

## “I had Missionary Grandparents for Christ’s Sakes!”: White Women in Transracial/Cultural Families Bearing Witness to Whiteness

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White women have occupied a distinct position in histories of White supremacy. With the rise of White supremacist discourses in this current epoch, I posit now is a critical time to examine how White women can bear witness to their Whiteness and to ask what role they want to play in creating a more equitable future. I take up these considerations by drawing on interview data from a qualitative study of ten White women in transracial/cultural families with Black African partners to analyze how the participants conceptualize their Whiteness and make connections between their subjectivities and histories of White domination. The women’s articulations reveal that through new relational and spatial experiences across multiple forms of difference, White women can develop a changing relationship to Whiteness and what it represents in neocolonial spaces on the African continent, the Canadian settler colonial context, and within their own familial lineages and relationships. Findings suggest that for White women to witness the historical weight of their Whiteness, forming linkages between their lives and broader political, economic, and social conditions of inequity is necessary. I argue White women need to cultivate spaces of critical engagement, such as the spaces created in the study, where they can begin to imagine themselves as different racialized subjects.

*Keywords:* white women, whiteness, white supremacy, multiracial families, racism, colonialism.

### Introduction

As subjects who face gender oppression and hold racial privilege, White women have occupied a distinct position in histories of White supremacy (Bush, 2016; Chaudhuri & Strobel, 1992; McRae, 2018; Najmi & Srikanth, 2002; van der Westhuizen, 2019). With the rise of the ‘global right’ and appeals to White supremacist discourses in this current epoch (Gökırksel, Neubert & Smith, 2019; Rubin, 2018), I posit now is a critical time to consider how White women can bear witness to their Whiteness and to ask what role they want to play in building a more equitable future. To take up these considerations, this paper draws on excerpts of transcribed interview data from my qualitative study of ten White Euro-Canadian women in transracial/cultural families with Black African partners. Informed by critical Whiteness, critical race feminist and antiracist scholarship, I analyze how the participants conceptualize their Whiteness and how they can make connections between their racialized subjectivities, colonialism and White domination. The women’s articulations reveal that through new relational and spatial experiences across multiple forms of difference, White women can develop a changing relationship to Whiteness and what it represents in neocolonial spaces on the African continent, the Canadian settler colonial context, and within their own familial lineages and relationships.

To bear witness is an active learning process of becoming, which requires one to “open oneself to uncanny points of connection, commanded by a persistent sense of becoming to something or someone that is other than the grounds on which one recognizes oneself” (Simon, 2000, p. 18). To witness is to necessarily encounter the existing limits of one’s hearing, seeing and knowing the world; it is to challenge one’s fundamental frames of reference and allow for the creation of new frames. The process of bearing witness can bring feelings of confusion, pain and guilt; yet this process can also lead to greater levels of critical consciousness and humility (Aanerud, 2014; Berlak, 2004; Etherington, 2019; Felman & Laub, 1992). My findings make evident that for White women to bear witness to the historical weight of their Whiteness, forming linkages between their own lives and broader political, economic and social conditions of inequity is necessary.

### White Supremacy and White Women

Mills (2003) argues we need to recover the concept of White supremacy, which has often been conceived as “formal juridico-political domination” (p. 36), such as the American system of slavery and the South African apartheid state. The first step to this reclamation is to accept that unequal power dynamics of White supremacist systems go far beyond their actual implementation. As such, the definition of White

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supremacy must expand to include its current *de facto* status, evident in the racialized nation building of 'the West' and in the ongoing forms of global domination by White western states and elites. White supremacy can therefore be characterized as, "a multidimensional system of domination ... extending to White domination in economic, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, somatic, and in a sense even 'metaphysical' spheres" (Mills, 2003, p. 42).

For bell hooks (1995) racism is not a sufficient concept to name the systemic oppression of people of Colour. Instead, she argues White supremacy addresses both ideology and human behaviour; it can best explain for instance how White women who think of themselves as liberal feminists and non-racist could seek to dominate women of Colour and Indigenous women. White supremacy then also identifies the foundational framework that shapes how White people see and behave towards people of Colour and Indigenous peoples irrespective of their political orientation (hooks, 1995, p. 185).

Within White supremacist systems, Whiteness is simultaneously "a location of structural advantage", a "standpoint", and "a set of cultural practices" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1) that functions as "a political, cultural, psychological fiction used to exploit and oppress groups of people not defined as 'White' for the mass accumulation of wealth, power and psychological advantage" (Deliovsky, 2010, p. 20). When Whiteness at the individual and group level (micro) is evaluated in relationship to structural power and domination at the systemic level (macro), it can be recognized that all White people, including White women, are racialized and implicated in a multidimensional, ideological system of White domination (hooks, 1995; Mills, 2003).

One way to illuminate how White supremacy operates and possibilities for its transformation is to investigate White women as subjects who have been central to White supremacist systems. For White women, Whiteness is a 'process of becoming' through discursive, social and spatial practices that begin in early socialization. Although White women are not trained to imagine themselves as racialized beings, they are taught to become "good White girls" (Moon, 1999, p. 179) and reproduce the forms of White femininity central to regulating racial divisions between White people, people of Colour and Indigenous peoples (Comeau, 2015; Deliovsky, 2010). Responsible for reproducing the imperial race and maintaining the colonial order, White European women have been instrumental in the economic, social and ideological processes of colonialism (Bush, 2016; Frankenberg, 1993; Knapman, 1986; MacDonald, 2015; Ware, 2015). Within the imperial context, the White European woman was a multifaceted and contradictory character: she was at once a missionary, imperial mother, ambitious settler, and at times defiant transgressor of racial, social and sexual lines (and to a lesser extent activist against imperial policies) (Bush, 2016; Ware, 2015). Colonial histories of White European women, predominantly written by men, reveal apparent themes including how the protection of White women was used to justify violent suppressions of local peoples (Carter, 1997; Knapman, 1986; McMahon & Kahn, 2018; Ware, 2015).

While the Canadian prairies may not evoke the imperial imagery of British India or "the Orient" (Said, 1978), Canada was nevertheless established as a settler colonial society, and the country's colonial narratives depict similar constructions of White women and their central duty in "settling" the nation (Carter, 1997; Chilton, 2016; Johnstone, 2018; Pickles, 2002; Snell, 2018; Thobani, 2007). As in other colonies, White European women were responsible for (re)producing the White population and maintaining 'proper' European homes. The constructed threat of danger towards White women was used to rationalize violence against Indigenous peoples and police boundaries between Indigenous and White settler populations (Carter, 1997; Rutherford & Pickles, 2014). White European women's position in colonial systems and colonial ideologies of race, gender and sexuality continue to inform the present-day constructions and positionalities of White women in western states (Boshkova, Shastina, Shatunova, 2018; Johnstone, 2018; McMahon & Kahn, 2018; McRae, 2018; San Martin & Barnoff, 2004; Ware, 2015).

Although antimiscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional in America in 1967 and no formal laws existed in Canada<sup>1</sup>, when White women enter into relationships with partners of Colour they become implicated in the historical weight of White supremacist systems in new ways (Luke, 1994; Deliovsky, 2008). By permanently crossing the fixed borders of the White patriarchal world, White women defy the long-standing rules of "heteronormative White supremacy" (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 54). As a result of their transgression, they can witness (though not all do) their relationship to race, Whiteness and difference change dramatically; their Whiteness and White femininity, once normalized and invisible, is now tainted and marked by historical discourses of anti-miscegenation. Yet, it is still the privilege of their Whiteness that enables their transgression to take place at all (Deliovsky, 2010; Luke 1994; Twine, 2010). By occupying "borderline space" (Rauktis, Fusco, Goodkind, & Bradley-King, 2016, p. 441), White women in transracial/cultural families can pose a threat to White supremacy by disrupting the conceptual, social and spatial separation between Whiteness and Blackness, in part by challenging the very notion that Whiteness has no colour (Luke, 1994).

Feminist scholar Ruth Frankenberg (1993) put forth the notion of becoming 'unWhitened' to signify the process by which White women are symbolically and socially removed from respectable White femininity when they cross racial lines. This is evidenced in the limited scholarship on White women in multiracial<sup>2</sup> families, in which women report verbal, emotional and sometimes even physical abuse they

face from the White world when they enter into multiracial relationships. Existing studies attest that as White women's public identities and affiliations may change, negative assumptions about their character, morality, sexuality and mental health status are made by family, friends and strangers (Britton, 2013; Dalmage, 2000; Deliovsky, 2010; Harman, 2010; Harman, 2013; Kouritzin, 2016; Luke, 1994; Rauktis et al., 2016; Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017; Twine, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

The scholarship on White women in multiracial families reveals thematic foci on White women's levels of racial consciousness, their official racial identification, and their ability to raise multiracial children. There are not many analyses of how individual White privileges are linked to historical and ideological systems of White supremacy and colonialism for these women (with the limited exception of Frankenberg, 1993 and Deliovsky, 2010). Moreover, in current research studies Whiteness and power are not explicitly examined *with* the research participants. My study (detailed below) aims to fill these gaps by unpacking Whiteness as part of the research process, investigating the early and ongoing racial socialization processes of White women in transracial/cultural families, and relating their experiences to systemic inequities.

### Materials and Methods

The study from which this paper draws was guided by three key research questions: (1) How do White Euro-Canadian women in transracial/cultural families conceive of discourses of race and difference and how do they see themselves constructed within these discourses?, (2) How can and do they contend with and challenge discourses of race and difference in their lives?, and (3) How can White Euro-Canadian women and their families inform antiracism pedagogies?

I employ the term "transracial" as defined by Twine (2010), "to signal the movements that members of multiracial families make between racialized bodies, social borders, ideological positions, and cultural practices" (p. 4). I include "cultural" to make explicit that transracial/cultural families are comprised of subjects who hold a complex list of cultural, ethnic, national, linguistic and religious affiliations.<sup>4</sup> Transracial/cultural families consisting of immigrant partners are distinct as their transgressions across differences involve crossing official colonial, as well as conceptual borders. There are circumstances faced by immigrants, especially immigrants of Colour that may not factor into other partnerships when individuals are born in the same country. As such, White women's experiences in families with Black African immigrant partners are framed by intersecting discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and nationalism, colonial constructions of what Africa "is" and who Africans "are" perceived to be, and complex bureaucratic processes of immigration and settlement (Bonsu, 2009; Creese, 2011; Creese, 2018; Mayer, 2002; Saunders, 2019; Walcott, 2003).

For the study, I used third party/"snowball" recruitment and public advertisements to recruit participants who met the following criteria: (1) identified as White Canadian women of European descent, (2) in or previously in a relationship with a Black African first-generation immigrant partner to Canada, and (3) resided in Vancouver, British Columbia or Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My intention was to locate White women who represented a range of subject positions with respect to: socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, education, employment, travel experience, civil society engagement, and more to comparatively explore how these variables mediate perceptions of race and difference. I received over thirty responses from women across the country, including interest from women in other transracial/cultural family compositions. Based on the selection criteria above and participant availability to meet in-person and commit to each phase of the study, a total of ten women were selected: Vancouver (n=6) and Saskatoon (n=4).

The ten participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to late thirties and held different ethnic, religious and cultural identities (e.g., one participant identified as an Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jew, one as Mennonite, one as Portuguese Catholic, and one as Ukrainian Agnostic). Eight women's socio-economic backgrounds were lower-middle to middle-class and two were of middle-upper class upbringings. Seven participants had or were in the process of obtaining a college or university degree, and three women had postsecondary vocational training. The women were employed across public and private sectors, three in government ministries or public institutions, one in a non-profit organization, four in private local businesses, and two were full-time students. Eight participants had children under the age of ten, with the exception of two women, who also had a teenaged child. Eight women were legally married to their spouses and in relationships from two years to over seventeen years together. One participant was in a long-term common-law partnership with her spouse, and one was legally divorced from her ex-husband. The women's partners were either permanent residents of Canada or recently granted citizenship after emigrating from African home countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Mali between five and twelve years ago. All participants are referred to by their selected pseudonym.

Drawing on decolonizing, Indigenous and feminist methodologies and antiracist research methods, the study employed the mixed qualitative methods of (1) an initial participant survey, (2) individual

interviews, (3) group workshops, and (4) a follow up inquiry. After expressing interest in joining the study, participants were invited to complete the survey containing three questions regarding their experiences of race, racism and Whiteness. This initial step was done to ensure the participants understood the study content and were willing to partake in candid discussions about race and difference. The semi-structured life history/narrative interviews followed, which centred on the participants' racial consciousness and racial life stories (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Okolie, 2005). The interviews lasted from one to two hours, took place in the women's homes or a public location of their choosing, and were audio recorded. Next, a group workshop was held in each research location and involved participant engagement with three topics: Whiteness, White privilege and racism; immigration and multiculturalism; and mothering and antiracism. Each topic had a corresponding text participants read prior to the workshop and then discussed: (a) "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (McIntosh, 1989), (b) *True Love or Marriage Fraud?* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011), and (c) *How to be an Anti-Racist Parent: Real-Life Parents Share Real-Life Tips* (Van Kerckhove, n.d.). The workshops were audio and video recorded. Lastly, the follow up inquiry consisted of email correspondence to solicit any lingering questions or feedback and to ensure participants knew they could continue to communicate about any issues covered in the study. The analysis in this paper draws principally from the interview data.

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) was utilized to analyse the transcribed data and detailed field notes were taken throughout the research study. As an analytical framework, CDA allowed me to evaluate the women's speech acts as discursive representations (re)produced within situated socio-historical processes, cultural practices, and relationships of power (Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Data was coded using a "high level" (abstract, conceptual) and "low level" (fixed such as: geographic location, age, education) coding process, and an alphabetized system of abbreviated identifications isolated key concepts, themes and discourses (Madison, 2005). Through an ongoing comparative analysis, I continuously reviewed my data to verify the accuracy of selected codes and themes and to allow new ones to emerge. I determined saturation was accomplished when the repetition of codes and themes was apparent.

Validity was established through three practices, the triangulation of three theoretical frameworks and four qualitative methods (Meyer, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2005), member checks throughout the research study and participant review of transcribed interview data (Lather, 2003; Meyer, 2001), and "catalytic validity" (Lather, 2003, p. 191). Catalytic validity is intended to ensure a link between theory and praxis occurs for the participants, wherein their consciousness is raised and they may be more agentive as a result of the research process. This form of validity was measured by how the study content and discussions inform the women's understandings and approaches to racial ideologies and their subsequent practices as White women in transracial/cultural families (Allen, 2017a, 2017b).

In the study, I explicitly wanted to name and interrogate Whiteness with the participants. I did so based on the contention if one genuinely seeks to not only scrutinize, but to deconstruct Whiteness, research endeavours should initiate opportunities for the researcher and the participants to critically trouble "White scripts" and to create "counter-narratives of Whiteness" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 68). I sought to create relational spaces of critical inquiry, in which the participants could articulate their reflections on race and Whiteness; and together we could unpack the relationship between White privileges and colonialism without getting stuck in negative and often debilitating emotions of *White discomfort* (Matias & Mackey, 2016; Schick, 2014; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Zembylas, 2018).

As the study unfolded, I realized that as part of the research process I had to understand not only who the participants are in relation to their transracial/cultural families in the present moment, but who they are as socially and ideologically constructed historical subjects. I had to assess how the women's racialized and gendered identities are formed(ing) with ideologies of colonial empire in ways they may be unaware, how they embody Whiteness, and how their articulations may be echoes of the past and resonate into the future.

### **Findings: Bearing Witness to Whiteness**

In the interviews, I observed participants articulating differing and evolving relationships to Whiteness, as well as forms of conscious disassociation with Whiteness as part of their ongoing sense and identity-making processes. The participants' respective associations to and embodiment of Whiteness principally reflected their experiences; in particular I found participants problematized Whiteness in African contexts, where Whiteness was associated to oppressive colonial rule, in the Canadian context with respect to what it means to be a White settler Canadian subject, and within the women's own families.

Maya is a spa owner in her mid-thirties who was raised as Mennonite in small towns in Saskatchewan. She now lives with her new husband in Saskatoon and is pregnant with their first child. During her interview, Maya appeared to struggle with her racial identity and her husband's conception of Whiteness as a Nigerian man of Igbo descent.

I don't really identify as White, which is funny because I am but I don't really ... I guess I don't want to be White as in the negativity that White can be ... like the history of what the White people did in

Africa ... so then maybe that's why I don't want to because if my husband talks about you know why he won't want to buy at Shell, the gas station, because they came over and killed a lot of people and did some horrible stuff, "the White people," so I know it's always a negative thing.

Maya's articulations illuminate the racial socialization and identification processes White women can go through being in a transracial/cultural family, wherein their awareness of and association to Whiteness - as a social practice, construction, and as oppressive power and privilege - may be transforming (although this is certainly not always the case) (Frankenberg, 1993). Realizations of Whiteness are not only associated to relationships with their partners and families, but also related more broadly to the spatial and historical nature of Whiteness and colonial systems. Maya has never been to Nigeria nor met her partner's family members, yet her disassociation or dis-identification with Whiteness is substantively attributed to British colonial rule there, and the ongoing influence of neocolonial economic and political dynamics. This is made clear by Maya's reference to her partner's boycott of the multinational petroleum company, Shell, and its negative impacts on human rights and environment degradation in Nigeria (Augenstein, 2016; Elum, Mopipi & Henri-Ukoha, 2016; Yusuf, 2018; Yusuf & Omoteso, 2016). Clearly for Maya's partner, Shell is associated with "White people" and violent oppressive practices, and Maya does not want to be affiliated with that form of Whiteness.

As we spoke, it was evident Maya was trying to make sense of Whiteness with respect to her racial, ethnic and cultural identity, familial lineage and colonial power. She went on to distinguish between two kinds of Whiteness: one that is about negative power and exploitation, and another that she perceives as innocent and peaceful (e.g., her Mennonite community). With her identification of being Mennonite as a more positive alternative White subjectivity, I found Maya struggled with recognizing her racial identity as oppressive when she was socialized to imagine Mennonite people as separate from the dominant White settler population in Canada. Maya's statements speak to her contemplation of White privilege in her own life and geographic location, as well as how her Whiteness is situated within systems of White domination her partner experiences in fundamentally different ways. It is in part through the perspectives of her partner that she could witness, and arguably had to face, the historical weight of her Whiteness.

Unlike Maya, two participants spoke of their relationship to Whiteness in relation to lived experiences of being in postcolonial African contexts. For instance, Mimi is a White woman in her early thirties, who grew up in rural Saskatchewan and has two children with her now ex-husband from Kenya. Mimi met her husband in Canada, and after deciding to get married she went to Kenya with him while they waited for his Canadian permanent residency. What she thought would be several months turned into three years, during which time she had her first child. For her, residing in Kenya as a White female "expat" (Koutonin, 2015) married to her Black Kenyan partner integrated her into specific neocolonial dynamics. In her interview, Mimi recounted stories of her time living there as a White woman including her perspectives on White missionary communities in the country.

I saw how White people would take advantage of the people because they could, and they didn't value the culture that they were now in. It was like 'you know you've come to this country, you're a visitor in this country, and you're going to treat people that way?' So I was mortified when someone would mistake me as a missionary because of what I was seeing some missionaries doing.

For Mimi to be mistaken as one of "those" White missionaries was unthinkable for her. Like Maya, she did not want to be associated with perpetuating White colonial dynamics, yet for her this was related to how she perceived her position in Kenya to be antithetical. Premised on her kinship relationship with her partner and by extension his family and community, she felt she did not embody a White colonial self - she imagined it was something else. At the same time, the cognitive and social separation she creates between herself and the White missionaries she described still means her racialized and gendered body is marked in notable ways in Kenya, which result in her regularly being mistaken as a missionary. In turn, Mimi's narrative speaks to having to reconcile how colonial ideologies that formed the basis of imperial missions to "civilize" are still at play in Kenya where missionary and development work remain contentious enterprises (Hearn, 2002; Manji & O'Coill, 2002; Twikirize, 2017). Whether she desires to be or not, Mimi's historical subjectivity is implicated in, and her presence is made possible by, those inequitable systems.

For other participants, Whiteness was brought forward within the Canadian context and addressed in relation to Settler colonialism. For example, Julia is in her early thirties and grew up in a middle-upper class community in Eastern Ontario. She now lives in Vancouver with her Zimbabwean partner and their young son. Like Maya, during Julia's interview she described the new ways she began to witness her Whiteness and settler colonial realities through her partner's experiences.

I've had this massive engagement with Aboriginal people and First Nations over the last few years, especially living out here [Vancouver] and because my husband worked on a First Nations reserve ... and it wasn't until he was working up there ... it just caused me to think a lot about issues in my own country to do with race, and then of course my work in Africa ... just positioning myself in this postcolonial environment and becoming a lot more critical of that place in Canada too.

Julia's "enlightenment" about Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism in her own country is

made possible in significant part by her Zimbabwean partner and his residence and relationships in a First Nations community. As a White Euro-Canadian woman who grew up in a mainly White Ottawa neighbourhood, Julia does not recall being aware of Indigenous peoples or learning the history of Canadian 'settlement'. Informed by Christian missionary values rooted in her family and church, as an adult, Julia's focus has been on international public health, mostly on the African continent. Before her partner transgressed into colonial racialized space Julia may never have entered in her lifetime, she had not realized the colonial inequities she witnessed in other 'third world' contexts actually existed right beside her in her own country.

As a Zimbabwean man of 'coloured' status, Julia's partner was socialized into different racialized discourses and dynamics than she was in Canada. His participation as a racialized newcomer in Canadian society enabled Julia to bear witness to herself, her individual and collective identities shaped by place (Canada), and by relationships (intimate with her partner and distant with Indigenous peoples). Her powerful insights can lead her to greater awareness and deeper comprehension of colonization and histories of White supremacy more broadly. In fact, Julia stated her "enlightenment" has motivated her to engage in extensive formal and informal learning about settler colonialism and public health issues in Canada, and will perhaps change her career trajectory to look closer to home.

Zanadu, like Julia, also has direct colonial missionary ties in her immediate family. Zanadu moved around rural Saskatchewan as a child due to her father's position as a church pastor. She is in her mid-thirties and now lives with her Maasai partner and their five children in a Canadian prairie city. During Zanadu's interview, she exclaimed, "I have the whole colonial thing. I had missionary grandparents for Christ's sake! My mom still says, 'I've spent however many years trying to undo what they did' sort of thing." Zanadu's maternal grandparents were missionaries, a familial history Zanadu thought her mother struggled to "undo" in her life, and something over the course of the study Zanadu acknowledged has likely had a powerful impact on her own life decisions.

I guess I grew up hearing that too, her sort of feeling she wanted to undo or make up for some of what her history was or what her family would have done, you know. Maybe I have that ... I am trying to think even how the slavery thing started because it was a couple of years ago, but I just went nuts reading so many books, like every book I could get my hands on.

Throughout Zanadu's interview we spoke openly about multiple issues: racism, oppression, gender and sexuality, yet when I continuously attempted to return to the question of Whiteness, her familial history, and her experiences as a White woman in a relationship with a Black Kenyan man, the conversation consistently shifted into other topics. Towards the end of our interview when I probed Zanadu about where her specific interest in slave narratives originated, she began to loosely join her mother's missionary family and subsequent negative emotions, with her interest in teaching herself and her children about slavery and issues of oppression. Zanadu took the feelings and messages from her mother that she grew up with and she channelled them into a self-directed learning journey, largely through historical literary texts about racism and slavery. Her familial past and her own experiences as a privileged White woman in other postcolonial contexts seemed to instil a sense of responsibility in Zanadu, and like Julia, she seemed to be reconciling a White colonial past/present by bearing witness to disturbing historical practices of White supremacy. Zanadu demonstrated her willingness to engage in ongoing learning that may expand beyond her present limits of knowing and possibly shatter her fundamental frames of reference (Aanerud, 2019; Berlak, 2004).

While transgressions into new relationships and spaces across differences can create opportunities to bear witness to Whiteness, this is clearly not automatic for all White women in transracial/cultural families (Rauktis et al., 2016; Robinson-Wood, 2015). For instance, there was one participant in particular, Liana, who stated she had never thought about her Whiteness, and not considered or did she appear to want to consider, her Whiteness in relation to power and privilege. Liana is in her mid-thirties and has lived in Vancouver and Surrey, British Columbia her entire life. She has largely maintained the same familial and friendship circles and has not travelled much. For the initial participant survey question, "Has being in your family changed your identity as a White person, a Canadian, a woman?" Liana responded, "No, my identity hasn't changed. I am still the same White person I have always been!" During Liana's subsequent interview, I asked her what she thought about the idea of racial privilege and whether White people have different privileges than people of Colour or Indigenous peoples in Canadian society. She responded: "I've never thought of that, I don't know" and stated her husband has never had "any problems". I also questioned whether she and her husband had ever spoken about race and racism in their seventeen-year relationship or if her partner ever experienced racism. She replied: "I don't think he's ever - and this is why I think I'm boring because I don't think we've ever had" As Liana has worked and lived in familiar spaces (public and private) where multicultural ideologies of diversity and tolerance are predominantly practiced, her Whiteness has not been challenged, nor is she aware of overt (or insidious) forms of racialization her husband, or she and her husband have experienced. Moreover, as Liana asserted, issues of race and racism were not topics she and her husband readily discuss in their relationship. Liana's articulations could also reflect her discomfort with the possibility of becoming aware that there may be irreconcilable gaps between how her and her family navigate the world, and that her Whiteness, something that according to her she has

never had to problematize in her life, does in fact shape her relationships. I did note Liana's statements contrasted with women who showed higher levels of consciousness about racism and their Whiteness, many of whom asserted discussions about race were part of their regular familial, and in some cases professional, discourse. It could be as Liana's son grows and may encounter racism, conversations about race and perhaps Whiteness could take place; this will depend in part on whether she is open to such ongoing learning.

For participants such as Liana, the study and especially the group workshop, presented a meaningful opportunity to hear the perspectives of other White women, which Liana was highly engaged with, and also highlighted the need to learn more about the linkages between Whiteness and racism as mothers who are influential in the racial socialization of their transracial/cultural children (Allen, 2017b). The study as a learning space in which to bear witness was made clear by another participant, Miranda, in her voluntarily correspondence sent following the study. Miranda is Jewish, in her early thirties and grew up in Toronto. She now lives in Vancouver with her partner from The Democratic Republic of Congo and their two young sons. During the study, she would address racism, yet was grappling with how Whiteness and White privilege lead to racism. Her reflections below indicate how she started to make those associations in the context of her own relationship:

We may perpetuate colonial relations in our own partnerships. As the Canadian born, White women in our relationships it is too easy for us to think we know how to do things the right way (or at least the right way for the particular Canadian context we are in). We probably all need to take a step back now and then (every day??). Our children see us in these sort of interactions and it is sending the message that mom (the White, Canadian born one) knows best.

Miranda's statements indicate the ways she began to witness how her positionality as a White "Canadian born" woman informed her relationship with her partner who, as Miranda recounted in the study, frequently confronts racism in the broader society. Miranda's words reflect her consideration that the racialized power relations she witnessed occurring outside her marriage may also be at play within it, and these dynamics are mediated by her Whiteness. It is also of note that Miranda used collective pronouns to assert the participants' shared sense of experience and responsibility in her statements including "our own partnerships" and "we probably all need to take a step back". Questioning how unequal relationships of power can affect children's perceptions of their parents is a key contention with respect to their own racial socialization and speaks to what children in transracial/cultural families may also witness in the everyday ways Whiteness mediates their lives.

## Discussion

Through new relational and spatial navigations in transracial/cultural families, the majority of participants recounted increased awareness of how racial ideologies are reproduced in everyday interactions and spaces. Some women also reported a heightened consciousness regarding their own Whiteness and how White privilege mediated their experiences relative to their partners of Colour, family and friends. I observed levels of racial cognizance and critical reflection were greater and often most profound for women who moved beyond their intimate geographic, cultural and social worlds, to experience their Whiteness in different postcolonial geographies. Five participants described how their Whiteness was re-scripted and remapped within the colonial histories and ideologies of the places they travelled and lived in, African countries such as South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya. To varying extents, the women demonstrate that they understand their subjectivities as White racialized subjects to be situated within historical dynamics of colonialism. Their Whiteness, far from being invisible and neutral, is now loaded with complex contextual meaning and is central to constructs of power and privilege.

At the same time, I found the women, especially Liana, who did not spend considerable time outside of the spaces and discourses they were socialized into, appeared to have less awareness about White privilege and racism, and the universalization of Whiteness and racial ideologies were not experienced or challenged in the same way for these women.

Familial histories of missionary labour, as in the cases of Julia and Zanadu, and the experiences of Mimi and several other participants in Kenya and other parts of Africa, serve as a reminder that connections to British imperialism are not part of a distant past. It can be unsettling to name how histories of White domination weave through White women's lives, just as it can be uncomfortable to accept the complicity of White women and White people in (re)producing ongoing colonial systems (Boudreau Morris, 2017; de Costa & Clark, 2016; Etchells et al., 2017; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Nguyen, 2018; Regan, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012). For White women in transracial/cultural families, it can be intimately disruptive to see how the discourses and institutions of White supremacy still control their partners' opportunities and choices as Black African immigrants living in the diaspora (Allen, 2017a; Creese, 2011, 2015; Okpewho, I., & Nzegwu, 2009; Walcott, 2003).

With such awareness comes responsibility and opportunity to move beyond complicity. White women's complicity was marked for the world when White American female voters were instrumental in the 2016 election of Donald Trump (Anderson, 2016; Lett, 2016; Ruiz-Grossman, 2016). As appeals to

White supremacist discourses grow in a time of global uncertainty, the same question echoed across histories of White supremacy is asked once again: when will White women stop upholding the White supremacist patriarchal order? To do so, like Maya, Julia and others, White women must first confront the historicity of their Whiteness and face themselves as historical subjects; yet this alone will not inevitably lead White women to actively resist inequality, transform racial hierarchies, or threaten their dominant racial positionality.

To bear witness to oneself, to others and to histories of inequity is to do more than just see, it is to linger in the liminal tension that disruptive learning generates, and most importantly to assume responsibility to not only envision but actively foster individual and systemic change. As hooks (1995) reminds us, “while it is important that individuals work to transform their consciousness ... individual struggle to change consciousness must be fundamentally linked to collective effort to transform those structures that reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy” (p. 195). For White women in the study and for White women all over the world, perhaps a central responsibility to challenge White supremacy is to reject dominant forms of White femininity and to envision new embodiments of Whiteness that are not embedded in colonialism, yet still explicitly name the historicity of this phenomenon (Ware, 2015). One is reminded of Maya’s assertion above about her discomfort with her Whiteness and her claim that she does not want to be “that kind of White”. Maya’s sense of unease is real for many White women who may want to challenge hegemonic Whiteness, yet do not necessarily have a framework within which to envision alternative forms of being White that are not “coded as national and racial dominance” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 16). What kinds of “counter-narratives of Whiteness” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 68) and White femininity are possible? Can anticolonial Whiteness/White femininity exist?

## Conclusion

Central to interrogating Whiteness is to name the historicity of White supremacy as a system of domination and oppression (Mills, 2003). Part of that history is the positionality of White women in colonial and settler nation-building ideologies and practices. In this paper, I contend White women have occupied a particular place in the colonial order and they have a responsibility to face their own Whiteness and oppose White supremacist patriarchy (Heindl, 2018; Moon, 1999; Najmi & Srikanth, 2002). I illustrate that as White women in intimate kinship relationships with family members of Colour, White women in transracial/cultural families have a unique relationship to dominant ideologies of difference. As White women, their bodies have been strategically employed to maintain the colonial order, and as transgressors across racial borders their Whiteness is stained (Kouritzin, 2016; Luke, 1994; Twine, 2010; Verbian, 2006). While certainly not applicable to all White women in transracial/cultural families, participant statements make evident the ways they can bear witness to their Whiteness by contemplating linkages between their lives and White domination, especially women who spent time in new postcolonial environments. My research findings suggest studies on race and difference must directly problematize Whiteness, and not just racism, by creating opportunities to interrogate Whiteness with White research participants as part of the research process. White women need to open spaces, such as those in the study, where they can critically examine their relationship to White supremacy, cultivate the language and skills to remap Whiteness, and determine who they want to be in making a just future.

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### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>There were no official laws against interracial marriage in Canada, but there is evidence the regulation of interracial relationships also existed, largely through more informal regulatory practices (Backhouse, 1999; Kouritzin, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>I use the prevailing term 'multiracial' in reference to the present literature.

<sup>3</sup>The scrutiny placed on White women is not applied in the same way to White men, whose transgressions across racial boundaries have historically symbolized and directly upheld the colonial order (Frankenberg, 1993; Razack, 2000). White men in multiracial partnerships use their White patriarchal power to 'override' the penalties of anti-mixing discourses (see Dalmage, 2000; Twine, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>The participants and their partners grew up in separate nation-states and are shaped by socialization processes and ideologies of difference in their respective communities of origin. For instance, although Canada, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo share histories of colonization, White women's and Black men's positionalities and experiences of White supremacist systems greatly differ.