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Coloured subjectivies and black Africanness.

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ABSTRACT

Racial identities in South Africa reflect a highly complex history of how people have related to each other. They also illustrate how power has been used to validate different identities, along a racial hierarchy that attached the most value to whiteness and the least to black Africanness. These structural validations have played themselves out in everyday interactions between people both in terms of how they are seen and how they see themselves. In particular, this study draws on psychoanalytic literature to help to explain the workings of race and the recalcitrance of racism. In South Africa, conceptualizations of blackness and whiteness have dominated discourses on race and on racism. Set in Cape Town, this study by contrast, focuses on coloured identities and how these are experienced and understood particularly in relation to black Africanness. It uses participants' life histories to explore the workings of race and racism in coloured households and communities, examining relations between family members in this regard in particular. It illustrates the tensions that characterize coloured subjectivities especially in the post-apartheid era, showing how coloured identities articulate themselves in opposition, as well as in relation, to black Africanness. Importantly, this study reveals how associations with black Africanness have threatened the security of many people who identify as coloured. The thesis also explores indices of sexuality and gender as they relate to the broader topic of race and racism. The key argument of the study as a whole is that by exploring the meanings of race racism in the realm of the intimate, or the intrapersonal, we will come closer to understanding these notions and practices and in the case of racism, some of the reasons why it persist after social and political transformation, even as its meanings change.