of racial prejudice and or privilege (Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000: 51). While colourblind narratives deny racial meaning, Bonilla-Silva maintains that these narratives can be indicative of social processes and relationships (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011: 192). Bonilla-Silva’s (2015: 1359-1360) racial theory often interprets colourblind narratives so as to understand what racial dynamics are being dismissed by these narratives and what purpose this may serve in the protection of racism.

Through his interpretation of colourblind narratives, Bonilla-Silva (2004: 556) interrogates contemporary racism through the use of two types of racial stories: testimonials and storylines. Testimonials place focus on narrator accounts of racial experience with the purpose of providing insight into the construction of colourblind attitudes and practical representations of race (Bonilla-Silva *et al*, 2004: 558). This will be of special importance for this thesis as we investigate, through interviews, storylines which refer to popular narratives, such as “the past is the past”. Within his understanding, storylines such as this maintain an image of colourblindness while simultaneously reproducing the racist ideology of the ‘past’ (Bonilla-Silva *et al*, 2004: 562-563). For Walker (2005: 134), Bonilla-Silva’s emphasis of colourblind ideology signifies an expansion in the understanding of racism as being overt and hateful to also being covert and subtle. Jackson (2015: 44) understands this expansion of racial meaning to be important as coded, colourblind language is increasingly being exhibited in a liberal modernity that many proclaim to be ‘post-racial’. In his interrogation of colourblindness, Bonilla-Silva (2015: 1359) observes ‘new’ manifestations of racism- providing an understanding as to how to challenge this form of racism.

### **2.2.3 Alana Lentin**

For Alana Lentin, the difference between post-racial ideology and post-racial theory represent the difference between anti-racialism and anti-racism (Lentin, 2011: 161). She defines anti-racialism as rising up against the concept of race while ignoring the condition that it represents, whereas anti-racism is identified as the identification of race for the purpose of identifying the condition that it refers to (Lentin, 2011: 161-162). The implication of this, for Lentin, is that refusing the language of race only serves to perpetuate the existence of racism as a societal condition (Lentin, 2015: 1403-1404). In light of this, Lentin’s (2007: 18-19) post-racial theory challenges revisionist understandings of the development of modern society that ignore racism as a founding logic in societal development. In this effort, she has utilised the sociological discipline as a platform for the exploration of this post-racial ideology (Lentin, 2015: 1401).

For Lentin, the sociological field exemplifies post-racial ideology in basing its founding theories in revisionist understandings of history in addressing the development of liberal modernity (Lentin, 2000: 91). She illustrates this in referencing Max Weber, as a founding father of social theory, who understood the development of modern society to be the product of ‘protestant ethics’ of accumulation- an account of history that entirely omits colonialism and



slavery as shaping modern society (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 77). In a field such as Sociology, where its founding scholars overwhelmingly tend to bypass racism as an integral factor shaping liberal modernity, Lentin (2000: 91-92) argues that the sociological discipline shifts critical understandings of race to the periphery of social analysis. Her argument is that the negation of racial language at the heart of post-racial language serves to perpetuate racism as a condition by misdiagnosing societal ills in the analysis of power structures and inequality (Lentin, 2011: 163).

#### **2.2.4 David Theo Goldberg**

David Theo Goldberg (2015: 26-27) notes that what follows directly from racist regimes, such as Apartheid or the Jim Crow era, are attitudes of multiculturalism. He credits the development of multiculturalism as an ideological compensation for racial oppression, as it is commonly thought that acknowledging racial and cultural difference on the basis of being equal may make up for historical racial inequality (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 95). For Goldberg, multiculturalism declines within society as it becomes increasingly distinguished by 'post-racial' moments, such as with the disbandment of racist legislation (Goldberg, 1993: 7). In South Africa, the abolishment of the Group Areas Act offers an example of this, as many assumed that with the removal of segregationist legislation, South Africa is now open to people of all races and further consideration need not be taken regarding racial segregation- with class being noted as the only determinant factor (Crankshaw, 2003: 120). This is important to note as he identifies a duality in this dedication to non-racialism, in covert defence of privilege and in aspiration of a future not defined by racial distinction (Goldberg, 2015: 35-36).

It is important to consider that Goldberg's application of post-racialism is one of the few to be extend to the context of South Africa. In his understanding, South Africa presents one of the most paradoxical examples of post-racial conditions in that while race has impacted social conditions to an extent not seen anywhere else, there remains one of the largest disparities in engagement of the nature of race itself (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 73). He expands on this in explaining that while race is a dominant feature of South African discourse, the discussion has largely focused on the interrogation of the legislative aspects of Apartheid, with there being a distinct silence regarding race as a social condition with practical implications (Goldberg, 2015: 32-33). He notes that while there has been considerable recognition and epistemic production regarding the structural aspects of Apartheid, there is an absence of thought

regarding how it continues in socio-cultural manifestations (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 73-74). Goldberg (2002: 422-425) looks to race as a systemic issue rather than idea or set of words, bound by its own set of logic. In his understanding, in liberal modernity's effort to move beyond racism, it has reproduced itself as a systemic issue, adapting to a context that no longer accepts overt and direct manifestations of racism (Goldberg, 2015: 107-112). He further theorises that in this adaptation, post-racialism has emerged as a new modality of racism, using colourblindness as means to reconceptualise racism so as to avoid any interrogation and challenge within contemporary society (Goldberg's 2015: 80-82).

### **2.3 A South African Post-Racial Perspective**

Chapter Two has detailed thus far key consecutive shifts in dominant expressions of what racism is over time, across societies and the correspondent development of race theories to explain these shifts. Early modernity was distinguished by biological essentialism that divided people into racial categories using pseudo-scientific constructions of biological superiority (Lentin, 2007: 27). The post-Second World War era witnessed a shift toward racial constructivism, wherein racial inequality was explained and/or justified by cultural, symbolic reasoning (Bonilla *et al*, 2004: 560). In the current society, post-racial theory contends that dominant white groups absolve themselves of racial privilege and responsibility through denying the importance of race by pointing out achievements of anti-discriminatory efforts (Lentin, 2011: 160). However, Cho (2009: 1612) argues that “formal discrimination's elimination failed to address the synergy between law and society that helped accumulate and compound centuries of white power and privilege using neutral means”. This claim suggests that the structure of racism has remained the same in that society is still socially, economically and spatially configured to privilege white groups at the expense of black groups (Bonnette *et al*, 2012: 73).

Post-racial theorists such as Lentin (2000: 92) argue that the aforementioned theories of racism do not represent entirely new schools of thought, but rather represent the adaptations of racist discourse in reconciling racist power structures with the changing times. To simply state what this entails, blaming racial inequality on biological inferiority pre-World War Two, and blaming it on black laziness post-World War Two, do not represent radical differences in racist thought (Essed and Goldberg, 2002: 377). The purpose of these sentiments remains the same:

the justification of racial inequality. What has changed between these statements is the conceptualisation of racist justification.

One of the key differences which separate one phase of race theory from another are the changes in language and accompanying discourse for explaining the problem of race. In this regard, transitions to liberal democracy, for instance in post-Apartheid South Africa, have evoked new modes of rationalising unequal racial structures. In the form of ‘colourblindness’ we have called new modes of race rationalisation, ‘post-racist’. (Cho, 2009: 1599). Walker (2003: 130) proposes that rationalisations of race change with the reconceptualization of identities in new contexts, saying “racism and its dimensions of power continues in both old and newer guises, shaping who young South Africans take themselves to be, such that for some reminders of the past are uncomfortable for their new South African identities”. This importantly notes that, while the nature of racism remains the same, how racism is articulated and expressed shifts over time in changing senses of identity and context (Vickerman, 2013 15-17). In this regard, racism, like a virus, may change forms and strain while remaining integrally the same (Lentin, 2007: 9). Post-racial theory, in this sense, is aimed at capturing the adaptation of racism to contemporary society and, like diagnosing a virus, this is a process which must consider the unique characteristics of each “host” society in which post-racist phenomena occur (Bonnette *et al*, 2012: 74).

In understanding the re-articulation of racial meaning in contemporary South Africa, it is important to consider that South Africa, through globalisation, is now influenced by the race rationalisations of international communities (Dolamo, 2017: 3). In this sense, modern South Africa is not only shaped by its own history, but is shaped by international history through globalisation. Through platforms such as social media, South Africans are able to witness both local victories against racial inequality, such as the transition from Apartheid, as well as international victories, such as the election of America’s first black president, Barrack Obama (Anciano, 2014: 36). As a result, there are numerous local and global moments that advocates of colourblindness may define as transcending racism (Cho, 2009: 1593). Goldberg (2015: 55) notes that as there have been multiple ‘post-racial moments’ witnessed by South Africans where racist barriers have seemingly been lifted, there is an uncertainty as how to reconcile these victories of racial equality with racialised inequalities that continue to exist in contemporary society. In this lack of certainty as to what racism means in the current South African setting, Mangcu (2017: 241) argues that racism has been reconceptualised in a modality of subtle and colourblind racism.

Case studies of social media, however, may assist in contextualising the continuing forms of racism (McClintock, 1992: 87-88). The purpose of studying South African post-racial currents in the context of social media is to find a means to articulate the ways in which everyday narratives liberalise, deny and exclude the critical consideration of racism in contemporary South Africa (Goldberg, 2015: 55). Among these avenues of potential exploration, social media offers as a hotbed of conceptual possibility in the identification and contestation of South African post-racial colourblindness. However, in using this platform to explore markers of post-racial colourblindness, it must first be established why social media may occupy this role, specifically within the South African context.

## **2.4 Social Media as a Site of Post-Racial Exploration**

In the 1990's, at the infancy of the internet, many scholars speculated on the unifying power of a digital platform for transcending race, gender and nationality (Daniels, 2012: 695). The internet was imagined to represent a post-racial haven, operating as an escape from the contestations of race in the real world (Daniels, 2012: 696). Decades later, the internet has seen extraordinary development, growing at unprecedented rates- and extending from something constructed for and by a select few to extending its reach throughout the world and across classes (Johnson, 1997: 61). While many speculated that social media could mitigate racial tensions by way of its anonymity and horizontal power structures, the social dynamics of these networks have remained strikingly similar to the offline world (Djuric et al, 2015: 1).

### **2.4.1 Types of Online Racism**

Despite community guidelines and regulations platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have allowed for somewhat unrestricted freedom of speech as these platforms are too large and diverse to be completely controlled (Kwok and Wang, 2013: 1621). Awan (2014: 139) has identified 'types' of offenders in cases of online hate crime. He identifies types such as: "trawlers" that visit the online profiles of others to post defamatory statements; "reactives" that follow particular social events such as political debates on immigration and maliciously respond to posts related to posts regarding these debates; and "professionals" that have a large social media following and attack, through prejudicial posts, marginalised groups (Awan, 2014: 143). This illustrates that there are various ways in which online hate crime may be

expressed (Lim, 2013: 650-652). While Awan (2014) focuses on the individual, Kwok and Wang (2013: 1621) illustrate a group aspect to online hate crime. They highlight the ‘sharing’, ‘liking’ and ‘favouriting’ functions of online media which allow individuals to affirm racist posts without penning them, themselves. They use the example of a tweet stating “So an 11 year old nigger girl killed herself over my tweets? ^\_^ that’s another nigger off the streets!!”- which was retweeted a staggering seventy-seven times with seventeen favourites and almost fifteen thousand people choosing to ‘follow’ this racist twitter account online. What is illustrated in this example is that social media users are able to support and perpetuate racism from a safe distance created by sharing, liking and favouriting functions (Hughey and Daniels, 2013: 336). This example further illustrates the extensiveness of online racism, in terms of the wide audience that it reaches and the various means through which it may be reproduced (Kwok and Wang, 2013: 1622).

Social media environments face many regulatory problems, but not always for lack of trying. Many social media platforms have focused their efforts towards controlling the issue of hate speech through removing hateful comments, having users report discrimination (Dekay, 2012: 294-295). This has seen the aid of research tools that attempt to flag hate speech through the use of algorithms (Djuric *et al*, 2015: 1). However, these algorithms are limited to overt expressions of hate speech, as they are incapable of interpreting covert forms of racism (Johnson, 1997: 62). Kwok and Wang (2013: 1622) note that, despite the presence of algorithms to prohibit online racism, the nature of colourblind language still allows prejudice to be expressed covertly. Hughey and Daniels (2013: 336) offer an illustration of an actual online comment which is covertly Islamophobic: “Please explain to me just one more time why we must value diversity, sensitivity and political correctness more than National Security, The ‘religion of peace’ is at it again!” (Hughey and Daniels 2013: 337). This sentiment disguises its racism through the writer positioning themselves as the victim, rather than openly expressing a bigoted dislike for increasing racial diversity. Poynting and Noble (2003: 41) refer to this post-racial language as ‘dog-whistling’ in describing it “as a shrill signal which cannot be heard by people, but is received loudly and clearly by the canine ears for which it is meant”. What is illustrated by the use of ‘dog-whistles’ provide a coded expression of racism, with its meaning being disguised by colourblind language.

#### **2.4.2 Online Coded Language**

While scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2004: 559-561) recognise that post-racial narratives are dominantly expressed in a coded language of colourblindness, other scholars have observed social media as a space in which colourblind racism may be ‘decoded’ and explored. Poynting and Noble (2003: 41) note that while there is a difficulty in identifying the racism within coded ‘dog-whistles’, social media offers a platform from which colourblind language may be interrogated through a higher level of scrutiny. Social media is unique as a site of interrogation of post-racial narratives as present’s statements that are both documented and may be related to the online context from which they are posted (Conover *et al*, 2011: 93).

The reason that social media presents discriminatory ideology such as racism in overt, covert, intentional and subliminal methods of expression is simply because that it is how it exists in the world offline (Cleland, 2014: 416-417). Racism exists as a present feature of social media as a projection of social media users (Hughey and Daniels, 2013: 333). Online social networks offer a platform of global connectivity, news and information to be tailored to the preferences of the individual user (Bakshy *et al*, 2015: 1130). For Conover *et al* (2011: 89), these preferences are informed by the daily identities of the individual social media user with the purpose of making their online experience as familiar to them as their offline reality. The result of this being the creation of an online ‘echo chamber’, wherein the extent of social media engagement is largely limited to like-minded individuals and outlets for many social media users (Bakshy *et al*, 2015: 1130). It logically follows from this that the racial norms and inequalities of the offline world are often projected online as expressed through posts, comments, retweets or shares, subscriptions to certain pages and so on (Daniels, 2012: 698). Gallagher (2003: 24) notes that social media platforms such as Facebook, promote this projection of real-world norms and identity politics through the use of algorithms which select content based upon user behaviour. Bakshy *et al* (2015: 1130-1131) has found that user projections of identities and preferences, as well as its promotion by social media sites, create ‘filter bubbles’ that are largely devoid of attitude-challenging content and instead affirm user views and opinions.

In the modern day and age, Picca and Feagin (2007: 92-93) believe that colourblind attitudes signify both a shift in the most common expression of racism and a shift in the location of racism. What is meant by this claim is that racist expression is now most commonly seen within subtle and coded language than the direct and hateful prejudice that was common place in times of overt, essentialised and institutionalised racism (Hughey, 2011: 132-133). Hughey and Daniels (2013: 336) note that in day to day interactions, people commonly present

colourblindness as the ‘frontstage’, while racist opinions are shifted to the ‘backstage’ of their private opinions. However, this distinction does not necessarily apply to social media.

According to Anderson (2006: 141-145), social media entails an intimate discursive interaction with an imagined online community. Hughey and Daniels (2013: 336) believe this to present an intersection between the frontstage and backstage of racist expression as the filter and preference bubbles of social media offer users the notion of engagement from the backstage while their activity largely remains on the frontstage with all to read. In examining among the more notorious South African cases of online racism as seen with Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen, this perspectives offers an insight as to why these individuals may have made these infamous comments. Unlike in cases of overt and direct hate crime, these three people each respectively held no intention of coming across as being racist, and have accordingly defended against accusations of racism raised against them. It is on this basis that social media may offer a new avenue for the exploration of racism couched within post-racial attitudes.

## **2.5 Cases of Online Racism in the “Rainbow Nation”**

From the point of the first democratic election in 1994, South Africa has been tasked with the monumental challenge and opportunity of departing from the institutionalised oppression of the Apartheid regime and reconceptualising the landscape of the country and the identity of its people (Barnett, 1999: 274). For the African National Congress, the means to achieving this, in part, was an ethos of non-racialism as a Constitutional principle for newly democratic South Africa (Leftko-Everett, 2012: 127-128). Symbolising humanitarianism, non-racialism had for much of the party’s history served as a guiding principle and became a central feature of the party after being adopted by its 1955 Freedom Charter (Sikhosana, 2017: 30). Non-racialism, in the transition from Apartheid to democracy, was an ideal held not only by the African National Congress but bound its alliance members in what was termed as an ‘unbreakable thread’ (Anciano, 2014: 36). Archbishop Desmond Tutu characterised this moment in speaking of South Africans as the ‘rainbow children of God’, in suggesting that South Africans, having broken free from the oppression of Apartheid segregation, were now able to co-exist (Gqolo, 2001: 98).

The spirit of ‘non-racialism’ was enshrined in the idea of the ‘rainbow nation’, a term now synonymous with the early post-apartheid South Africa (Baines, 1998: 3-5). In a moment

distinguished by an uncertainty as to how to progress from the oppression of the Apartheid regime and where there existed no clear path as to how to reconstruct South African national identity, Rainbowism was thrust into the mainstream of public discourse by the South African government as a motif for the newly democratic South African identity (Gqolo, 2001: 99). For Everatt (2012: 5), this ideal was fundamentally flawed in its acknowledgement of racial diversity on one hand but its silence towards the implication of racism on the other. It set all South Africans as being equal in democracy. Gqola (2001: 100) points out that this idea of equality dangerously assumed that all members of this rainbow have equal access to South Africa's resources and wealth, failing to acknowledge how South Africa has historically been structured around racial exploitation and that Apartheid's structural legacy remains entrenched. Gqola (2001: 103) argues that Rainbowism, in its dedication to reconciliation, dismissed the 'effects of history on the contemporary' in refusing to acknowledge that racism has had structural implications that benefits white groups at the expense of black groups. For Gqola (2001: 95), race as an expression of an adaptive system of power and privilege was downplayed and critical engagement with the changing concept of race deflected.

By the early 2000's, the concept of the Rainbow nation incited frustration among black South Africans, as the aspirational assumption that the end of Apartheid signified the end of racialised oppression was directly undermined by the distinct lack of social, economic and spatial change with the new democracy (Everatt, 2012: 6-7). Where legislation such as the Black Economic Empowerment as well as the Reconstruction and Development Program made attempts to address the racialised economic inequalities of Apartheid, many white South Africans resented these initiatives as being in contravention with South African constitutional values of non-racialism (Whitehead, 2012: 1258-1259). This resentment is important to consider as white South Africans have been historically empowered as the beneficiaries of exploitative racial stratification (Everatt, 2012: 6-7). While it is a 'black' government that has been empowered by South African democracy, it is still white South Africans that benefit largely from the social, economic and spatial structures that have historically been created with the intention of privileging them at the expense of black groups (Gqola, 2001: 100-103).

For Walker (2005:136) the motif of 'Rainbowism' served to perpetuate what she refers to as 'default racism', a term that she uses to describe the lack of recognition of racial power and privilege in the assumption that all racial groups exist equally- an idea that denies the existence of structural racial inequality. While 'Rainbowism' has waned as a public symbol since 1994, it retains the authoritative character of being an initial emblem for the new South Africa



(Anciano, 2014: 41). Gqola (2001: 99) describes Rainbowism as having rendered race as a fixed identity, creating a mandated silence around the meaning of race and the structures that it remains prevalent within. For post-racial theorists such as Walker (2005: 132-134) and Goldberg (2015: 85-86), this silence is actively maintained as a justificatory framework for explaining inequality, and is most commonly manifested through attitudes of liberalism, denial and exclusion.

For Goldberg (1993: 7-8), colourblind perceptions suggest racism as having ended as a systemic societal condition with the end of legislated racism, continuing only as a liberalised and singular phenomenon. Goldberg (2015: 27-31) identifies liberalism as a key post-racial narrative that minimises racism through defining racism as exclusively individually-enacted hateful prejudice, ignoring how it further exists in racial structures of power and privilege. For Apfelbaum and Sommers (2008: 918-919), the reduction of modern racism to an individual phenomena, provides an incentive for people to assume colourblindness so as to easily deny accusations of racism. It is here that individuals may publicly express colourblindness, within a 'frontstage', where they may otherwise be acutely aware of race within the 'backstage' of their inner thoughts (Bonilla-Silva *et al*, 2004: 559).

McKaiser (2015: 88-90) notes that in a society such as South Africa, where the interrogation of race is largely reduced to individual expressions of hateful prejudice, post-racial denial serves to stifle conversations of racial power differentials and covert prejudices. While scholars such as Sullivan and Tuana (2007: 39) identify racism as a contemporary societal condition, the narrative of post-racial denial serves to disown the collective responsibility of racism, and instead deflects responsibility exclusively to the overt expressions of hateful racism. The reduction of contemporary racism to individual expressions of prejudice, and the ability to deny the interrogation of racism beyond this narrow definition, provides the basis for post-racial exclusion (Walker, 2005: 132). For Goldberg (1993: 229), post-racial liberalism and denial provide historically empowered white groups with the ability to define the scope and meaning of racism- which commonly results in racism being framed as an expression of hate and not a system of power.

Walker (2005: 134) proposes that the aim of post-racial attitudes is not to change things within society, but is instead to maintain the status quo. In a society such as South Africa, centuries of colonialism and Apartheid have structured the functioning of society around white people at the direct expense of black South Africans (Habib, 1997: 23). Gqola (2005: 95) contends

that these power structures, embedded within the very functioning of South African society are maintained through the exclusion of black, coloured and Indian people from identifying and contesting these structures in liberal democracy. Post-racial narratives present a modality of racism that aims to create a silence around its very own existence within society (Goldberg, 1993: 224-225). It is useful, in light of this, to develop the understanding of post-racial narratives through examples of how these narratives may operate within society- such as with social media.

## **2.6 Post-Racial Liberalism**

Leftko-Everatt (2012: 14-21) describes the feature of liberalism in post-racial racism as the exclusive attribution of only individual accountability (as opposed to collective accountability) in acts of racism. Gqola (2001: 100-103) argues that post-racial liberalism is exemplified by government mandated labels such as ‘previously disadvantaged’ that insinuate that the disempowerment and oppression of black South Africans is not an active process. Such post racial terminology masks the vast reproduction of structural inequalities disproportionately affecting black communities in modern day South Africa. The fear in this, for scholars such as Gqola (2001: 103), is that if performed frequently enough, post-racial liberalism assumes the status of fact and is held as truth.

### ***Helen Zille***

Democratic Alliance politician and premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, has exemplified the issue of post-racial liberalism within a series of tweets praising colonialism (Mirzoef, 2017: 18). Among these tweets were claims such as:

“What a revelation Singapore has been. I can see why it prospers. Ppl (sic) understand the past but work in the present and plan for the future”, followed by “Would we have had a transition into specialised health care and medication without colonial influence? Just be honest, please.” And “For those claiming legacy of colonialism was ONLY negative, think of our independent judiciary, transport infrastructure, piped water” (Corcoran, 2017).

She later addressed these tweets, claiming to not be racist and rather served to acknowledge the success of Singapore in ‘repurposing’ its colonial legacy for modern development (Corcoran, 2017). Other tweets occurred in response to twitter users, with one user (in reference to a Cape Town drought) stating that:

“I really fail to understand why this WC #DayZero is so attracting such attention where even Army is coming to de rescue. We grew up and still living in #Day Zero, when will government and Army come and rescue us (*sic*)” (Pettersson, 2018: 49).

In response to this, Zille responded that:

“It must be a relief that you weren’t burdened by the legacy of a colonial water piping system” (Pathie and Ritchie, 2018).

Federal Executive chairperson of the Democratic Alliance, James Selfe distanced the party from Zille’s controversial tweets by stating that her comments were made in a personal capacity and were not representative of the Democratic Alliances views as a political party (Daniels, 2018). As an example of South African post-racial liberalism, the Zille case offers a dual application. The concept of post-racial liberalism applied in this research is evident in Zille’s acknowledgement of the structural impact of Apartheid and assumption that South African democracy has afforded us the opportunity to ‘repurpose’ colonial infrastructure. For Dolamo (2017: 3), there is an implicit assumption in this case that colonialism has been brought to an end and that all South Africans are to some extent equal. This is further seen in her assertion that black South Africans should be grateful for colonial water piping systems. In saying this, Zille conveys the idea of that all South Africans now benefit from a system that was structured so as to be racially oppressive, denying the skewed racist distribution of colonialisms spoils still evident today (Mirzoef, 2017: 18). Important to this case is not only what has been said by Zille, but how it has been reported and responded to.

For many, this case represents an infringement of the constitutional rights to freedom of speech, rather than an issue of race, in that these statements are simply the idea of an individual (Löwstedt and Mboti, 2017: 112). What is commonly and exclusively problematised within this case is that the statements made by Zille are offensive (Dolamo, 2017: 3). Even in Newspaper articles such as “Helen Zille on colonialism: 12 Tweets and a chat vs scholarship”, it is argued that Zille should not be weighing in on the issues of history as she lacks the academic rigour to critically engage with the issue as a scholar would (ENCA, 2018). However, as stated, Helen Zille is a notable politician and occupies the role of Premier of the Western

Cape. In the aforementioned tweets, Zille has further doubled down on her beliefs regarding the positive aspects of colonialism. For Shangase (2017: 3-4), it should not be any stretch of the imagination to believe that she carried these opinions with her into this political role, as her political opinions are applied from her personal perspective. While she may not be an academic, her understandings of the world extend much further than merely individual opinion and inevitably form the guiding principles of her governance. The distinct danger in this situation is not the idea of people's feelings being hurt by the views of Helen Zille, the individual. The danger is in how she may have manifested these views into political and legislative realities (Mirzoef, 2017: 18-19). The absence of thought considering the relationship between Zille's tweets and her political power illustrates the danger of South African post-racial liberalism in as much as the actual tweets. It is in this that the insidious nature of post-racial liberalism resides, in the assumption of individual responsibility, racism is removed from its historical and present structural implications.

## **2.7 Post-Racial Denial**

In describing post-racial denial, Everatt (2012: 6) proposes that South African democracy has served to 'democratise racism' in presenting racism as something experienced by all South Africans. However, while the Apartheid regime oppressed all South Africans, it did so through a racial and gender stratification that impacted black South Africans disproportionately (Crankshaw, 2003: 10-15). In liberal democracies, the reality that Apartheid was enacted to benefit whiteness is easily overlooked by many white South Africans who identify the racism of Apartheid as an equal and common enemy (McKaiser, 2015: 45). This 'equalising' consciousness around the oppression of the past easily reduces interpretations of Apartheid history to the hateful prejudice of individuals- such as Hendrik Verwoerd, as the singular imposers of racism (Mangu, 2017: 243-244). Limiting racism to the actions of such individuals sets the basis for the post-racial denial of racism as a systemic issue and further denies the collective responsibility of white groups for how they have been privileged and empowered by racism.

David Everatt (2012: 16) has found among South Africans of colour that the limitation of racism to individual action creates a sense of alienation, as their experiences of racism as a systemic issue is silenced by constitutional non-racialism. The common sentiment in these groups was a lack of certainty as to how to engage with race and racism, as there exists a

paradox in a reality bound by race alongside national ideals of non-racialism. Whitehead (2012: 1261-1262) makes the point that this paradox promotes the use of a common sense understanding of racism, which refers to the structural impacts of Apartheid and dissuades from current (re-)articulations of racism. This serves as an important example of how colourblind and post-racial ideology converge in contemporary South Africa. While it has been previously mentioned that colourblindness has been co-opted in the United States as a conservative rhetoric, it manifests in South Africa as a liberal ideal. South African post-racial denial relies on the presence of this colourblind ideal as it is on the basis of South African non-racialism that the meaning of race and racism may be reduced from regarding power to exclusively hateful prejudice- and it is in this limitation of racial meaning that racism may be denied (Anciano, 2014: 41)

### ***Penny Sparrow***

Few cases are as illustrative of the aspect of ‘post racial denial’ as that of Penny Sparrow. This case refers to a single Facebook post made by Kwa-Zulu Natal realtor, Penny Sparrow (Le Roux, 2016). In this Facebook post, Sparrow complains about the presence of:

“These monkeys that are allowed to be released on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s day on to public beach towns”

This was said in reference to black South Africans flocking to her local Scottsburgh beach on the national holiday (Löwstedt and Mboti, 2017: 113). The problem with “these monkeys” for Sparrow was that they:

“Obviously have no education what so ever (*sic*) so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others” (Good Governance Learning Network, 2016: 85).

In clarifying what was meant by ‘monkeys’, Sparrow set out that:

“I’m sorry to say I was amongst the revellers and all I saw were black on black skins what a shame” (Löwstedt and Mboti, 2017: 114).

Sparrow continued the post making a distinction in saying that:

“I do know some wonderful thoughtful black people. This lot of monkeys just don’t want to even try. But think that they can voice their opinions about statute and get their

way dear oh dear . from now I (*sic*). Shall address the blacks of South Africa as monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same pick drop and litter” (Wicks, 2016).

This Facebook post went viral and was met with public outcry. Amidst the backlash Sparrow offered a post apologising, saying:

“I’m sorry if you have taken it personally. It’s not meant to be a personal thing. If you would have read it properly you would see that I am not Racial (*sic*), in fact I help underprivileged people of all races . please (*sic*) accept my apology as I certainly didn’t mean to anger you.” (Evans, 2016).

Despite this retraction, Sparrow’s case prompted the African National Congress to bring the matter to the Magistrates Court (Wicks, 2017). This was on the basis of *Crimen Injuria* (infringing on the dignity of another) and resulted in a guilty plea for Sparrow and R5000 fine in the avoidance of jail time (Marais, 2017: 26). Sparrow was further fined R150 000 under the Equality Court for the post (Marais, 2017: 30). In an interview reflecting on the event, Sparrow set out that she was sorry that this story had gone viral, and that it was a mistake comparing “them” to monkeys as while she views monkeys as cute and naughty, “they” did not see it that way (Wicks, 2016). Certainly proving to be the case, the African National Congress Youth League rejected her punishment as insufficient considering her crime, contending instead for the 70 year olds imprisonment (Wicks, 2017).

It is evident that in Penny Sparrow’s denial of racism, there is a denial of hateful intent. This is visible in her distinction of “wonderful thoughtful black people”, that is, the “underprivileged people” that she assists and in her comparison with other black people to animals, emphasising her own stance as one of endearment rather than prejudice. Bonilla-Silva (2004: 559) identifies this as a trait of racial denial, as it concerns the misdirection of claims of racism on the basis of disputing intent of the claims. However, in Penny Sparrow’s denial of racism, the comparison of black people to monkeys extends much further than any superficial claims of endearment that she could make.

The animalisation of black people is not unique to the case of Penny Sparrow but has, instead, featured historically as comparison that dehumanises black people (Goldberg, 2009: 168). This concept reinforces notions of white supremacy in asserting that black people are closer biologically to monkeys than to white people (Mitchell, 2012: 20). This process of animalisation has worked consistently with biological essentialism, where black people are

regarded as phenotypically inferior to white people (Fanon, 2008: 133-134). Goldberg (2015: 55) suggests that in ‘post-racial’ societies such as South Africa, the act of animalisation serves the purpose of projecting the racial imagery historically associated with black inferiority while erasing racial reference (Goldberg, 2015: 55). While the animalisation of black people has been shown to be a colourblind narrative that is not particularly successful as a method of denial, it is important to consider the way in which Sparrow used this as an addition to the central claim of no hateful intent. In the denial of racism, claiming no ill intent incurs the characterisation of racism as exclusively being something that is intentional, ushering in the argument that her statement cannot be racist as it had no intention of being so (Sullivan, 2014: 25). It is in this sense that post-racial denial is its most powerful. In this, allegations of racism are asked to corroborate the claim with the identification of racist language and where colourblind language may hide racist ideology, racism is denied (McKaiser, 2015: 88). It is on this basis that post-racial denial maintains racial power to the exclusion of black people.

## **2.8 Post-Racial Exclusion**

In the editorial of *Racism and Sociology*, Hund and Lentin (2014: 7-8) offer the imagery of a conversation between Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and William Du Bois. In this imagined conversation, Du Bois features as an outsider to the discussion (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 9). This position as the unequal observer does not insinuate any intellectual inadequacy of Du Bois in comparison to Weber and Durkheim, nor does it speak to any hateful prejudice in the theory and practice of the latter theorists. Rather, this imagined conversation realises the exclusion experienced by black academics in social science disciplines (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 18). This certainly speaks to the reality faced by William Du Bois as his innovations in the sociological field have largely been overlooked in the canon of the discipline (Cho, 2009: 1628). Patricia Hill-Collins (1986: 514) referred to the status of black intellectuals in white institutional spaces as that of “outsiders-within”. Hill-Collins (1986: 515) like du Bois (2015: 75-79) sees intellectuals of colour as occupying epistemically significant standpoints, on the margins where they share “a comparable collective social location” giving ‘outsiders-within’ a unique view of the centres of cultural and institutional power. For Magubane (1996), the marginalisation and unique collective vantage of black academics is indeed true for South Africa. In contemplating the issue of epistemic exclusion, Medina (2013: xi) proposes that this issue occurs in the ‘pre-emptive silencing’ of the Other where marginalised subjects are, being excluded from

communicative interactions, and ‘epistemic objectification’ in which participation occurs through the excluded persons knowledge being mediated by the empowered group (Medina, 2013: 92-93).

To understand the power of the post-racial framework is to understand its power to detect forces of racism which extends beyond hateful prejudice and instead manifests subtle, innocuous anti-black through exclusions (Goldberg, 1993: 95). As a result, the post-racial analytical framework can also incorporate the pressing critique of epistemic inequalities and decolonisation of knowledge. Critical disciplines such as Sociology conventionally marginalise black-African theory as a point of convention and canonical purity, perpetuating racial exclusion as a matter of course, and not direct prejudice (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 7-10).

Exclusion operates in the expression of colourblind attitudes where those racially privileged, many of which claim to be concerned with racial issues, exclude voices of ‘the Other’ by using their position of historical power in “pathologising and individualising” epistemological understandings of racism (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 71). It is important to understand exclusion as being applied to epistemology, as the means through which we produce knowledge dictates our ability to recognise and vocalise the ills of society. This is illustrated by McKaiser (2015: 111) in his identification of white South African liberals that are embarrassed by the ‘real’, overt racists while actively defending the material and symbolic privileges of whiteness. In this, he cites a 2015 interview with Max Du Preez where Du Preez (in a single sitting): criticised ‘real’ racists; denounced the material implications of Apartheid and the idea of white privilege; as well as made the claim that what makes South Africa superior to the rest of Africa is its white population (McKaiser, 2015: 115-118). In this there is a concerning contradiction of racial progressiveness and ideals of paternalistic racial superiority. However, what seems to be absent from the sentiments of Max Du Preez is hateful prejudice. More than anything, his statements reflect ideals of optimistic colourblindness, and it is only through critical examination that these statements may be problematised in its defence of privilege. Matthews (2012: 173) observes that while much South African anti-racist efforts are aimed at addressing ideologies of overt white supremacy, this may not be adequate in addressing the issue of symbolic and material privilege in our modern democracy. This is an important consideration in the discussion of post-racial exclusion as exclusion does not pertain to radical efforts of white supremacy, but rather pertains to the maintenance of historically established white spaces (Hund and Lentin, 2014: 10). These white spaces hold the epistemological power of defining



race in society, marginalising black groups in these definitions and undermining the scope and impact of racism in a modern society (Rabaka, 2010: 145-152)

### ***Mabel Jansen***

In 2016, former judge, Mabel Jansen took to Facebook to make a series of comments on a public discussion regarding white South Africans demanding that the European Union repatriate them back to Europe (Noyoo, 2018: 5). In these comments Jansen reflects on her legal work in saying that 99% of her criminal cases concerned:

“black fathers/uncles/brothers raping children as young as five” (Mail & Guardian, 2018).

Adding to this that her case files dominantly featured:

“rape, rape, rape, rape, rape, rape of minors by black family members. It is never-ending.” (Mail & Guardian, 2017).

She later communicated with Gillian Schutte privately over Facebook on the matter, explaining that:

“In their culture a woman is just there to pleasure them. Period. It is seen as an absolute right and a women’s consent is not required. You may find this hard to accept and unpalatable as I did. I still have to meet a black girl who was not raped at about twelve years old. I am dead serious.” (Good Governance Learning Network, 2016: 85).

This claim was presupposed with her own experience of being propositioned by black colleagues (Marais, 2017: 29). Expanding on this justification, Jansen continues that:

“Mothers are so brainwashed that they tell fathers that it is their birth right to be the first. I must hand you- 10, 20, 30, 40 files and you will adopt a completely different attitude. White people have a lot to account for. But this? I feel like vomiting...So no- the black people are by far no angels. Their conduct is despicable” (Mail & Guardian, 2017).

Upon the publication of these comments to the Facebook page, and the release of the private discussions between Jansen and Schutte the matter went viral- resulting in the judge being placed on special leave in 2016 (Noyoo, 2018: 5). Jansen (2016) has stated that her intention

was for these messages to remain confidential, and came from a place of activism and camaraderie, with the ‘real issue’ of protecting vulnerable women and children (Marais, 2017: 30). In light of this event, the Judicial Service Committee began to establish a judicial conduct tribunal to decide if the comments made by Jansen warrant her impeachment (Mail & Guardian, 2018). However, Jansen resigned with immediate effect to the approval of then President Jacob Zuma and Justice Minister Michael Masutha, nullifying the judicial tribunal (Noyoo, 2018: 5). This is illustrative of social media’s unique position, as a site for exploring the allegedly racist ‘backstage’ of Jansen’s thought’s against the ‘frontstage’ of her liberal public reasoning (Hughey and Daniels, 2013: 336).

Each case study has presented narratives of colourblindness that portray ideals of good will and intention. Helen Zille made her statements in her hopes of South African development. Penny Sparrow made her comparison of black people to monkeys out to seem as if out of endearment. While the insidious nature of these two sentiments has been easily identified in those respective cases, the study of Mabel Jansen is one that is far more polarizing. Sexual violence is one of the primary societal ills faced in current South Africa. Masana Ndinga-Kanaga (Mail & Guardian Thought Leader, 2016), in addressing Jansen’s comments as well as its support, aptly identifies this issue as one of racial exclusion. Ndinga-Kanaga sets out that in making these comments, Jansen effectively pathologizes all black South Africans as well as silences both black and non-black survivors of sexual violence (Mail & Guardian Thought Leader, 2016). Jansen as guardian of the constitution damningly expresses her deeply held belief that black communities possess inherently inferior traits to white communities, embedded essentially in their respective race identities. It is not ‘men’ in general that are identified as perpetuating rape culture, but specifically black men. She ‘softens’ the blow of her racist opinions by offering a concession that white people have much to “account for”, giving herself permission to then charge all black society as “despicable”.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The markers of liberalism, denial and exclusion have been identified as indicators of post-racial colourblindness. The three case studies illustrate that each marker of post-racial racism presents its own distinct danger but are also intertwined in practice and theory. South Africa has made monumental achievements in the effort towards racial inequality, but it remains crucial that we continue the interrogation of how race and racism continues to evolve within and impact upon

our society. In this, there is a very real need to identify veiled maintenance of racial power. The goal, in identifying these narratives of colourblindness and using platforms such as social media to contest them, is to address mechanisms of distortion and silencing around white supremacy. It is only through recognising this form of racism for what it is that we may be able to critically engage with race and racism in society, and it is to this goal that the South African post-racial perspective is dedicated towards.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

As previously set out, data has been collected in this research through the use of in-depth interviews as well as user-generated Facebook comments regarding the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen. A central finding from interviews conducted is that individual interpretations of race varied among participants. The research found that shifts in race theory are reflected in changing understandings of race in South Africa. Affirmations from respondents about the presence of colourblind racism and its tenets of liberalism and denialism confirmed post-racialism as an emergent modality of racism and emphasised the need to expand the scope of racism's definition.

The first half of this chapter will analyse the testimonies of participant's racial experience. The analyses process will follow a thematic approach under the following emergent themes:

#### 3.1 Perspectives on the meaning of Race

##### 3.1.1 Biological Essentialist Understandings

##### 3.1.2 Racial Constructivist Understandings

##### 3.1.3 Critical Race Understandings

#### 3.2 The Rise, Decline and Remnants of Post-Racial Rainbowism in South Africa

#### 3.3 Post-Racialism and the Rainbow Nation

#### 3.4 Social Media as a Site of Post-Racial Politics

The second half of this chapter will analyse the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen and the Facebook comments posted to articles relating to the cases. This will be conducted through a narrative analysis of the dominant storylines that emerge from these comments. The narrative analysis will follow the format of:

##### 3.5 Facebook News Outlets

##### 3.6 The Dominant Storylines of South African Post-Racialism

- 3.6.1 Was it Actually Racist?
- 3.6.2 Black People are Actually the Racists
- 3.6.3 Not All White People
- 3.6.4 The Past is the Past
- 3.7 Penny Sparrow
  - 3.7.1 Facebook Comments
  - 3.7.2 Participant Understandings
- 3.8 Helen Zille
  - 3.8.1 Facebook Comments
  - 3.8.2 Participant Understandings
- 3.9 Mabel Jansen
  - 3.9.1 Facebook Comments
  - 3.9.2 Participant Understandings

As per the ethical standards set out in Chapter One, no participant or Facebook user details will be disclosed in the analysis of data. Participant names will be replaced with pseudonyms. This will be illustrated by the use of an asterisk upon the first use of the pseudonym. Facebook user-comments will not be referenced by any user name, but will be referenced by the page on which they have posted comments of interests.

### **3.1 Participant perspectives on the Meaning of Race**

Everatt (2012: 7) has notes that from the early twenty-first century, that South Africa's democracy has been distinguished by non-racialism. For Mathews (2012: 171-172) the façade of non-racialism detracted and stalled in important ways the development of national discourse, definition and historicization of racial and ethnic identity and difference in the country after Apartheid. The unresolved race question, and the unfinished national confrontation with group definition, difference and power has partially contributed to a vast

spectrum of interpretations on what racial division today entails. This sense of multiplicity and unresolvedness was mirrored by research participants who expressed interesting and often contradictory variations and combinations of essentialism, constructivism and colourblindness in their personal definitions of race. While certain participants identified with one racial theory in particular, it is important to note that these analytical categories were found to overlap in complex and sometimes contradictory racial understandings.

### **3.1.1 Biological Essentialist Understandings**

Biological Essentialism has historically justified racism as part of the natural order through notions of white supremacy (Schraub, 2017: 610-612). It is an interesting finding of the research that an overtly prejudicial race theory (seen prominently from the nineteenth to early twentieth century) applies not only in the current context, but is today held by some individuals of colour. For participants such as Ismael\* (an Indian male), race exists as an unproblematic and objective reality, saying:

“We have black, white, coloured, Indian. I find that it’s just a term to define who you are, to categorise you. Not in a negative way, but you call a spade a spade. If you’re black, you’re black. If you’re white, you’re white. I don’t see it as a derogatory term.”

This statement is representative theoretically of biological essentialism in presenting race as static signifier of objectively “who you are”, rather than being a dynamic ideological construct. Odette\* similarly understands race as a uniform and essentialist feature of identity, describing racism as a lack of acceptance of fact, stating that:

“I think it’s (racism) negatively impacted our society because we haven’t gotten past the fact that there are people of different races.”

Within these respective sentiments, different fixed race groups are represented as a ‘given’ South African reality that is, in itself, unproblematic. While the transition into democracy entailed political change, scholars such as Mangcu (2017: 247) have argued that constitutionalised non-racialism has seen the cultural and economic legacies of Apartheid go unchallenged in democracy due to a lack of political leadership regarding racial issues. Mazibuko (2017: 438) argues that the democratic government has provided historically colonial white groups “power without responsibility while subjecting African people to exploitation with no redress”. The denial of systemic racial inequality tends to be the incipient

view of those who benefit from the legacy of Apartheid. This denial of inequality is often expressed, even among the youth, as the view that inequality is no more than a factual depiction of essential difference as displayed by the quotes above. The interviews showed how present and past ‘racisms’ fold together.

### **3.1.2 Racial Constructivist Understandings**

Students also emphasised constructivist understandings of race, by highlighting the social processes through which hatred and discrimination are bred. Students such as Sterling\* (a white male) identifies race as a tool constructed for the express purpose of domination during specific periods of white supremacy in the Jim Crow era and in Apartheid, saying:

“I think that race in general...it’s a superiority thing, like you have white supremacists, like the KKK (Ku Klux Klan), and that’s it. Historically it’s our checkered past with Apartheid. It’s a domination thing. And also, it was used to delegitimise specific groups of people to say that they’re inferior. And obviously, that was total hogwash, with all due respect. I think that race is a very divisive term and that we can actually just forget it now in our society and in history all together, it’s just bullshit to be honest (*sic*). We would be a lot better off if it was never introduced as a concept.”

The sentiment in this, is that race is an idea constructed by certain individuals, applied at a certain time which only exists in modern society because people choose to continue its ideology. Sterling, in making this statement, presents race as something that was previously a pertinent issue, but is needlessly divisive in contemporary society. Bonilla-Silva (2000: 52) makes the argument that post-racialism is a form of constructivism in proposing that it crucially recognises race as being ideological in order to dismiss it as a systemic and enduring factor of society. This is depicted in the above student’s view of racism as an individualistic belief that was applied by a singular hateful group, implicitly denying racism’s presence in the current setting. The work of Lentin (2014: 72) corroborates this interpretation of present-day constructivism by saying that in contemporary reductions of racism to hateful irrationality, race critical understandings are dismissed “knee-jerk” reactions.

### **3.1.3 Critical Race Understandings**

Critical understandings of race provide an understanding of racism as being embedded feature of both our socialisation as well as societal structures and, as a result, racism is thought to re-conceptualise itself alongside societal changes (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 22). For participants such as Maria\*, that subscribed to this sense of racial meaning, racism was something that will inevitably reproduce itself in South African liberal modernity:

“I think that racism as with anything over time it just changes and moulds to what's happening in society so it comes out differently so I don't think racism is declining in South Africa I just think that the expression of racism is different to how we saw it in the past.”

In understanding racism as a persistent systemic issue, participants such as Maria, Lauryn\*, Joe\*, Shanice\* and Karolina\* each drew an immediate correlation between race and racism. In their respective understandings, race has most consistently used in the consolidation of racial power, and is therefore inextricably linked ideologically to racism. These participants understood colonial racial subjugation as an issue that persists within South African liberal modernity through socio-economic, spatial and psychological structures of racial power. Each of the aforementioned participants were perceptive to post-racial narratives as a modality of racism that dismissed contemporary racial inequality. This was described by Maria in explaining that challenging racism in current South Africa faces arguments of denial and justification, with her identifying this as a modality of racism itself:

“No because they would be like "okay, okay Maria, we see you". Like we understand and whatever, but like not acknowledging it. Just to end the conversation. Or it would be turned into a thing of ‘ah, you and all your university ideas of liberal studying with the social sciences, that's not how the real world works’ kind of thing.”

What has been illustrated in the above statement is that, while the three aforementioned racial theories are afforded equal legitimacy in South African democracy, these racial theories present, particularly in relation to race critical understanding, opposing beliefs regarding the scope and impact of racism (Melber, 2017: 40-41). Maria noted the result of this to be that race critical interrogations of racial inequality are able to be silenced through the non-recognition of racial implication by constructivist and essentialist perceptions. Post-racialism is then able to emerge within the current South African context as constructivist and essentialist theories have been inadequately addressed within contemporary society. Underpinning South African



post-racialism is an ideology of Rainbowism, as it has seen non-racialism endorsed as the Constitutional understanding of contemporary racial dynamics (Walker, 2005: 134).

### **3.2 The Rise, Decline and Remnants of Post-Racial Rainbowism in South Africa**

Among the themes that emerged from the student interviews, the concept of Rainbowism persistently appeared within the racial constructions of participants. Rainbowism emerged to describe national dedication to non-racial development following the 1994 election (Barnett, 1999: 274). This leitmotif for democratic constitutionalism was pronounced in Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech wherein he dedicated the new South Africa to "peace, prosperity, non-sexism, non-racialism and democracy" (Nur, 2015: 61). This sentiment would be further enshrined in the 1996 South African Constitution in making non-racialism a constitutional value and would shape the most notable post-apartheid racial project in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Møller and Dickow, 2002: 183). While Everatt (2012: 5) notes that there has been a decline in the political imagery of the Rainbow nation in defining what South Africa *is*, students such as Clint\* (a coloured male) illustrate that legacy of Rainbowism remains as an ideal of what South Africa *should be*, saying:

"...if you look at all of the colours in South Africa, it represents us as a Rainbow nation-together."

When prompted to expand on what the Rainbow nation meant, Clint provided a colourblind definition reminiscent of Nelson Mandela's, saying:

"...like we don't look at colours. We treat each other with love, respect, kindness-irrespective of colour"

This sentiment was reproduced by Sterling\*, who framed Rainbowism as an instrument of peace, crucial to South African nation-building:

"People say that it's a farce, but I don't think so. Like, we've got people from all walks of life, all over the world, and that's what makes South Africa what it is today. And some people say that Nelson Mandela's rainbow nation, or whatever, is bullshit (*sic*)-but I don't think so."

For Sterling, contemporary South Africa is post-racial, in the sense that it no longer systemically oppressed people and is now open to people from "all walks of life". The notion

that contemporary South Africa is now equally accessible to people irrespective of race is not a unique stance. Scholars such as Nattrass and Seekings (2001: 47) have similarly argued that:

“In South Africa, black and white are no longer synonymous with rich and poor. Moreover, South African society cannot simply be divided into rich and poor, as if the distribution of incomes were bipolar.”

The implication for such scholars is that the primary cause of inequality in a post-Apartheid South Africa is not historically empowered white groups, but instead an increasingly multi-racial upper class (Nattrass and Seekings 2001: 65-66). It is in this disassociation with our racialised past that South Africa is conceived as being ‘post-racial’. For participants such as Shanice\*, the post-racial colourblindness of Rainbowism is a misleading descriptor of contemporary South Africa:

“...we can’t take away from the fact that we’ve entered into a new arena of oppression, and to disregard that, it’s very ignorant. And that’s the thing, we disregard so many stereotypes and biases that have trickled down into the mainstream society in the twenty-first century. So we kind of hide under the guise of being a Rainbow nation, for instance.”

While Shanice has distinguished contemporary South Africa as a site of continued racial inequality, constitutional ideals of non-racialism present racial inequality as a “previous disadvantage” in proposing that racial privilege and subjugation are not an active issue (Anciano, 2014: 51). It is important to note, however, that the ideal of non-racialism is a concept that precedes democracy. For Biko (1987: 21) there is tactic in claims that South Africa has transcended its racialised history, setting out that:

“Thus in adopting the line of a nonracial (sic) approach, the liberals are playing their old game. They are claiming a "monopoly on intelligence and moral judgement" and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man's aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds.”

He added that:

“The myth of integration as propounded under the banner of liberal ideology must be cracked and killed because it makes people believe that something is being done when in actual fact the artificial integrated circles are a soporific on the blacks and provide a vague satisfaction for the guilty-stricken whites. It works on a false premise that

because it is difficult to bring people from different races together in this country, therefore achievement of this is in itself a step forward towards the total liberation of the blacks. Nothing could be more irrelevant and therefore misleading. Those who believe in it are living in a fool's paradise.”

These statements are pivotal for illustrating the significance of the post-racial framework. Overall the interviews sketched a strong impression of young middle-class South Africans who view racialised inequality in modern South Africa as perpetuated primarily not by the overt racists, but instead by liberals and progressives. The students interviewed indubitably express from their own unique perspectives, views on racism which can be described by post-racial phenomenon. A common observation shared by the students interviewed is that of janus-faced liberalism where today those in positions of white privilege shrewdly make the politically correct acknowledgement of racial difference but refuse to see it in the context of systems of inequality (Mangu, 2017: 241). Theorists of post-racialism such as Lentin (2016: 34) argue that deflection, denial and distancing represent new modalities of post-racial racism. According to Goldberg (2015: 85-86), the silence from white South Africans regarding the relevance of race in a modern South Africa is not a product of ignorance, but rather a conscious framework for the justification of historically-established systems of racial privilege (Goldberg, 2015: 85-86).

Furthermore respondents such as Sterling and Oddette understanding South Africa's 'have's' and the 'have not's' as a divide that is not racialised, but one representative of a divide between a multi-racial upper-class and everyone else. They viewed this as an attempt to confirm that white people are no longer an oppressive force in South Africa, nor are they disproportionately privileged in the modern context (Kgongoane, 2017: 58). Sterling expanded on this notion of a non-racial upper-class in proposing that affirmative action policies have created a black elite class of capitalists:

“There was this notion with Black Economic Empowerment that it would have a trickle-down effect through enriching a couple of black capitalists, then the trickle-down would enrich a couple of other people. But obviously that hasn't happened. Because now you have this emerging, capitalist, elite class that are getting rich off tenders but meanwhile the trickle-down effect hasn't happened.”

Despite perceptions of a non-racial upper class, scholars such as Walker (2005: 133) argue that South Africa remains unequally structured so as to benefit white groups. Statistically, white

South Africans (as of 2013) are four times more likely than black South Africans to receive higher education, more likely to be employed than white people in advanced economies and experience less poverty in democracy than under Apartheid (Mangu, 2017: 249). These statistics illustrate that while some black elites have emerged within South African democracy, white groups remain in a position of privilege. However, these realities are disguised by post-racial concepts such as Rainbowism that propose that contemporary South Africa is distinct in being structurally and politically post-racial.

### **3.3 Post-Racialism and the Rainbow Nation**

Walker (2005: 132) has further found that in contemporary South African society being marked by post-colonial and retributive discourse, Rainbowism serves to provide an alternate understanding of the South African climate. The concept of Rainbowism suggests an end to the systematic oppression of black South Africa. Kgongoane (2017: 56-58) argues that Rainbowism allows for current discussions of de-coloniality and racial equity to be reframed as prejudicial towards white groups. This understanding was illustrated by Sterling who advocates the use of Rainbowism in the political sphere, arguing that current discussions of de-coloniality are in contradiction with constitutional ideals of non-racialism:

“...they’re (Democratic Alliance) more of a party that’s dedicated to non-racialism than the ANC. Which is the irony of the situation. You’ve all these people that are aligned to the ANC and its structures- and that’s the majority. And then you have the official opposition who actually make the concerted attempt to being non-racial, but then the ANC will call them out and whatever.”

Viewing the current South African political climate through a post-racial lens, Sterling presents de-colonial subject matter such as land reform or free education as being driven by prejudicial agendas, rather than being the result of crucial and overdue address of history (Sikhosana, 2017: 33-35). Post-racial Rainbowism, while seemingly innocuous, insidiously conflates the fact that some racial barriers have been overcome with the ideal that *all* racial barriers have been transcended (Cho, 2009: 1595). Alex\* (a black male) when asked if racism had declined in contemporary South Africa, reluctantly stated that the differences between his experience and his parents were illustrative that racism has indeed declined:

“Basically what I have been told by my parents and the old people that I have been around. They were not to walk around in certain places. They were not to be in certain places at certain times without some form of identification or permission. Which is not the case now. So it is now like an individual trying to show that towards you, it’s not like everyone saying that you can’t do this, you’re not supposed to be here.”

Despite providing this comparison, he would later retract this statement, believing that while there have been many liberations against racism, it has not disappeared as a systemic issue but merely changed in its expression. However, in this research the majority of participants of colour grappled with a contention between ideals of Rainbowism and personal experience. Naledi\* presented these contradictory understandings when asked what form of racism she most commonly sees in contemporary South Africa. In her understanding, ‘reverse racism’, in which black people are prejudicial towards white people, seemed to be a common manifestation of racism in current society:

“...the younger generation that I’ve seen, like black people like my friends, are like ‘I just don’t like white people, I’m just not interested in white people because of this and that’- its just like, okay.”

However, in later describing her experience as a black woman, Naledi noted that she felt subjugated under a more subtle form of racism which she found difficult to describe. Similarly to Alex, Naledi described racism, in white groups subjugating black groups, as having declined. Their respective descriptions, however, contradicted their experiences in capturing what racism means in contemporary society. It is important to consider, in light of this, that post-racialism actively denies the experiences of black people (Bonnette et al, 2012: 72). As South Africans persist in their efforts of anti-racism and de-coloniality, it is important to note that post-racial narratives are adapting justifications of racial subjugation from claims of racial equality to claims of white victimhood in our maturing democracy (Kgonoane, 2017: 58). Sterling illustrates this adaptation of post-racial narratives in depicting affirmative action policies that are aimed at rectifying the socio-economic racism established by South African colonialism as being oppressive towards him:

“I guess it’s all about who you interact with, despite legislation making it increasingly hard for white males to get a job at the end of the day, you remain slightly optimistic because that’s just a South African trait... I guess also for me, you get kind of detached from this whole bigger debate somewhat. You go to school with guys that are somewhat

politically connected or somehow connected to the ANC or whatever, and these guys are fucking (*sic*) loaded. And when I say I had a relatively decent upbringing, it wasn't always that way. It wasn't always smooth sailing, but for some of these guys, it's all that they've known since...I don't know."

This statement is interesting in its use of racial frames to assert a point of victimisation. Bonilla-Silva (2015: 1364) describes frames as the dominant themes within an ideology, such as cultural racism or liberalism within post-racial colourblindness. The purpose of frames within post-racial colourblindness is to appear in good moral standing while simultaneously criticising interventions dealing with racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva et al, 2004: 556). These frames occur alongside what Bonilla-Silva (2015: 1365) refers to as a colourblind 'style' which features the avoidance of direct racial language- which is utilised so as to appear non-racial. The first frame utilised by Sterling is post-racial liberalism, in his reduction of racism to conscious hateful prejudice. This frame is used to create a disassociation with historically established white privilege and his current individual position in modern South Africa. It is on the basis of this frame that Sterling is able to position himself as being 'born-free' of white privilege (Apfelbaum and Sommers, 2008: 918-919). This position depicts national progress as acquired at his expense. He adds to this frame with the non-racially styled image of an entitled, rich and politically connected black student. His assertion is essentially that his position in society has been achieved through hard work while students of colour generally achieved their position through political favouritism. He poses the privileges that he enjoys as being grounded by the time's where it wasn't "smooth sailing". This appears to be contrasted with the black student that, by the very virtue of being "born-free" is assumed to experience opulence and structural privilege.

It is important to note that the views and opinions conveyed by Sterling were not made in defence of conservatism, but were remarkably intended as a liberal perspective. Sterling was not describing what he felt entitled to as a white male, but instead described how he felt victimised by virtue of his race. 'Post-racial victimhood' is defined as the perception of "reverse racism", in terms of white groups facing discrimination as a result of affirmative action and efforts of de-colonialisation (Kgongoane, 2017: 58). It serves to co-opt the language of oppression with the intention of de-radicalising critical interrogations of white power structures (Mangu, 2017: 240). Karolina (a white female) describes a sense of narcissism as essential to the use of post-racial victimhood. She shares how she sees the attitudes which sustain the 'post-racial' possibility for white privilege to be characterised as oppression:

“I think that’s what the current identity crisis that whites are having is about the whole, ‘we’re perfect, our shit doesn’t stink, we are just the epitome of evolution and we brought everyone running water and electricity and we’re just the best, we didn’t do anything bad’ (*sic*).”

Post-race theorist McKaiser (2015: 69) identifies racial narcissism as a dominant trait of whiteness because according to him colonialism has always been predicated on some form of racial supremacy that serves to justify exploitative racialised privilege in assuming that it has been earned. Racial narcissism refers to the justification of white privilege through ideals of biological and or cultural white superiority (Hughes, 2018: 5). This has resulted in many white lawyers, businessmen, academics and other individuals in socially coveted positions crediting their success to meritocratic effort where, in reality, they have occupied spaces that 90% of the South African population have previously been formally barred from (Mangu 2017: 247). McKaiser (2015: 69-70) argues that, in a modern context where these barriers have been symbolically lifted, white narcissism justifies black people entering white spaces, such as academia, as a matter of black privilege and white victimisation. This narcissism serves the dual purpose of justifying competitive losses of white people to people of colour as well as disguises historical and contemporary white privilege (Kgonoane, 2017: 57-58).

In the South African context, the psychological ramifications that have come from centuries of racial subjugation have largely gone understated. While political projects such as the Truth and Reconciliation commission have sought to address racial animosity, societal issues such as racial narcissism have not significantly been addressed (Møller and Dickow, 2002: 195-196). For Sumi Cho (2009: 1595), the result is that “post- racialism insulates white normativity from criticism and opens the floodgates of white resentment when confronted with previously accepted and unquestioned inequities”. According to Mangu (2017: 247), because of the belief that they purely ‘earned what they have’, white groups are able to remain unreflective about their structural privilege and are able to justify the maintenance of white privilege and power. The insulation of whiteness from self-critique is central to post-racial racism.

### **3.4 Social Media as a Site of Post-Racial Politics**

While participant views of what racism is and how race matters in democratic South Africa differed considerably, one theme that student participants consistently agreed upon was that social media has emerged as a platform for the observation of racism, as well as an arena for

its contestation. Social media is unique to this era of race politics, and is thus a necessary condition to explore in the context of this thesis. Remarkably, participants who felt the need to challenge racism, agreed that social media was their preferred environment for doing so. Many respondents described it as “safer” than direct offline confrontation. Lauryn elaborated on this point in explaining that challenging racism ordinarily requires calculation of personal risk by the one taking action against racism, particularly with regard to more covert, subtle and nonobvious expressions of racism, which could directly and explosively be denied in person:

“...in calling out these things, you have to be so strategic in how you do it. Which is what I appreciate social media for. You’re more able to challenge these things without fear, but in reality, challenging these things face to face and in our daily lives is difficult. Because you almost have to calculate the risk for calling each case of racism out because of the implication. You don’t want to be that black person at work that is calling out these racial incidents. And again, once you call it out, these people won’t treat you the same way now. You’ll feel the difference after calling them out, so it’s quite challenging.”

Lauryn, in the above statement, illustrates the danger of challenging post-racial language, which is definitively self-concealing in nature. She observes, conversely, that anti-racist whistleblowing in the liberal post-racial context poses certain dangers which are mitigated by the alternative of social media activism. Daniels, (2012: 711-712) similarly notes that social media is alluring to anti-racist efforts as the risk of being alienated is significantly reduced. Ismael confirms why social media is particularly useful as a political base for challenging new modalities of covert racist expression in saying:

“In a modern South Africa, it’s (racism) hidden. It’s there, but it’s not out there. Because you can easily get called out. You can be put in the limelight. You can be put on a stage where you can’t take back what you said. Because back then, they didn’t have social media, if you said something, it’s only you and the person there for it. Now you can record a conversation, you can video a conversation, you can do all these things and post it for everyone to see and hear.”

It is perhaps for this reason that social media has formed an integral aspect of social movements such as the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and #RhodesSoWhite protests that have challenged South African racial dynamics and ideals of Rainbowism (Sikhosana, 2017: 8). These protests have been distinct in using social media platforms, such as Facebook, to coordinate protests



action as well as to create ‘safe’ spaces where racism may be publically interrogated (Anderson, 2006: 141-145). Where the power structures of society may alienate individuals, social media offers a platform to openly disseminate argument, engage within communities and create institutions of support for the marginalised (Gallagher, 2003: 24). As social media has invigorated anti-racist and de-colonial discourses in South Africa, Joe proposed that the rise of these discourses over platforms such as Facebook may be the source of the increasing cases of online racism such as with Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen:

“...the student protests were big, because there were a lot of black people on camera and on everyone’s TV’s a lot of the time! And then you have all these racialised movements around transformation and change happening with policies and it’s like, I don’t want to say that it’s their (racists) trigger... But I can’t remember any of these racist social media outbursts prior to the student movements”

As previously argued, South Africa’s post-racial narratives are changing and possibly growing in intensity in light of the anti-racist and de-colonial movements, adopting victimhood and charges of ‘reverse racism’ in an effort to maintain and justify white racial power and the neutralisation of white self-critique. Participants in this study proposed that the reactionary intensification of the post-racial language of white victimhood has been challenged over social media to a degree not necessarily achievable offline. While Facebook users ordinarily operate within ‘echo chambers’ that are created to appeal to user preferences, the site is increasingly changing so as to draw users to public pages (Bakshy et al, 2015: 1130). This effort has been taken with the intention of creating new means of keeping users on the site (Champoux *et al*, 2012: 23-24). The unintended consequence has been greater participation on public, community and political pages where debates are held.

Scholars such as Bakshy (2015: 4) have noted that, in an effort to increase user activity, Facebook purposefully polarises its users by using algorithms which generate ‘bait’ to coax users with observably contrasting opinions to enter similar sites. This entails drawing users from opposing ‘echo chambers’ to these news outlets, where they may engage in debate. The more conflict that arises from these clashes implies the more time that users are exposed to advertisements, allowing Facebook to satisfy advertisers and its primary goal of generating profits (Patterson, 2012: 532). Many users are unaware of being purposely polarised- resulting in users assuming that they are engaging with like-minded users, where that is not actually the case (Conover et al, 2011: 89).

### **3.5 Facebook News Outlets**

The previous discussion focused on Facebook's promotion of public news pages, but it is important to note that Facebook news outlets also operate with a degree of independence in their own interests on social media (Boxell *et al*, 2017: 2). When selling hardcopy papers, a news outlet may rely on its audience to seek it out. However, this changes on social media platforms as the outlet must now seek out its audience, tailoring its articles, thumbnails and comment descriptions in accordance with what will most likely be seen by its target demographic (Bakshy *et al*, 2015: 7).

The case of Mabel Jansen as an example of how this may apply. For a news outlet such as Sowetan Live (Facebook, 2016) that attracts predominantly black commenters and a following of over 700 000 people, an article reporting the Mabel Jansen case titled 'Why I expose Judge Mabel Jansen's toxic utterances' immediately presumes vehement denunciation of Jansen from its audience. The Mail & Guardian (Facebook, 2017), a site that features a following of 485 000 people and racially diverse commenters discusses the very same issue in an article with the unprovocative title of "Mabel Jansen resigns as Judge" (Mail & Guardian, Facebook). The article's description is similarly ambiguous in stating "The department of justice and constitutional development confirmed on Thursday that Mabel Jansen has resigned with immediate effect". In contrast, a political commentary outlet such as Letters from White South Africa (Facebook, 2016), with a following of over 40 000 people and exclusively white commenters reports the incident in an article titled "Mike Smith's Political Commentary: Judge Mabel Jansen is 100% correct". These Facebook articles offer vastly different presentations of the very same event, what is made evident in this is that these presentations of news are tailored to the presumed opinions on race of very specific audiences. However, these Facebook articles are accessible to audiences beyond their target demographic. The open access of various online 'echo chambers' has allowed for the engagement of racial storylines in order to shed light on what post-racial racism may mean today.

### **3.6 The Dominant Storylines of South African Post-Racialism**

In analysing Facebook articles related to the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen, the four most prominent storylines are: 1) *Was it actually racist?* 2) *Black people*

*are actually the racists* 3) *Not all white people* 4) *The past is the past*. These storylines are representative of how post-racial narratives serve to dismiss accusations of racism and silence anti-racist discourses. It is important to note that storylines are directly related to the online Facebook pages and target audiences to which they refer (Bonilla-Silva, 2015: 1365). An exploration of the case studies reveals that post-racial narratives are diverse but consistently converge on the principles of colourblindness, liberalism, denial, exclusion and self-victimisation hitherto discussed.

### **3.6.1 Was it actually racist?**

This storyline is about how racists decry accusations of racism as absurd, as the main defence against charges of prejudice (Miles, 2000: 138-140). The indignant protestation of *was it actually racist* is usually shrouded in a re-interpretation of the event in question so that race is downplayed or abstracted as a key factor in the storyline (Gqola, 2001: 98-99). This storyline relies on definitions of racism as hateful prejudice to discount the racialised meaning in events where the racial implication is not overtly expressed (Motha, 2010: 294-295). In addressing statements where the racist intent is not explicit, Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 240) describe there to be a “social etiquette” regarding race, in that “common sense” definitions of racism as direct and hateful prejudice are so persistently used to identify racism that alternate interpretations from this definition are avoided as being radical. The storyline of *was it actually racist?* therefore appeals to social etiquette’s regarding race, questioning if a statement facing the allegation of racism meets the criteria of being overtly hateful. Where the statement regards covert expressions of racist language, this storyline challenges accusers to break away from common social etiquette in calling out such statements as racist (Lentin, 2011: 163).

While this storyline calls for distinct and obvious expressions of racist language, scholars such as Lentin (2007: 7) have noted that the dominant expression of racist language has changed from being direct and hateful to being reliant on colourblindness to express racism. The danger presented by the question of *was it actually racist?* is that it employs wilful ignorance of current modalities of racist expression that are expressed through ‘subtle’ and colourblind language (Isdahl, 2016: 26). By reducing racism to its most extreme forms, this storyline heightens the risk posed by making claims of racism, as such a claim of racism is framed as being a drastic measure and is only deemed necessary in the harshest instances of racism (McKaiser, 2015: 45). Where the racist intent of a statement is hidden in the ‘backstage’ of implied sentiment, the

storyline of *was it actually racist?* calls attention to the ‘frontstage’ of the literal meaning of the statements (Picca and Feagin, 2007: 92-93). Where the ‘frontstage’ is framed as being colourblind, this storyline reduces challenges of racism to being unfounded and arbitrary (Lenin, 2007: 132).

### **3.6.2 *Black people are actually the racists***

The storyline of *black people are actually the racists* presents the argument that, within South African liberal modernity, it is black South Africans that are most dominantly racist. In South Africa’s transition from a white-dominated Apartheid regime to a constitutional democracy, the claim that *black people are actually the racists* argues that black people becoming politically empowered has featured a shift in racial power and prejudice (Leftko-Everatt, 2012: 14-21). For individuals using this storyline, it is most commonly manifested in claims of ‘reverse racism’. Norton and Sommers (2011: 215-216) propose that ideas of ‘reverse racism’ reflect an understanding of racism as a zero-sum game, wherein racial equality is thought to come at the expense of white interests.

This storyline features a post-racial understanding of society in assuming that liberal modernity exists in a balance of racial equality (Everatt, 2012: 5-6). A central factor to this storyline is that society, through the end of discriminatory legislation such as the Group Areas Act, is now equal and meritocratic (Mangcu, 2017: 247). The claim that *black people are actually the racists* is most notably utilised in response to anti-racist and de-colonial discourses that seek to enact further racialised change in society, framing these discourses as not only unnecessary, but harmful (Bonilla-Silva and Foreman, 2000: 62-63). McKasier (2015: 51) provides an example of this storyline during the national student movements where Rhodes University, in letters addressed to the Rhodes alumni, described the de-colonial protests as a “racist storm”. What is illustrated by this example is that the storyline of *black people are actually the racists* is used to halt the examination of racism within contemporary society in claiming that the pursuit of black empowerment results in the disempowerment of white people (Goldberg, 2015: 37).

The danger presented in this storyline is that it frames current discourses of anti-racism, such as the student protests, as victimising white South Africans (Noyoo, 2018: 8). Claims of “reverse racism” that are being levelled against movements such as #RhodesMustFall are particularly dangerous as they implore constitutional mandates of non-racialism in arguing that

such as the national student protests, are “racist” (Isdahl, 2016: 8). However, the use of the *black people are actually the racists* storyline is illustrative of white perceptiveness of racism as a system of power, as this storyline argues that in the loss of power, white groups face prejudice (Gqola, 2001: 94-95).

### **3.6.3 *Not all white people***

At the core of this storyline is a plea for the innocence of whiteness and a refusal of responsibility for racial inequality (Williams, 2000: 219-221). In using this storyline, racism is characterised as an issue that resides in the past. In assuming that racism resides in legislation, such as the laws seen under Apartheid, the *not all white people* storyline makes the claim that society is now fundamentally equal (Mathews, 2012: 175-178). In claiming that race no longer dictates the experience of individuals, it is further assumed that persisting racial inequality may not be associated with white people (Bonilla-Silva, 2006: 79-80). The storyline frames the socio-economic and spatial privileges enjoyed by white groups in contemporary society as the product of their hard work and capability- as opposed to being influenced by centuries of colonial subjugation and exploitation of black groups (Mangu, 2017: 247). Conversely, the socio-economic and spatial disadvantages experienced by black groups is considered to be the product of their effort (or perceived lack thereof), as it is believed that any racialised barriers have been removed through constitutionalism (Essed and Goldberg, 2002: 377).

Where overt and prejudicial manifestations of racism are identified within society, this storyline serves to deny claims of these statements and events being indicative of collective issues of racism (Sullivan, 2014: 4-5). This is achieved through acknowledging the instance of racism as being individualistic, as opposed to being a collective issue in contemporary society (Kgongoane, 2017: 2-3). For individuals using the storyline of *not all white people*, Löwstedt and Mboti (2017: 116-117) observe that users commonly clarify that they have not actively expressed racism, therefore exonerating them from being complicit in racism. Where a white individual is shown to be overtly prejudicial towards black people, this storyline creates a distance from the implicated individuals in describing their racism as being isolated and representative of their individual opinions (Bonilla-Silva *et al*, 562).

The storyline of *not all white people*, in claiming that racism is no longer a collective issue, defines racism as irrational outbursts (Lentin, 2011: 161). The implication of this storyline disowning white responsibility for racism is that it effectively utilises ignorance so as to not

acknowledge the accumulative effects of white privilege through colonial subjugation in contemporary society (Goldberg, 2015: 19). Bonilla-Silva (2004: 565) has noted that the storyline of *not all white people* is a dissociative tool that aims to naturalise white privilege and power by relegating the meaning of racism to active discrimination.

### **3.6.4 *The past is the past***

The storyline of *the past is the past* is one that similarly provides an argument grounded in ignorance in discounting the presence or scope of racism. Fundamentally, this storyline presents an argument that contemporary society should not be concerned with discussions of racism as it is not a systemic issue within society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006: 61). This argument is founded by the idea that society now prioritises human dignity, providing every individual with equal opportunities irrespective of race (Walker, 2005: 129-130). This storyline relies on the notion that while race has historically featured as something that has defined and influenced society, this no longer occurs as the result of democracy and constitutionalism (Anciano, 2014: 37). While acts of racism may be acknowledged within this storyline, these acts are (similarly to the *not all white people* storyline) defined as irrational and hateful relics of previous time periods (Mangcu, 2017: 243-244). The storyline of *the past is the past* is distinct from the storyline of *not all white people* in terms of the scope to which it denies racism. While the sentiment expressed by the use of *not all white people* is that while one white person may appear racist this should not be extended to other white people, while *the past is the past* conveys the perception that racism itself is an issue of the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2004: 562-566). On this basis, *the past is the past* is used to argue that the acknowledgement of racism is inconsequential and detractive from more pertinent societal issues within the current context (Walker, 2005: 130).

For Bonilla-Silva (2004: 557), arguments that *the past is the past* assume that racism within the current context signify individual outbursts that are dangerous only in their ability to offend those willing to acknowledge it. It is in this sense that racism is argued to be inconsequential. The storyline is further used to deny the need for continued discussions of de-coloniality and anti-racism (Dolamo, 2017: 3). In its reasoning, contemporary society is now in a position to move on from its racialised past, arguing that discussions of racism or affirmative action are regressive from a society that has transcended the need for racial signifiers (Essed and

Goldberg, 2002: 81-83). The purpose served by this storyline is to naturalise white privilege, insulating it from critique (Sullivan and Tuana: 119).

### **3.7 Penny Sparrow**

#### **3.7.1 Facebook Comments**

In searching Facebook for articles related to the Penny Sparrow case three outlets appeared to cover the issue: Mail & Guardian (Facebook, 2016), News24 (Facebook, 2016) and Unite Against Right Wing Racism (Facebook, 2017). The storylines that most commonly emerged within this case study is *the past is the past* as well as *not all white people*. Bonilla-Silva (2004: 64) proposes that these storylines are often used in conjunction with each other, as they are both centred on claims of ignorance of contemporary manifestations of racism.

##### **(i) *The past is the past***

The purpose of *the past is the past* within the case study was to consistently delegitimise the anger expressed by other users in relation to Sparrows comments, commonly arguing that this matter pertained to an irrational outburst, posing no real threat beyond mere offense. This storyline commonly framed black South Africans as being needlessly divisive in challenging Sparrows comments as a collective racial issue. It was further argued in the use of this storyline that Sparrows comments were trivial, and the public outcry in response to it is indicative of South Africans “holding onto” ideas of racism. This sentiment is encapsulated by a user comment that entirely ignored Penny Sparrows comments and focused instead on how “we” are clinging to the past, proposing that we should progress to a point of being colourblind:

“1994 happened to change the wrongs of the past- wrongs done by white people towards black people. But if we stay stuck in the past and cling to the past, how are we going to move on... My children are nine and seven respectively and they were born in the new era. They do not see colour or distinguish between black and white and yellow and brown, because, like me- they love people... What makes me sad is that I read all of these racial comments and have to live in fear for my children’s future and fear that one day, we meet a person with a grudge who wants to hurt my family because of what other people did to their family. Can we not just live in peace? Let’s put all our efforts

into building ONE nation who can lead the world forward with love and respect. Just because we were born white do not put me and my family in the same box as those that wronged you in the past.”

This comment illustrates ‘post-racial’ moments, such as the 1994 democratic election in this case, are manipulated by this storyline to create an argument that contemporary challenges of racism are needlessly divisive and hateful. Sullivan and Tuana (2007: 119) argue that this storyline justifies the actions of individuals such as Sparrow by naturalising their racism through the assumptions of society itself being ‘post-racist’. However, Bonilla-Silva (2004: 564) notes that while this storyline appears optimistic, it serves to isolate racism in ideas of “the past” in the attempt to conceal contemporary cases of racism.

## **(ii) *Not all white people***

The storyline of *not all white people* was commonly used in concession of Penny Sparrow’s racism, but with the strategic purpose of disowning Sparrow’s statements as a white person. This featured an argument that Sparrow’s views represented that of an irrational and hateful individual. This was, similarly to the *the past is the past* storyline, used in response to people claiming that Sparrows comments were indicative of persisting issues of racism. The resounding sentiment in the use of this storyline was that Sparrows comments did not represent the perceptions of other white people.

Perceptions of ‘reverse racism’ underpinned the use of this storyline, as many users regarded the discussion of Sparrow’s comments regarding collective racial issues as unnecessarily angry and prejudicial towards white people. In this regard, many users expressed offense at the recognition of Sparrow as a white person, arguing that this represented an unfounded stereotype. The storyline was often utilised alongside *the past is the past* in presenting the argument that contemporary society is now fundamentally equal, proposing that individuals such as Sparrow represent outliers. It was further argued that, as cases such as Sparrow’s represented isolated opinions, focus should not be placed on them, but should rather focus on ‘more important’ issues such as the financial crises.

### **3.8.2 Participant Understandings**



Among student participants, the majority agreed that the Penny Sparrows case study indicated an issue of racism that extended beyond Sparrow as an individual. Maria, in explaining that she has commonly witnessed the expression of similar sentiments to Sparrow in exclusively white spaces, felt that this case study pointed to a systemic issue of racism:

“...we haven’t properly addressed the issue of racism. It was just like Penny Sparrow, this evil old lady, did this evil thing. And it’s like, no, this is in our society. It exists every single day. She’s not the exception, and that should be the point.”

Crucial to understanding is a shift in the meaning of Penny Sparrows comment from being a hateful and irrational outburst, to instead being a sentiment illustrative of contemporary South African racial dynamics of power and privilege. Ismael expanded on this point in explaining Sparrows comment was not a product of hatred, but instead the result of her racial privilege being infringed upon:

“I think that a lot of white South Africans when they’re racist, it’s not because they hate a specific race- but it’s because they feel inconvenienced.”

Understanding the case of Penny Sparrow as an issue of racial power, and not as an irrational outburst, expands the racial significance of her comments as regarding a loss of spatial privilege. The post-racial storylines that have defended Sparrow against accusations of racism, from this expanded understanding, regard larger issues of racial inequality in a contemporary South African society. Providing her understanding of why these post-racial narratives may emerge in defence of Penny Sparrow, Maria suggested that justifying cases such as this may be crucial to the defence of white power and privilege:

“They (white people) feel personally attacked by this Penny Sparrow thing because maybe they recognise it as something within themselves and are scared that they could get in trouble for it.”

In recognising the Penny Sparrow case as being illustrative of a systemic racial issue, the post-racial storylines that have appeared in defence of the case would then not only justify Sparrow’s comments, but would act as a justificatory framework for issues regarding socio-economic and spatial inequalities that persist to this day.

### **3.8 Helen Zille**

### **3.8.1 Facebook Comments**

In the analysis of the Helen Zille case study, the following eight Facebook pages were examined: BBC World Service (Facebook, 2017); Mail & Guardian (Facebook, 2018); Eyewitness News (Facebook, 2018); News24 (Facebook, 2017); Daily Maverick (Facebook, 2018); Letters from White South Africa (Facebook, 2018), Al Jazeera English (Facebook, 2017); BBC News Africa (Facebook, 2017). The main post-racial storyline identified in the Facebook comments for the Helen Zille case is '*was it actually racist?*'.

#### **(i) *Was it actually racist?***

The storyline of *was it actually racist?* was frequently used to question why Zille's comments were being problematised. In the use of this storyline, commenters commonly stated that colonialism did, in fact, bring development to South Africa as described by Zille. Her statements were then held to be a self-evident reality, with many users being angered by the public outcry that has resulted in the wake of these comments. The sentiment was illustrated by one user angrily affirming Zille's argument in saying:

“Apologized for what? Stating the TRUTH? Who developed this country? Who built schools, universities, hospitals, roads, government? The tooth fairy? Colonists did not steal money, they used it to build! So that idiots can burn it down like in Cape Town. All this generation is good for is destruction!”

Through comments such as this, the *was it actually racist?* storyline attempted to reframe the issue at hand in presenting colonialism as beneficial aspect of South African history. In crediting “this generation” as being destructive to the infrastructure established by colonialism, this storyline justifies the colonial period within South African history and, in doing so, excuses the comments made by Zille. Through the re-interpretation of the subject of this case, this storyline shifts the discussion from covert expressions of racism to being an issue of freedom of speech. Illustrative of how post-racial narratives delegitimise interrogations of racial inequality, the shift of topic from racism to ‘political witch hunts’ created a difficulty for users interested in discussing the racial dynamics of this case as their comments were persistently redirected to the subject of political freedoms.

It is important to note that the shift of the conversation from de-coloniality to the freedom of speech were gradual, often developing from initial passive comments to becoming increasingly

aggressive statements. Pontying and Noble (2003: 42) note that the use of terms such ‘freedom of speech’ represent a dog-whistle in utilising covert language as a ‘signifier’ to create an implicit argument justifying racism. Cho (2009: 1634) characterises the users of dog-whistles as “incognito racists”, as their racism is only visible as traces within their offhand comments.

### **3.8.2 Participant Understandings**

Among interview participants, 7 of the 12 people interviewed felt that there was an aspect of truth to Helen Zille’s statement in proposing that colonialism brought development to South Africa. This sentiment has persistently appeared as a theme within the analysis of Facebook comments and in-depth interviews as what many hold to be an undeniable aspect of South African history. However, participants such as Lauryn have problematised this perception as providing a revisionist understanding of history:

“...that’s the other problem with these comments, it whitewashes history. Assuming that everything that was brought here was the invention of the white man. Meanwhile maths and so many other things aren’t. And it carries the idea that everything was born in Europe and carried out to the rest of the world.”

A common sentiment in these revised definitions of colonialism is that it frames colonialism as developing South Africa, bringing civility and technological innovation (Wilson, 2011: 6). In reality, colonialism was never enacted with the intention of benefiting black groups (Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999: 153). Its purpose has fundamentally regarded the expropriation of land, labour and resources with any ‘development’ being so as to benefit colonists (Khumalo, 2018: 193). To scholars such as Rassool and Witz (1993: 449), this revisionist understanding of colonial history was a design of the Apartheid government in compensation for a tenuous 1948 election and limited Afrikaner nationalism. The National Party aimed to expand its political base through promoting a white settler nationalism, framing colonialism as an endeavour of ‘civilisation’ through praising ‘settlers’ such as Jan Van Riebeeck and qualifying the incoming Apartheid infrastructure as a natural progression of civilisation (Rassool and Witz, 1993: 449-450). Participants with critical racial understandings, such as Lauryn, identified Helen Zille’s comments as a modern iteration of ‘revisionist history’, proposing that Zille’s comment signify a defence against current de-colonial discourses through making a positive correlation between colonialism and development.

### 3.9 Mabel Jansen

#### 3.9.1 Facebook Comments

Within the Mabel Jansen case study, six Facebook pages were examined: Sowetan Live (Facebook, 2016); East Coast Radio (Facebook, 2018); Eyewitness News (Facebook, 2017); Letters from White South Africa (Facebook, 2016); Mail & Guardian (Facebook, 2017); Citizen News (Facebook, 2017). The storyline of *black people are actually the racists* appeared dominantly within this case.

##### (i) *Black people are actually the racists*

In the use of this storyline, Mabel Jansen's comments were persistently overlooked, with the conversation instead being directed to Economic Freedom Fighters leader, Julius Malema. What became apparent in the use of this storyline was that many South Africans view a figure such as Malema to be the embodiment of contemporary racism. The reason that this may have been considered to be the case is that he has re-ignited the race question. Malema represents a departure from the non-racialism of the African National Congress, with his political ethos being deeply rooted in ideals de-coloniality and anti-capitalism (Kotze, 2012: 332). With the introduction of a racially outspoken politician such as Malema, the *black people are actually the racists* storyline is given renewed wing as proponents of 'reverse racism' are able to claim that a black politician singing the Apartheid struggle song of "kill the boer" is far more controversial than a judge claiming that rape is a product of black culture (Posel, 2014: 32-33). This sentiment was captured by a user saying:

"And what about Malema and his 'kill the farmer, kill the boer' that is also wrong. Have him resign as EFF leader....? It works both ways don't be such a racist cow."

In re-directing the subject of analysis from Mabel Jansen's comments to claims of 'reverse racism' by Julius Malema, Norton and Sommers (2011: 215-216) understanding of this storyline as a zero-sum game was illustrated as Jansen's comments were justified by virtue of the existence of figures such as Malema. While the Jansen case refers to ideas regarding black criminality, the persistent reference to Julius Malema as a "racist" within the Facebook comment in the Jansen case presents the insight that "reverse racism" is perceived as a

dominant aspect of black criminality. In the Facebook comments regarding the Jansen case, the storyline of *black people are actually the racists* commonly demonised Malema as the personification of Jansen's ideas of black criminality and cultural deficiency. This is illustrative of a growing sentiment of white victimisation as a post-racial response to the reinvigoration of the South African race question that attempts to maintain white power by contending that current anti-racist discourses are inherently anti-*white* discourses.

### **3.9.2 Participant Understandings**

Of the three case studies, the case of Mabel Jansen was by far the most divisive among participants. Male participants, with the exception of Joe, viewed the case as an exclusively racial issue. Female participants were more receptive to the gendered components of this case, with participants such as Odette understanding the case to exclusively pertain to gender issues and the propensity of black culture to perpetuate rape culture. Participants such as Shanice and Lauryn felt from the outset that Jansen's comments remained racist, noting that while sexual violence remains a pervasive and pertinent issue in South Africa, toxic constructions of masculinity remain central to the issue as opposed to race.

Jansen's comments polarised the country and highlighted the inextricable link between ongoing racism and other forms of social hierarchy, such as sexism (Noyoo, 2018: 5). Unfortunately, many inferred the need to choose 'race' or 'gender' as the main cause. But contemporary racism and sexism do not exist in isolation from one another. A discussion of racial inequality is incomplete without an understanding of gender inequality, simply because the racialised individual is also the gendered individual, and these societal conditions exist in a state of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242-1243). In Jansen's comments, if one is to accept that sexual violence is a dominant issue in modern South African society, the idea that responsibility resides in black culture becomes an implicit premise. Thus, an individual is forced to focus on the gendered aspect of these comment and ignore the racial aspect, or focus on the racial aspect without speaking to the gender aspect. In liberal modernity, social movements are becoming stronger and individuals are becoming increasingly connected within them through social media (du Rand *et al*, 2017: 23). It is important to acknowledge that in these spaces of social progressiveness, liberals such as Mabel Jansen are able to alienate individuals from the discussions of racism through using gender as a frame, essentially forcing others to prioritise a single societal condition (Mangcu, 2017: 241). This is illustrative of the

complexity of South African post-racial narratives, as this case dismisses contemporary issues of racial inequality by comparing racism to other pertinent forms of subordination.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter aimed to establish post-racialism as an emergent form of racism within contemporary South Africa. In the first half of this analysis, data collected from in-depths interviews were used to form testimonials of racial experience. Through participant experiences and understandings, it was found that there are multiple, contrasting perspectives of racial meaning within South Africa. Through South African ideals of Rainbowism, post-racialism has been able to emerge as a seemingly liberal modality of racism. Recently, South Africa's protest landscape has been distinguished by renewed calls for racial justice and decoloniality. At a theoretical level, the intricate field of post-racial theory has amongst other frameworks in critical race theory emerged to reconfigure and widen the definition of racism to accommodate changes in the construction of both racism and anti-racism.

Among participants, it was found that many of them believe that South Africa should aspire to the colourblind ideals of Rainbowism. However, the seemingly progressive ideal of Rainbowism was also discovered to act as a rationale for arguments regarding anti-white, 'reverse racism'. To this point, participants that had presented racial constructions similar to the racial theories of biological essentialist or racial constructivist commonly identified 'reverse racism' as the most dominant modality of racism to emerge in contemporary South Africa. This presents an important insight regarding the state of post-racialism within contemporary society. Post-racial theorists such as Bonilla-Silva (2004: 562-564) identify storylines which legitimise the charge of reverse racism and white victimisation which include *the past is the past* and the *not all white people*. Other storylines more explicitly cast black South Africans as the 'new' racists such as, *was it actually racist?* and *black people are actually the racists*.

The four storylines defend, rather than address, racial inequality through denying that white structural and cultural supremacy remains a reality. However, these storylines are under attack from social movements as well as critical post-racial theory. This tells us that South African society is becoming less willing to accept the colourblind attitudes as a symbol of progress. Or, at the very least, as student interviews revealed, it is a burning, contentious issue.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **CONCLUSION**

This primary aim of this study has been to explore new modalities of racism that have arisen in contemporary South Africa. A post-racial framework was then utilised to shift understandings of racism from overt expressions of hateful prejudice to being a system of power. Through this framework, post-racialism was identified as a current modality of racism that serves to justify contemporary racial inequality and delegitimises critical racial interrogations. This research has presented social media as a site of exploration for post-racial politics. In light of this, the case of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen have been examined as illustrative of South African post-racialism within the content of the case studies and with regard to how people respond to these case studies. This research has been conducted through a qualitative approach, utilising in-depth interviews of 12 Rhodes University students and user-generated Facebook comments relating to the case studies. It has been found within this study that South African post-racialism operates through attitudes of colourblindness that point to ‘post-racial moments’ of racial progress to argue that race is no longer a systemic issue.

In contemporary South African society, there are many moments of racial progress to be celebrated. Formalised colonialism and Apartheid have met their political end and have been replaced with constitutionalism and democracy. Formerly whites-only spaces such as government have now been made to better represent South African racial demographics. While this may be the case, it is increasingly becoming apparent that racism has not disappeared from South African society. The social media case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen have not only illustrated that racism remains an issue in modern society, but that new forms of racist expression are emerging. However, something that has hindered the contestation of these emergent modalities of racism, and has set the basis for South African post-racialism, is the legacy of Rainbowism.

Rainbowism, defined liberal modernity in South Africa as analogous with the achievement of racial equality through the implementation of democracy. In the reasoning of Rainbowism, the answer to four centuries of racial subjugation through colonialism and Apartheid has been non-racialism. This has created a distinct narrative of South African colourblindness that assumes

all people to be institutionally equal, as a multi-coloured rainbow, within the new democracy. This has essentially accepted the racial differences and power dynamics constructed through colonial domination in assuming that these dynamics will change organically through non-racialism. Those most impoverished within modern South Africa are defined as the ‘previously disadvantaged’, conversely assuming that white groups are no longer privileged. In proposing that the only way for South African society to progress is non-racialism, this ideology positions racism as the hateful prejudice of the Apartheid regime.

Rainbowism has been constructed on the premise that if the hateful prejudice of Apartheid has drawn to a close, replaced by a constitutional democracy, then systematic racism has seen its conclusion. On this premise, it is proposed that South African liberal modernity is institutionally colourblind. However, this has not correlated with post-Apartheid South Africa. Statistics previously listed have illustrated that white South Africans remain in a position that benefits them economically, socially and spatially. These disparities have been emphasised by distinctly racialised movements such as the #RhodesMustFall protests that have directly challenged the continuation of colonial legacy in contemporary South Africa. While South African democracy has dedicated itself to non-racialism, it is increasingly becoming apparent that this constitutional value remains idealistic, failing to contextualise the modern context.

The issue with Rainbowism is that it aspires to a post-racial South Africa, in contending that the end of Apartheid has meant that race no longer dictates the lived reality of individuals within society. However, defining race as hateful prejudice critically misdiagnoses the purpose and scope of racism. While hateful prejudice remains a manifestation of racism, this research has aimed to illustrate that the fundamental purpose of racism is to sustain power and privilege for white groups through the subjugation of black groups. Defining racism as a pursuit of power shifts the understanding of racism from exclusively being an ideology to also existing as an embedded characteristic of society. This embeddedness manifests itself through socio-economic, spatial, political and psychological structures of racial power.

Racism has so far been depicted as manifesting in different racialised theories such as biological essentialism, racial constructivism and post-racial narratives. While the reasoning and premises vary among these racial theories, the purpose remains the same. These ideologies aim to maintain the structures that empower white groups at the expense of black groups. The reason that these ideologies change while maintaining the very same purpose is that they exist as a product of and justification for the racial inequality of their time. While the academic



framework of Critical Race Theory aimed to challenge the normalisation of the socio-economic, political, spatial and psychological racial power structures within modern society, scholars such as Derrick Bell, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Alana Lentin and David Theo Goldberg have emphasised a need to adapt interrogations of racial power structures to a post-modern context characterised by racial victories such as the end of formalised Apartheid. These scholars argue that in a contemporary society, post-racial ideologies have emerged as a product of ‘post-racial moments’ such as South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994. The post-racial narratives that emerge from this ideology use these ‘post-racial moments’ to argue for the decline of racism and, in doing so, justifies the perpetuation of racial inequality in society.

The emergence of post-racial narratives is particularly dangerous in a South African context where there is a constitutional dedication to non-racialism. As has been illustrated among Rhodes University students, there is a distinct lack of consensus as to racial meaning within South African society. In the absence of political leadership, individuals are made to construct racial meaning for themselves, and these meanings are afforded equal legitimacy. In this contested space of racial meaning, post-racial narratives argue that racism is no longer a collective issue, but is instead the results of irrational outbursts of prejudice. What has been established is that the aim of post-racial ideologies is to silence contemporary racial discussions. It has been argued that post-racial narratives do this through liberalising racial definitions to individual action, deny collective accountability and exclude racially subjugated groups from the social, economic, epistemic and spatial structures that will enable systemic change.

However, as times are changing, the means of challenging racism are similarly changing. New avenues of exploration are being discovered. In this regard, social media has been offered as a contemporary platform for understanding South African racial dynamics and challenging the various forms of racism. Using the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen have presented a means for the analysis of post-racial narratives not only in terms of the cases themselves, but in terms of how South Africans have responded to these cases. Among user comments, four dominant storylines have emerged as post-racial narratives within the comment sections of articles regarding the cases studies. These storylines are: *was it actually racist?*; *black people are actually the racists*; *not all white people*; *the past is the past*. The storylines each serve the purpose of liberalising, denying and excluding from the interrogation of the racism within the case studies, and are evident of how post-racial narratives justify racism and silence racial criticism.

The importance of these case studies is to further illustrate the dynamics of racial power and privilege exhibited by Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen. While these figures have become notorious within South African public discourse, the point is that these figures are not unique or abnormal in their whiteness. Instead, these figures highlight the power structures that empower white South Africans in a modern context. In many senses, what is revealed by these case studies is deeply discouraging. The interrogation of post-racial narratives illustrates how deeply woven and persistent racism is structurally within South African society. The existence of these post-racial narratives seemingly taint the racial victories that have come to define South African liberal modernity as it becomes apparent that our shift to democracy failed to challenge racial power structures beyond the political sphere.

However, what the case studies of Penny Sparrow, Helen Zille and Mabel Jansen illustrate is that social media has presented every South African, irrespective of societal positions, with a means through which they may identify and contest racism. In conducting interviews, multiple participants expressed a hesitance in challenging racism, as pointing out racism was noted to pose personal risk. Participants further noted that with the emergence of post-racial racism, they felt that the task of challenging racism has become significantly harder as this brand of racism is seemingly innocuous. However, participants commonly noted that social media offered a platform to challenge racism which does not carry the same repercussions experienced in day to day interactions. As illustrated by these case studies, challenging racism over social media is becoming an increasingly effective method of creating change. Movements such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #RhodesSoWhite that are inextricably linked to social media are further challenging epistemic spaces that, even in democracy, remain as white-dominated spaces. These developments have been further shown to be creating changes within post-racialism. Where narratives such as post-racial arguments, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century denied racism by proposing that society was systemically equal, post-racial narratives are now increasingly using charges of 'reverse racism' to protect white privilege and power. While there are other reasons that have contributed to post-racial expression becoming increasingly aggressive, social media has been illustrated as a power contributor to this. In this sense, social media has been illustrated as a site of post-racial politics.

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