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An intergenerational study of the negotiation of apartheid memory among white South Africans

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Abstract

South Africa's history of societies structured on the basis of racial hierarchies, and specifically minority white power, has had far-reaching repercussions. Although apartheid was abolished eighteen years ago, and significant changes can be seen in the country, the country is still, to an extent, racially divided and difficulty in accessing basic rights still correlates strongly with race. Essentially racial tensions within South African still exist. White South Africans still maintain their structural privilege and South Africa is not yet free from the clutches of white dominance. When asked about their apartheid pasts, white South Africans often demonstrate a complete lack of engagement with their pasts and race. Some either choose to remain silent or 'forget' the past and among others a not-knowing emerges. Many do not acknowledge their role and responsibility with regards to apartheid believing they were merely bystanders to the apartheid regime. This remembrance of the past is fundamentally shaped by their whiteness. This lack of engagement with the past aids in continuing to perpetuate the centrality and invisibility of whiteness and white privilege. How then is this memory of the past and relationship to whiteness communicated to the next generation? What could the repercussions of this process of remembrance and invisibility of whiteness be as South Africa attempts to muddle through current racial tensions?

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