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Experiencing Negative Racial Stereotyping: The Case of Coloured People in Johannesburg, South Africa [†]

Amanuel Isak Tewolde

Centre for Social Development in Africa, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg,
Johannesburg 2092, South Africa; aisak@uj.ac.za

[†] When using the term 'Coloured people' in this paper, I do not intend to reify or essentialise the group as a biologically or genetically objective community but the usage alludes to a social or political designation.

Abstract: Scholars examining racial stereotyping and prejudice in racially organised social systems have largely focused on how non-White ethnic and racial groups experience racial stereotyping in White-majority national contexts such as the US, Australia and European countries. There is only scant scholarship on experiences of ethno-racial communities in Black-majority countries such as South Africa, a country where Whites are a minority. Even though there is ample scholarly work on racial stereotyping of racial groups in South Africa such as Coloured people, much of it is focused on their experiences during colonial and Apartheid eras. Little is understood about how Coloured people experience racial stigmatisation in post-Apartheid South Africa. This paper addresses this gap. Based on interviews with fourteen Coloured participants from Westbury, Johannesburg, this study found that many interviewees claimed that Coloured South Africans were negatively racially stereotyped as people who use drugs, as aggressive and violent people, as alcoholics and as criminals. Many participants also resisted and countered the negative stereotypes by talking about Coloured people in positive ways, which shows their agency. The negative stereotyping of Coloured people which prevailed during colonial and Apartheid times is still deployed by society to describe Coloured people in post-Apartheid South Africa. To capture the continuity of negative stereotyping in South Africa about Coloured people, I developed the analytical term of 'perpetual racial stereotyping'. Many decades after the end of the Apartheid system, negative racial stereotyping of Coloured South Africans still continues in everyday life, and Coloured people are still associated with racist prejudices, narratives, discourses and stereotypes that were invented many decades ago by settler colonialism and Apartheid.

Keywords: Apartheid; colonial; Coloured people; Johannesburg; racial stigma; perpetual racial stereotyping; South Africa; Westbury; stereotyping



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1. Introduction

South Africa is a racially organised country with four racial categories, namely Black African, White, Indian, Coloured. In South Africa, race-consciousness is pervasive and deeply embedded in institutions, laws, policies and the society at large (van Niekerk 2019; Roux and Oyedemi 2022). While social classification in many African countries is based on non-racial markers such as ethnicity, tribe, language, religion and culture, inter alia, due to White European settler colonialism, South African society, like some African countries, is stratified by racial markers (Tewolde 2020, 2021, 2023). Ever since White Europeans arrived in South Africa in the 17th century, the ethno-racial demographics of the inhabitants has undergone transformation due to intermixing (intermarriages), importation of new peoples and constant migrations (Christopher 2002). White Europeans, who were in power until the late 20th century, used various racial categories to classify and sort out the complex South African demographic profile (Christopher 2002). White Europeans used racial classification to differentially allocate political, social and economic resources and privileges, benefiting

White Europeans while marginalising those they categorised in various racial labels across centuries (Christopher 2002; Johnson 2016; MacDonald 2006; Maré 2014; van Niekerk 2019).

The current four racial categories in use in contemporary South Africa were created by the Apartheid regime in the middle of the 20th century through the Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 that classified the South African population into Black¹, Indian, Coloured and White (Christopher 2002). The category Black refers to people belonging to indigenous African ethno-linguistic groups, namely isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Tshivenda, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho and SiSwati (Christopher 2002). The category White refers to people whose ancestral origins come from Europe such as Dutch, English, Greek, Portuguese, German, French and so on (Christopher 2002). The racial classification Indian or Asian describes people who originate from the Indian sub-continent. The racial classification ‘Coloured’ has been associated with definitions and notions of racial mixed-ness (Roux and Oyedemi 2022; Pirtle 2021).

In relation to racial classification, the racist Apartheid government also attributed meanings or stereotypes linked to the non-White racialised groups. Negative stereotypes were attached to non-Whites, and particularly Coloured people were associated with a plethora of negative biological and behavioural attributes (Roux and Oyedemi 2022; Pirtle 2021). As Adhikari (2006, p. 143) argues, Coloured identity has been negatively stereotyped and linked with: ‘associations of racial hybridity, illegitimacy, marginality and residual savagery coalesced in the stereotyping of Coloured people in the popular mind’.

While the concept of stereotyping is defined variously by many scholars, I found a definition by Hamilton et al. (1990) to be the one that encapsulated the vast scholarly definition on stereotyping. Hamilton et al. (1990, pp. 146–47) define stereotypes as

‘certain generalisations reached by individuals. They derive in large measure from, or are an instance of, the general cognitive process of categorising. The main function of the process is to simplify and systematise, for purposes of cognitive and behavioural adaptation, the abundance and complexity of the information received from its environment by a human organism.’

Here, Hamilton et al. (1990) view stereotype as a simplified and summarised way of describing social groups, and that people who engage in the act of stereotyping fail to appreciate complexities and intricacies within the stereotyped social group.

Within this paper, the term ‘racial stereotyping’ is understood as ideas, notions, belief, representations and prejudices associated with a particular racial group, particularly a racial group that is disadvantaged and excluded in a mainstream society (Adhikari 2006). Racial stereotypes are largely false, misguided, exaggerated, dehumanising and based on baseless argumentative foundations but still are relevant in societies where racial stereotyping is prevalent (Adhikari 2006).

The objective of this paper is to explore how Coloured people in Westbury, Johannesburg, speak about how they experienced racial stereotyping in the post-Apartheid context. The central research question that guides this paper is, ‘How do Coloured people in Westbury, Johannesburg, talk about their perceptions and experiences with racial stereotyping in their everyday lives?’ Many decades after the end of the Apartheid system, discourses of negative racial stereotyping about Coloured South Africans still continue in everyday life, and Coloured people are still associated with racist prejudices, narratives, discourses and stereotypes that were invented many decades ago by settler colonialism and Apartheid. I developed the analytical category of ‘perpetual racial stereotyping’ to reinforce, conceptually frame and solidify my argument. Many participants resisted the negative stereotypes which shows their agency in actively counteracting negative representations about them.

This paper is organised as follows: First, I will discuss Coloured people in South Africa followed by a review of the literature on racial stereotyping in the global context and racial stereotyping in South Africa. After that, I will discuss theories of racial stereotyping and stereotype reproduction. The following sections will outline the method of the study, the results of the study and the discussion sections. The last section concludes the paper.

2. Coloured People in South Africa

The racial designation or category ‘Coloured’² does not refer to the idea of being a non-White or Black as is used in other racialized national contexts, but instead, in the South African context it refers to an intermediate racial status (Adhikari 2006; Farred 2000; Hammett 2010; Johnson 2016; Maylam 2001; Pirtle 2021). Therefore, since colonial and Apartheid times, the racial category ‘Coloured’ has been used to refer to people who were defined as occupying a middle racial position within a Black–White racial hierarchy (Christopher 2002; Roux and Oyedemi 2022; Seekings 2008; Pirtle 2021).

Throughout colonial and Apartheid eras, the category ‘Coloured’ had been used to classify different ethnic and racial groups (Christopher 2002). Official population classification in South Africa started in 1865 in Cape Colony (Christopher 2002). During this census, the term ‘Other’ was invented to describe and classify populations of mixed-race background, and in the next census in 1875, the racial category ‘Mixed and Other’ was created to categorise people of mixed-racial background and ancestry in the Cape Colony (Christopher 2002, p. 403). In the following censuses in 1880 and 1890, the independent Orange Free State invented the term ‘Coloured’ to describe people who were non-White.

After the formation of a unified modern South African state then called The Union of South Africa in 1910, the racial designation ‘Mixed and Other Coloured’ was created to categorise Cape Malay, Indian, Hotentot or Khoisan mixed-race individuals and other populations (Christopher 2002, p. 404). In the censuses that followed in 1921, 1936 and 1946, the racial designation ‘Mixed and Other Coloured’ was created and it was used to classify populations of mixed ancestry (Christopher 2002, pp. 404–5). After the onset of the Apartheid government in the late 1940s, the racial classification ‘Coloured’ was invented by the White-minority regime to categorise mixed-race people and the category was used in the subsequent 1951, 1980, 1985 and 1991 censuses (Christopher 2002, p. 405).

The Apartheid state, therefore, lumped vastly heterogeneous ethno-racial groups in South Africa into a single Coloured category. As Adhikari (2006) notes,

‘a ‘phenotypically diverse group of people’ descended largely from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and a range of other people of African and Asian origin who had been assimilated into Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century formed the Coloured category. Also partly descended from European settlers, Coloured people have popularly been regarded as being of ‘mixed race’ and have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy perceived as distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population’. (Adhikari 2006, pp. 143–44)

The racial classification ‘Coloured’ is currently in use widely in official documents and society at large in post-Apartheid South Africa (van Niekerk 2019; Roux and Oyedemi 2022; Pirtle 2020). Therefore, Coloured racial identity has historically and in contemporary South Africa been associated and assumed to occupy a racial intermediary position (Adhikari 2006; Erasmus 2001; Johnson 2016; Posel 2001a, 2001b; Pirtle 2021). In the post-Apartheid context, many Coloured South Africans see themselves as a racially marginalised social grouping (Pirtle 2021) and describe themselves a ‘not Black enough’ racial group (Pirtle 2021). The post-Apartheid state re-classified Coloured people as ‘Black People’ in policy documents such as Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA) and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003 (BEE) (Pirtle 2021), but many Coloured people racially view themselves as ‘not Black enough’ (Johnson 2016; van Niekerk 2019; Roux and Oyedemi 2022; Pirtle 2021).

The Apartheid state propagated the stereotype and discourse about Coloured South Africans as those who fall between Black people and White people or occupying an in-between racial positioning. The representation of Coloured South Africans as neither Black not White or as occupying a middle racial location is still pervasive within the imagination of the South African society. Such continuity speaks to the notion of ‘perpetual racial stereotyping’ which this paper proposes to make sense of the continuities and entrenchment of negative racial representations of racialised groups.

Unemployment among the non-White groups, including Coloured people, in South Africa is relatively high. According to Statistics South Africa, the nation-wide unemployment rate in 2013 was 32.9% and that this figure positions South Africa as one of the top countries with high unemployment rate ([StatsSA 2023](#)). Regarding the socio-economic realities in Westbury, Johannesburg, participants within this study mentioned that residents of Westbury experienced wide and protracted youth unemployment, acute and prolonged problems with housing and infrastructure. There is also widespread violent gangsterism and drug sale and use among Coloured people in Westbury ([Luvhengo 2023](#)).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Racial Stereotyping in the Global Context

Many scholars around the globe have documented the socio-cultural phenomenon of racial stereotyping in national contexts where society is organised along racial stratification systems such as, inter alia, Brazil ([DaMatta 2010](#); [Piza 2000](#)), the US ([Steele and Aronson 1995](#)), Europe ([Hayes et al. 2018](#); [Van Veen et al. 2023](#)) and Australia ([Deery and Hosking 2016](#); [Weng and Mansouri 2021](#)). In such racially stratified social systems, non-White social groups such as Black and Brown people are usually characterised and described in negative terms.

In the USA, Black Americans (African Americans) are stereotyped and represented negatively as intellectually inferior, highly sexualised, violent and morally problematic ([Steele and Aronson 1995](#)). Black Americans in the US have endured centuries of negative stereotyping by White Americans and most of the negative images about African Americans that originated centuries ago still exist in contemporary US society and culture ([Adams-Bass et al. 2014](#); [Loury 2003](#); [McCleary-Gaddy and James 2020](#); [Reed 2022](#); [Rosenthal and Lobel 2016](#)). The indigenous ethnic groups in the US described as 'Red Indians' are also usually negatively stereotyped in unfavourable terms, for example, as uncivilised, savage, alcoholics and uneducated ([Davis-Delano et al. 2021](#)). Latino communities in the US are also negatively represented and stereotyped as criminals and drug dealers by the media, political figures and the society at large ([Gonzalez 2019](#)). Here, I am not suggesting that White Americans are the only racial group that perpetrate racial prejudice against non-Whites, as inter-racial stereotyping among non-Whites might also exist.

Black ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are usually represented and negatively stereotyped as violent and prone to crime ([Hayes et al. 2018](#)). Further, other ethno-racial communities in the Netherlands such as Turkish- and Surinamese-Dutch are usually socially and culturally represented and negatively stereotyped as lazy, unemployed and of low social status ([Van Veen et al. 2023](#)).

Many scholars studying racism and racial stereotyping in the UK national context have also found that Black people and other migrants are usually portrayed in negative terms ([Abbas 2020](#); [Mahmud and Gagnon 2023](#); [Narkowicz 2023](#); [Osbourne et al. 2023](#)). A study by [Osbourne et al. \(2023\)](#) found that Blacks in the UK were stereotyped as angry and inferior, among other negative representations. In the UK, other scholars also found that Muslims are viewed as undesirable and terrorists by the White mainstream society ([Abbas 2020](#)).

Throughout much of Europe, the Roma people, ethnic groups who lead nomadic or itinerant way of life, across the continent are usually stereotyped negatively as criminals, lazy and untruthful, inter alia ([Kende et al. 2017](#)). The Roma people in Europe have experienced virulent negative stereotyping due to their nomadic lifestyle and in the media and popular imagination, they have been viewed as living abnormal and fringe lives ([Kende et al. 2017](#)).

In Australia, Black people are negatively stereotyped as criminals ([Deery and Hosking 2016](#)), violent ([Weng and Mansouri 2021](#)) and diseased ([Cooper et al. 2017](#)), while Arabs and Muslims are stereotyped as terrorists ([Weng and Mansouri 2021](#)). Negative representations and stereotypical perceptions about non-White racial groups in Australia is prevalent across various media outlets, political figures and society at large ([Weng and Mansouri 2021](#)). In

Australia, the Aborigines or the indigenous populations are usually depicted negatively by the popular media and the White Australian society as uncivilised and backward (Balvin and Kashima 2012; Falls and Anderson 2022).

In Brazil, non-Whites are depicted as having negative racial identity while Whites are stereotyped as having a positive racial identity and as an ideal race (DaMatta 2010; Piza 2000). Black-skinned Brazilians are popularly stereotyped and represented as of low social status and hence deserving of low-status occupations while White Brazilians are viewed as of high social status and deserving of high-status occupations and professions (DaMatta 2010; Jairo and de França 2022; Piza 2000). In Brazil, White identity is viewed as a standard and pure while other non-Whites are viewed as incomplete and of lower racial status; dark-skinned Brazilians are the most negatively stereotyped (DaMatta 2010; Piza 2000).

The above literature illustrates that across many societies where race-consciousness is the norm, White people are associated with positive attributes while non-White Black and Brown social groups are usually represented and negatively stereotyped in terms of undesirable qualities and markers. As researchers interested in critical race studies have argued, racial stereotyping of non-White peoples around the globe originated and was popularised in the era of colonialism and maintained by White societies in many parts of the world (Mahmud 1999). The above examples also suggest that racial stereotyping of non-White peoples is a global phenomenon and colonial discourses and ideologies regarding non-White populations as less than White Europeans has become pervasive and solidly entrenched globally (Melson-Silimon et al. 2024). By ‘global’, I am referring to countries where societies are organised in racial terms or where there are notions of race-consciousness and racial hierarchy.

I should emphasise here that within this paper, I do not intend to interchangeably use the terms ‘mixed race’ and ‘Coloured’ as I am aware that the terms ‘mixed-race’ and ‘Coloured’ are used differently in different parts of the world. With regard to experiences of negative racial stereotyping, I refer to ‘non-Whites’ as an umbrella racial term to refer to various racialised groups globally.

3.2. Racial Stereotyping in South Africa

One of the key texts on racial stereotyping in South Africa is the scholarly article of Adhikari (2006) entitled, “‘God Made the White Man, God Made the Black Man...’: Popular Racial Stereotyping of Coloured People in Apartheid South Africa” that discusses how Coloured South Africans were negatively represented in the South African society during the Apartheid era. Here Adhikari (2006) notes that ‘through hybridity, the closely allied attributes of racial inferiority and illegitimacy are also assigned to Coloured people as a group’ (p. 151). Adhikari (2006) further writes:

The attribute of racial hybridity is virtually inherent to the concept of Colouredness in the popular mind and is the most prominent in the array of negative qualities associated with it. Coloured people are generally thought of as being of ‘mixed race’, or less flatteringly, as ‘half-caste’ or even a ‘bastard’ people. Indeed, before the exclusive meaning of the term Coloured became current in the mid-1880s, words such as ‘bastard’ and ‘half-caste’ were the most common epithets used to refer to this social group or to individual members. In other words, Colouredness is seen as the product of miscegenation, and racial mixture to be its defining characteristic. The idea of racial hybridity has been so intrinsic to the concept of Colouredness... (p. 151)

Adhikari (2006) also suggests that,

‘indeed, many of the racial traits attributed to Coloured people have often been explained in terms of the deleterious effects of racial mixture. Allegedly inherent characteristics of Coloured people, such as their being physically stunted, lacking in endurance and being naturally prone to dishonesty, licentiousness and drink, have often been explained or justified in terms of the effects of racial mixture or of

‘gebastenheid’ (bastardisation) resulting in physical and moral weakness (p. 155). . . From my experience of the way in which the term has been used by outgroups to describe Coloured people, moral and intellectual inferiority should be added to this list’. (p. 159)

As [Adhikari \(2006\)](#) further notes, the Apartheid government and its racist discourses strongly popularised associations of Coloured people with negative attributes and qualities that created conditions for social stigmatisation of Coloured people in South Africa. Regarding the negative characterisation of Coloured people in the Apartheid era, [Adhikari \(2006\)](#) further comments that,

‘in popular discourse, the Khoisan origins of Coloured people are often used to explain racial traits ascribed to them. Negative characteristics attributed to the Khoisan have thus been projected onto the Coloured grouping as a whole, invoking images of inveterate laziness, irresponsibility, dirtiness and a penchant for thievery that are often assumed to have been inherited by Coloured people from their Khoisan ancestors’. (pp. 159–60)

During Apartheid, [Van den Berghe \(1962\)](#) explored how the various South African racial groups were stereotyped. Pertaining to the stereotyping of Coloured people, [Van den Berghe \(1962\)](#) reported that in the 1960s, White Europeans described Coloureds as ‘musical, gay [cheerful], happy, alcoholic and hardworking’ ([Van den Berghe 1962](#), p. 59). Indians described Coloured people as ‘colour conscious, alcoholic, quarrelsome, gay [cheerful], happy, sociable, good, craftsmen, hardworking, apathetic, uncultured, hedonistic, friendly and unmannered’ ([Van den Berghe 1962](#), p. 59). Black Africans described Coloured people as ‘colour conscious, alcoholic, gay [cheerful] and happy’ ([Van den Berghe 1962](#), p. 60). Therefore, during the Apartheid era, there were certain stereotypes about Coloured people that circulated widely, as is illustrated by [Van den Berghe’s \(1962\)](#) research study.

In the South African context, scholarly debates are focused on the theme that historically oppressed non-White racial groups such as Black Africans, Indians and Coloured people have been negatively stigmatised and stereotyped by colonial and Apartheid governments and White South Africans ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Fourie et al. 2022](#); [Pirtle 2021](#)). The term ‘Coloured’ used within this paper does not overlap with the usage elsewhere. In the South African context, due to the absence of one-drop-rule ideology, an intermediate racial group such as ‘Coloured’ exists and the classification is different from the category ‘Black’. Also the term Black is here defined and understood differently from the usage in the US context.

Racial stigmatisation still surfaces in post-Apartheid contemporary South Africa. For example, a study by [Fourie et al. \(2022\)](#) found that Black Africans were negatively stereotyped and dehumanised by White people. A study by [Peters et al. \(2022\)](#) notes that Coloured people in South Africa experienced racial negative stigmatisation in negative terms by South Africans. As [Adhikari \(2006, p. 143\)](#) writes about the continuities of negative stereotyping about Coloured people, ‘. . .these attitudes have been carried over into the post-apartheid period’.

In a research article entitled ‘The Princeton Trilogy revisited: how have racial stereotypes changed in South Africa?’, [Talbot and Durrheim \(2012\)](#) examined if the racial stereotypes that were reported in [Van den Berghe’s \(1962\)](#) study still continue in the post-Apartheid context. [Talbot and Durrheim \(2012\)](#) found that

the stereotype of Coloureds appears to be highly consensual and stable across time. The most common representation of Coloureds as alcoholics is linked with the idea that Coloureds are violent, criminal, gangsters, on the one hand, and gay, happy and friendly, on the other. (p. 484)

[Talbot and Durrheim \(2012\)](#) also suggested that how Coloured South Africans are negatively represented and stereotyped still continue in the post-Apartheid context: ‘Coloureds were described less favourably now by all three groups of respondents, but especially by black and white respondents’ ([Talbot and Durrheim 2012](#), p. 486).

In a research article entitled, ‘Stereotypical attitudes amongst black students at a rural historically black South Africa university’, [Mensele et al. \(2015\)](#) interviewed Black students about their perceptions of Whites, Blacks, Coloured and Indian South Africans and found that their participants stereotyped the four racial groupings in positive and negative terms (*ibid.*, p. 479). Regarding their negative stereotyping of the racial groups, the researchers found that they perceived Black people as poor, uneducated, immature, impulsive, aggressive, lazy and loud (*ibid.*, p. 479). They characterised White South Africans as cold, dominant, selfish, with a superior attitude and not Africanised. They stereotyped Indian South Africans as cold and unsociable (*ibid.*, p. 479). The students stereotyped Coloured as impulsive, undisciplined, aggressive, with cultural crises and a lack of identity (*ibid.*, p. 479).

The present paper engages in scholarly conversation with the global literature on racial stereotyping of minority racial and ethnic groups and the literature on racial stereotyping of Coloured people in South Africa. Particularly by way of mapping out how the Coloured participants of this study narrated their perceptions and experiences of racial stereotyping in post-Apartheid South Africa, it attempts to make a contribution to the literature.

3.3. Theorising Racial Stereotyping

As the ideology of racial classification is predicated on physical attributes of persons, such physical traits are then assigned either positive or negative racial meanings ([Loury 2003](#)). While White skin and other physical characteristics of those defined as White are positively stereotyped across much of the globe, non-White ethnic and racial groups are stereotypically perceived in negative terms. For example, some of the negative stereotypes include undesirable, inferior, low status, morally degraded and uncivilised ([Mahmud 1999](#); [Reed 2022](#); [Rosenthal and Lobel 2016](#); [Weng and Mansouri 2021](#)). Racial stigmatisation theory, therefore, proposes that in racially arranged social systems where White supremacy prevails, non-White people are perceived negatively and are represented in images and speech that describe and impute inferior and unfavourable qualities ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Loury 2003](#), p. 334). Racial stigmatisation of non-White racial groups could be based on their origin, personality, demeanour, character or physical appearance ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Loury 2003](#); [Peters et al. 2022](#)). To reiterate, negative stereotyping of racial groups is based on false, exaggerated, caricatured and simplified representations rather than based on reality or facts ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Loury 2003](#)).

Through stereotyping, the complexity of the social world is reduced into oversimplified images and characterisations ([Reed 2022](#)). Racial stereotypes, once they are formed and popularised, have the tendency to endure across generations and become part of common sense and unconscious bias in a society or culture ([Deery and Hosking 2016](#)). The theory of racial stereotyping suggests that physical traits of racially defined people are associated with moral, intellectual and behavioural capabilities or tendencies ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Reed 2022](#)). The origins of racial stereotypes and representations are rooted in colonial encounters between White European settlers and indigenous populations whereby Europeans saw non-White phenotypic attributes as undesirable and ascribed negating meanings and characterisations to non-White physical characteristics ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Loury 2003](#)). Generalisations are then formulated about racial groups based on fictitious ideologies and systems of beliefs ([Reed 2022](#)). I employ racial stigmatisation theory in order to make sense of and analyse how Coloured people perceive and experience racial stigmatisation in their everyday life.

3.4. Theorising Stereotype Reproduction

This theoretical outlook suggests that stereotypes about specific social groups (such as racial, ethnic, tribal, gender, etc.) tend to perpetuate across generations and time periods, embedding themselves within societal or cultural psychology ([Reed 1991](#)). In other words, negative narratives, discourses and prejudices about target groups continue to operate within society and sometimes institutional systems even if legal or official discrimination

of such social groups no longer exist (Reed 1991). Stereotypical perceptions have the tendency to endure across generations existing as ‘typical traits of’ a particular group (Reed 1991). The transmission of stereotypes from one generation to another occurs if interventions do not happen by powerful institutions such as the media, political figures, writers, academics and community leaders in a society to alter stereotypical perceptions (Hudson 1998; Reed 1991).

Scholars suggest that underlying beliefs and narratives about particular social groups stubbornly continue for generations even if many years have passed since their origin (Hudson 1998). Related to the notion of stereotype reproduction is the concept of ‘cultural transmission’ where ideas, beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, worldviews and other elements of culture are reproduced cross-generationally (Kline et al. 2013; Scherger and Savage 2010). The idea of cultural transmission suggests that individuals across generations mimic, pick up, adopt and perpetuate societal beliefs and attitudes (Scherger and Savage 2010). Stereotypical beliefs or perceptions about certain groups in a society, therefore, are culturally or socially transmitted across generations as truisms and social facts (Scherger and Savage 2010). I use the theoretical concepts of ‘stereotype reproduction’ and ‘cultural transmission’ to make sense of the ways in which negative stereotypes about Coloured South Africans continue to endure many years after their origin in colonial and Apartheid periods into the post-Apartheid context.

4. Method

This article forms part of a broader research project that explored experiences and perceptions of racial marginalisation of Coloured people in Westbury, Johannesburg. Research participants were identified and recruited through snowball and convenience sampling strategies. An academic colleague helped with the recruitment of participants from the community, which helped me with recruitment, access and rapport with study participants.

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, approved the research with ethical clearance number REC-01-035-2021. Fourteen participants were recruited and interviewed for the study. Eight males and six females were recruited. The age range of participants was between twenties and sixties. Regarding the socioeconomic status of the participants, the majority of the participants were working class. I explained to the participants the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary, after which the participants signed consent forms. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants. Some of the questions asked include, ‘How did you experience racial stereotyping?’, ‘What are the kinds of stereotypes applied to Coloured people in South Africa?’ and ‘How do you react to the negative racial stereotypes?’.

The interviews took place in June 2021 and in April 2022. The interviews were conducted in English, and all the interviews were digitally tape-recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data and instances of experiences of racial stigmatisation were coded and categorised across the interview data. I followed thematic analysis stages proposed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) to identify the relevant themes. Many participants disclosed that Coloured South Africans are usually negatively stereotyped by South African society and that such stereotyping made their socioeconomic mobility and improvement difficult to achieve. The two major themes for the study were experiencing negative racial stereotyping and resisting negative racial stereotyping. I do not belong to any of the four South African racial groups and this could have shaped the narratives produced by the participants.

Westbury, the research site, initially was a Black residential area called ‘Western Native Township’ before the forced removal of Black people by the Apartheid government in the 1950s. Coloured people were then moved to the area and the majority of them were working class (Chapman 2015). In 1963, the area was renamed ‘Western Coloured Township’ and in 1967 it was renamed Westbury (Chapman 2015). At present, Westbury is a predominantly Coloured area, but other racial and nationality groups such as Whites, Black Africans, Indians and African migrants also reside there.

South Africa's General Household Survey released in 2018 indicated that Coloured South Africans did not fare better in various socioeconomic indicators such as education and income (StatsSA 2018).

5. Results

5.1. Experiencing Negative Racial Stereotyping

The participants related that Coloured people often experienced negative stereotyping by society. They noted that negative behavioural or character traits were associated with Coloured South Africans. For example, Felix, a male participant in his late twenties, relates that Coloured South Africans were racially stereotyped as people prone to crime and drugs:

'A Coloured person gets screened based on you know "Are you a criminal?", "Are you on drugs?" "Are you competent?"... the only time you are represented on those platforms is either if you are portrayed as criminal, a gangster, drug dealer, or in that same like... so representation is a very big part of a lot of the issues when it comes to marginalisation.'

Vino, a middle-aged male participant, said that both Coloured people and their residential area of Westbury were negatively stereotyped:

'Once you mentioned that you came from Westbury, you were already blacklisted or so-called you were put in a box whereby you come from a very poor area, your education is very bad, and you are classified as people who are just workers or unemployed people.'

Tete, a female participant in her thirties, related that Coloured people experience negative racial stereotyping in everyday life by Black politicians:

'There are politicians that said these things. That is why people the Black people can walk around calling us barbarians and can call us these names that we are products of rape because of what their leaders said about us... They don't know us. They never sat with us and really see who we are. You get what I am saying? You can call me a barbarian you can call me this you can call me that but you don't know me because of what your leaders have said.'

Jam, a male participant in his late twenties, shares his experiences with racial stereotyping:

'The first thing is in their minds all of us are the same. So in their minds, Coloured like to fight... Coloured they like violence, and obviously there are so many good stories there are so many people that do the right thing. But these stories people don't want to hear. If something goes wrong they are quick to come in and see and report it. But when you do good things that is not reported. You don't see those things in... it is like it is almost like bad story is more important than the good ones. So violence, aggression, short-tempered, lazy, they classify us with drinkers, we like drugs, all those things. Those are the things they see us as, they don't wanna see us as educated people intelligent people you know. People that have integrity and those things and loyalty, those things are not part of us when they see us they just see violence because that is the only thing they see in TV when it comes to us.'

Morrisen, a male participant, also described the negative stereotyping about Coloured people in Westbury. Here, we also see how not only Coloured people but also the area in which they live, Westbury, is negatively stereotyped.

'Government has this stereotypical view on us. And most people do have the stereotypical view on us. And they are not to be blamed this is the life they have shown us, shown him. So ya we have seen negativity... whenever you think about Westbury, the first thing that comes to mind would be bullets, drugs, unemployment, that type of thing... I would definitely say race is a major issue because most people have the stereotypical view that Coloureds are these rough

people, uneducated, into drugs, and all of that type of negativity is the stigma attached to them.'

Vinzo, a female participant in her thirties, also relates that Coloured people are associated with negative behavioural and character traits in everyday life:

'The reason being is because I think a lot people have this concept of Coloured.

And what they always socialise us with is we never come to work on a Monday, because either we have been drinking the weekend so we are too tired to come to work and on a Friday Coloureds never come to work because either they are starting their weekend off. . . so we have been classified under that umbrella that you know Coloureds are not consistent. They cannot keep a job because they are just in it for the money and once they get the money they are missing and you know you cannot find them they don't do a good job.'

As the above narratives suggest, the participants of the study experienced and perceived negative racial stereotyping of Coloured people in their everyday social interactions, by the media and by government officials. Coloured people are associated with negative behavioural and character traits. In addition, some participants also related that the residential area of Coloured people, Westbury, is also negatively stereotyped and represented as a violent and undesirable area by South Africans.

5.2. Resisting Negative Racial Stereotyping

Not all participants passively internalised and succumbed to societally imposed negative racial stereotyping; instead, some participants also resisted and rejected racist and unfounded stereotypes about Coloured people. For example, Tate related:

'I believe my Coloured brothers and sisters got a talent. . . Our talents are not being recognised. . . these people are talented; our youngsters are talented actors, dancers, singers, writers, artists they are talented.'

Jam also emphasised:

'Positive stories and attributes about Coloured people do not get reported or talked about,

and obviously there are so many good stories there are so many people that do the right thing. But these stories people don't want to hear. If something goes wrong they are quick to come in and see and report it. But when you do good things that is not reported. You don't see those things in. It is like it is almost like bad story is more important than the good ones. So violence, aggression, short-tempered, lazy, they classify us with drinkers, we like drugs, all those things. Those are the things they see us as they don't wanna see us as educated people intelligent people you know. People that have integrity and those things and loyalty, those things are not part of us when they see us they just see violence because that is the only thing they see in TV when it comes to us.'

Locious notes that Coloured people should not be viewed in negative terms as there are many Coloured people in high positions and successful:

'We got our own Coloured runners within parliament. We have got Jessie Duarte that is there as a Coloured you understand? We have got our Coloured people that is serving within the government like Jessie Duarte is from ANC and she sits every day in parliament.'

Pablo also resisted negative stereotyping of Coloured people and asserted that there are many Coloured people who are role models and success stories. . .

'You can actually name a few growing up that made it out of here that came back and made a difference in our community like Steven Pinnar is a very good role model. . . he is a soccer player. Steven Pinnar he is a famous soccer player. He came out of Westbury. . . He is from Westbury and made it out of here. A big

professional soccer player, he came back and he gave to our community and today Westbury community even has a soccer tournament made of Steven Pinnar. . . There is another guy Keagan Dolly he is also a famous soccer player. . . ya he is also a famous soccer player he also made it out of our community. So that is two people out of our community that made it out of here.'

Morrison also related that Coloured people possess many good qualities, but instead, bad things are selectively reported about them.

To me it is like they only care once they see the negativity on the media. We are not represented fairly I would say. Because there are a lot of great minds and good people in Westbury so it is not just the bad but people just focus on the bad and the good is overshadowed by that. . . So ya we have seen negativity. . . whenever you think about Westbury, the first thing that comes to mind would be bullets, drugs, unemployment, that type of thing but like I said before they don't look at the good aspects of Westbury. Take the Youth Centre for example it is the place of hope where youth and young people can get uplifted and be pushed for more successful background. But these will not be displayed in the media.

As the above excerpts illustrate, Coloured people in Westbury denounced racist, selective, exaggerated and unfair representation and stereotyping of Coloured people; instead, they argued that many good qualities of Coloured people are not reported.

6. Discussion

Participants of this study disclosed that Coloured people were negatively racially stereotyped³ by society as people who are involved in drugs, as criminals, violent, aggressive, short-tempered, lazy, alcoholics, rough people, uneducated and derelict. Others also said that they were stereotyped as 'products of rape'. Some participants related that Black politicians and the society perceived them using terms that associated Coloured people with negative behavioural traits.

Seeing through racial stereotyping theory (Reed 2022; Rosenthal and Lobel 2016), the negative stereotyping of Coloured people is based on oversimplified judgments about the behaviour and character of Coloured people even though Coloured people are linguistically, culturally, phenotypically and historically diverse and complex communities (Johnson 2016; Pirtle 2021). As the theory of racial stereotyping theory also suggests, the negative representation of Coloured people is rooted in colonial discourses and narratives about non-White racialised groups globally and in the South African racialised context (Adhikari 2006; Loury 2003; Peters et al. 2022).

Also viewed through a stereotype reproduction perspective, the ways in which Coloured South Africans are stereotyped negatively is a continuation of similar stereotypes prevalent during colonial and Apartheid times (Adhikari 2006; Mensele et al. 2015). In other words, colonial and Apartheid discourses about Coloured people are being reproduced across generations into post-Apartheid South Africa (Mensele et al. 2015). The concept of cultural transmission also best explains the cross-generational transmission of negative stereotypes about Coloured South Africans (Kline et al. 2013; Scherger and Savage 2010).

How Coloured South Africans have been negatively stereotyped in South Africa should not be seen as an isolated discourse but instead forms part of a global phenomenon pertaining to non-White populations where the colonial encounter between Europeans and indigenous people has engendered the racist and dehumanising characterisation of non-White peoples around the world (Abbas 2020; Hayes et al. 2018; Kende et al. 2017; Piza 2000; Reed 2022; Weng and Mansouri 2021).

The international literature suggests that across many racially stratified social systems, non-Whites such as Black people of African ancestry, mixed-race people, Asians, Latinos and Arabs have been caricatured and represented in negative, degrading, defacing and dehumanising discourses and narratives (Abbas 2020; Hayes et al. 2018; Kende et al. 2017; Piza 2000; Reed 2022; Weng and Mansouri 2021). Even though the negative stereotyping of non-White populations around the world, including about Coloured people, was invented

in colonial times, such stereotypes still endure in the contemporary era, which the analytical concept of ‘perpetual racial stereotyping’ captures.

Supporting the narratives of participants of this study, [Adhikari \(2006, p. 143\)](#) notes that historically Coloured people in South Africa have been negatively identified with ‘associations of racial hybridity, illegitimacy, marginality and residual savagery coalesced in the stereotyping of Coloured people in the popular mind’. The participants disclosed that South Africans used degrading terms to represent Coloured people, and as [Adhikari \(2006\)](#) notes, the same dehumanising descriptions were used during Apartheid to characterise Coloured people. Even though the onset of democracy in 1994 removed Apartheid, its institutions, policies and laws and racist stereotypes about non-Whites still continue to dominate the social psychology of many South Africans, per [Mensele et al. \(2015\)](#).

Even though the racist stereotypes about Coloured people were founded on lies and misrepresentations, everyday South Africans still use such racist terms to imagine and talk about Coloured people, effectively perpetuating Apartheid’s racist residues ([Peters et al. 2022](#)). For example, in the 1960s, [Van den Berghe’s \(1962\)](#) study found that Coloured South Africans were negatively stereotyped as ‘alcoholics, violent, criminals and gangsters’ and my participants revealed that the same stereotypical terms were used to describe Coloured people in contemporary South Africa.

Nine years ago, a study by [Mensele et al. \(2015\)](#) also reported that Coloured South Africans were described as ‘impulsive, undisciplined, aggressive, with cultural crisis and lack identity’ and my participants also related that similar stereotypes were used by South Africans to describe Coloured South Africans. The theoretical perspective of ‘perpetual racial stereotyping’, which I developed, conceptually captures this continuity in how Coloured South Africans have been racially stereotyped.

Some participants linked experiences of negative racial stereotyping to place/neighbourhood such as Westbury, a Coloured area. An intersectional analysis of the reproduction of racism linked to skin colour, class relations, place and history is pertinent here ([Mählck 2016](#)). In her research on racialised Mozambican academics, [Mählck \(2016\)](#) found that intersections of phenotype, history and space/place coalesced to frame the experiences of her participants. Here, [Mählck \(2016\)](#) suggests that experiences of stereotyping of non-White people is nuanced and intersectionally linked, rather than being a linear or one-dimensional process.

In relation to the concept of ‘perpetual racial stereotyping’, this process should be understood as an intersectional dynamic involving the interplay of multidimensional and complex factors and contexts ([Mählck 2013](#)). For example, experiences of negative racial stereotyping play out in relation to the continuities of time and place ([Mählck 2013](#)), namely across colonial, Apartheid and post-Apartheid eras and racially designated residential areas.

White European settlers in South Africa had invented and popularised racist negative stereotyping not only about Coloured people, but also about the racialised Black and Indian South Africans which stereotypes are still well established and adopted as truisms among ordinary South Africans ([Mensele et al. 2015](#)). The ways in which Coloured South Africans experienced negative racial stigmatisation in South Africa illustrates how entrenched and resilient negative discourses about non-Whites in South Africa have become. Such stereotypes were invented by White society in colonial and Apartheid times ([Adhikari 2006](#); [Fourie et al. 2022](#); [Mensele et al. 2015](#); [Pirtle 2021](#)).

Even though the post-Apartheid South African state has reclassified Coloured South Africans as ‘Black People’, their lived experiences and how they are perceived and stereotyped by the larger society illustrates that Coloured South Africans are still viewed as ‘Coloured’ rather than as ‘Black People’ ([Pirtle 2021](#)). As scholars suggest, though a heterogeneous grouping, over the years Coloured people in their own ways have developed their own cultural traditions, linguistic dialects and other ethno-cultural markers that help them to be seen as a cultural group ([Erasmus 2001](#); [Johnson 2016](#); [MacDonald 2006](#); [van Niekerk 2019](#); [Roux and Oyedemi 2022](#)).

The ways in which the participants resisted and rejected societal negative stereotyping of Coloured people suggests a politics of resistance against their subjectification (Nielsen 2011; Rossi 2017). Stereotypes are a form of discursive formations that create subjects and subjectification; however, [stereotypical] subjectification are not permanent or unassailable, but instead are prone to being resisted and usurped, as the participants of this study illustrate (Nielsen 2011; Rossi 2017). Coloured South Africans are now resisting and confronting racist characterisations of their identity. Indeed, negative discourses or stereotypes about non-White South Africans have become so ubiquitous and well-entrenched; however, they are being critiqued and confronted by Coloured South Africans as autonomous social actors in their everyday lives (Rossi 2017).

I am aware that many racially organised countries across the North are undergoing rapid demographic transformation and that they are becoming more diverse, in which White people in those countries are gradually losing their majority status; however, despite the growing trend towards racial/ethnic diversity, racial prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping by White people towards racial minorities still continue (Balvin and Kashima 2012; Falls and Anderson 2022).

One may ask, 'What do the findings mean in the context of moving toward a more pluralistic society in South Africa?' Even though South Africa might show signs of more diversity through continued immigration, this trend is still a trickle and the proportion of South Africa's racial groups remain relatively unchanged (StatsSA 2022). The findings of the present study suggest that Coloured people in South Africa as a racial minority still experience prejudice and negative stereotyping despite small-scale immigration-induced demographic diversity.

This paper only focused on the subjective perspectives of Coloured people about experiences of negative racial stereotyping and did not delve into objectively measuring or reporting on the intersections between their experiences of racial stereotyping and objective facts around racial inequality (Reed 2022). In other words, it was not the focus of this paper to tease out issues of socioeconomic indicators such as income, education, occupations, health and others in relation to racial stereotyping. Furthermore, this paper did not focus on how experiences of racial stereotyping intersect with the realities of social distance between races or intergroup relations in multicultural societies such as South Africa (Weng and Mansouri 2021).

The proposed analytical perspective of 'perpetual racial stereotyping' suggests that colonially invented and created practices of characterising particular racial groups in negative discursive frames still percolate throughout the social universe even years after legal racial discrimination has ended. The circulation, endurance, tenacity and entrenchment of negative racial stereotyping of Coloured South Africans in the post-Apartheid context speaks to the ways in which racist and dehumanising racially imbued discursive statements about a whole group can still penetrate across legal regimes, types of governments and social orders and exist as socio-culturally available everyday repertoires.

7. Conclusions

This paper explores how Coloured people in Westbury, Johannesburg narrated their experiences and perceptions with racial stereotyping in their everyday life. The participants related that they were negatively stereotyped as if they constituted a single homogenous group and in ways that associated their behaviour and character with negative traits. The everyday experiences of Coloured people with negative racial stereotyping suggest that racist and dehumanising colonial discourses and narratives about non-White social groups in South Africa, particularly Coloured, people still continue in post-Apartheid South Africa. I developed an analytical perspective that I named 'perpetual racial stereotyping' to stress that many years after their invention by colonial and Apartheid regimes in South Africa, negative stereotypes about Coloured South Africans are still in circulation within society. Although the post-Apartheid South African state re-classified Coloured people as 'Black People', Coloured people in the contemporary era are viewed and stereotyped as a Coloured

racial group and usually associated with negative attributes even though the stereotypes attached to Coloured people are essentialised, racist, extremely exaggerated, totalising and baseless. The negative stereotyping of non-White peoples is a global phenomenon and though invented centuries ago, the associations of Black, Brown, Mixed-race, Arabs, Asians and Latinos with negative traits have circulated globally. The ways in which Coloured South Africans in Westbury experience racial stereotyping, therefore, forms part of the global problem. The post-Apartheid state was supposed to create and popularize positive discourses to reverse and expose colonial and Apartheid negative stereotyping of non-Whites in South Africa and hence the perpetuation of racist stereotyping about Coloured people illustrates the failure of the state in dealing with such stereotypes and representations. This study has limitations in that it was based on interviews with fourteen participants and that it cannot be generalised to the perspectives and stories of the entire Coloured community across South Africa. Future scholarly work could look at how other non-White social groups, namely Black and Indian South Africans, talk about how they are stereotyped. Other studies should also look into how other Coloured communities in South Africa talk about how they are stereotyped by society.

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Notes

- ¹ The four racial categories are here understood as socio-political or socio-historical constructions rather than objective biological or genetic classifications. Many scholars of race and racial classification place racial categories within inverted commas to signify their social constructions and within this paper, they should be understood as baseless and fictitious categories.
- ² Throughout colonial times until the onset of Apartheid, the category Coloured as it is used currently was established with the emergence of Apartheid rule in 1948 and is associated with ideologies of racial mixedness. The category encompasses people who are culturally, linguistically, socially, historically, phenotypically and ancestrally heterogeneous.
- ³ The negative stereotyping of Coloured people in Westbury was not limited to themselves only but also to the residential area they inhabit. In Some cases, the participants noted that negative racial stereotypes used by society were also directed at Coloured people in South Africa more generally.

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