# "No, you're just half" - The impact of everyday racism on mixed-race identities in Belgium

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**"No, you're just half" –**
**The impact of everyday racism on mixed-race identity development in Belgium**

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**DEDICATION**

For all mixed-race people of colour in this world.

We are existent.

Our lived experiences are authentic, legitimate, and real.

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**EPIGRAM**


**Bill of Rights**
*for*
*People of Mixed Heritage*


# I  HAVE THE RIGHT...

Not to justify my existence in this world.
Not to keep the races separate within me.
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.
Not to be responsible for people's discomfort
with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.


# I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To identify myself differently than strangers
 expect me to identify.
To identify myself differently than
 how my parents identify me.
To identify myself differently than
 my brothers and sisters.
To identify myself differently in different situations.


# I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To create a vocabulary to communicate about
being multiracial or multiethnic.
To change my identity over my lifetime--and more than once.
To have loyalties and identification with more
than one group of people.
To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

If I had discovered the poem above at the age of 5, it would have clarified – or at least alleviated – my experience as a mixed-race individual. Ever since I can remember, there have been pervasive comments and situations that made me feel alienated and disconnected from what I called my ethnic identity. The most pervasive situation of all is the seemingly innocent but inevitable questions "Where are you from – no, where are you *really* from?" Most of the time, the questioner comes up with it right after wanting to know my name. But in many cases, even my name seems irrelevant to the people in my environment, and complete strangers who are curious about "what" I am, are approaching me when I am present in public spaces, such as the bus stop, the train, or the queue in a grocery store. Since my race does not represent the norm in the society I live in, it is a characteristic of my identity about which people feel entitled to discover and probe as a means of entertainment. Under the disguise of a "genuine interest" in me as a person, in reality, the questioner seeks to satisfy their own need to resolve their confusion about my racial ambiguity and to identify what is different about me. This explains their obvious relief and amusement once they feel reassured about where I am "really" from as well as their feeling of entitlement to ask a whole other set of private and indiscrete questions about my family life. People's aspirations to use my (presumed) racial identity as an explanation of why I am different, and the blatant disappointment when they figure out that I do not have an "exotic" story to tell, is another indicator that genuine interest and respect for me are not the motivations when people try to engage in this type of conversation with me.

Whilst these and other forms of inadequate encounters have always made me feel uncomfortable and confused, I had never considered that the reason for that could be the (un)conscious set of values called racism. I had assumed that my uneasiness stemmed from my own insecurities rather than from a natural reaction of being *othered*[1], disrespected, objectified, and fetishised over for the only reason of not being categorised as White. My experiences became highly reflective of what Hall identified as internalised racism, i.e. "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them" (Hall, 1986:26). Yet, when I came to realise that my phenotype was tied to repetitive experiences, I began to wonder whether it was only a personal struggle or if others felt the same way, i.e. if a societal issue was in place.

When then I availed myself of Wright Mills' (2000) conception of the sociological imagination, I came to the conclusion that my lived experiences present public issues that are due to wider social structures. According to Mills (2000), the sociological imagination is the ability to evaluate the distinction between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structures". *Troubles* in this context are defined as private

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[1] *Othering* refers to the "processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate" (Jensen, 2011:65).

matters that are individual and emerge out of a personal biography within the scope of an immediate environment. *Issues*, on the other hand, encompass more than an individual milieu and inner life and are a public matter. Issues emerge out of the overlap of various milieus, which form a larger structure of the institutional, the social and historical. Whilst usually people do not recognise the historical and institutional aspects of society when evaluating their own lives, "neither the life of an individual, nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (Mills, 2000:3).

Consequently, from the perspective of evaluating my individual life experience embedded in a sociocultural context, I used *auto-ethnography* as a qualitative research method. According to Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2016), auto-ethnography is used as a means to highlight the relevance of this autobiographic data in relation to the research process. By telling and analysing my own life story, I explain how my sociocultural environment has influenced my mixed-race identity development as well as my perspective as regards to how I chose to design the interview questions and to interpret the data.

Growing up in Germany with only my White mother, I developed a mono-ethnic German identity as a young child. Yet, I soon realised that my environment attached a social meaning to my olive skin tone. Being questioned about whether I was a foreigner, what language I spoke at home and rarely being believed when I said I was German, created a conflict between my own self-perception and the perception my environment had of me. As I learned to read at school, I also came to realise that my surname did not sound typically German. By the age of 7, I had understood that my skin colour and my surname acted as determiners of being an "Other". In addition, I lacked the language to describe my lived experiences: on the one hand, this was due to the fact that I had never been educated about how my physical appearance and my name have consequences on how society treats me. On the other hand, Germany is a country, which only talks about racism either in the context of the Nazi-era or in a way that it downplays contemporary racism and its consequences (e.g. when labelling racist behaviour as "xenophobic"). This racially coded language also has the consequence that the term "ethnicity" is used when referring to "race"[2]. Hence, being socialised in the German culture, I was unable to distinguish between my ethnic identity (German) and my racial identity (Non-white, Mixed-race). Only through travelling to different countries and living in the UK in my early adulthood, my understanding of the fluidity of my ethnic and racial identities rose. But it was not until my mid-twenties that I came to conceptualise my Mixed-race identity in political terms (i.e. evaluating all the aspects of my identity in terms of privileges I do (not) have in society), whilst simultaneously upholding a German ethnic identity.
Having been object of both unintended and intended acts of (everyday) racism, I aim to discover different perspectives on the Mixed-race experience in this Master Thesis.

When taking into account Mills' framework, even personal troubles are to be acknowledged when put into the context of structural racism: although my perception of everyday interactions might be personal and my aversion to explain my racial background to strangers may not be shared with some other Mixed-race

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[2] In this thesis, ethnicity is defined as a feeling of belonging to a group of people who share a language, culture and history, whilst the concept of race refers to phenotype and/or ancestry. A more detailed definition of these two concepts will be given in chapter 2.

individuals, how people feel about racialised interactions is not pivotal in a context where these experiences in private life are just an expression of how institutionalised racism is functioning. While these forms of racial microaggressions (i.e. unconscious, well-intended biases towards non-whites) seem minimal, the oppression they produce operates on a macro and systemic level (Sue, 2010). The alleged otherness that is associated with not being White[3] is one of the reasons why discrimination against Non-whites takes place. These inequalities occur – amongst others – in employment, housing, education and health care (see Wise, 2013; Hedges, 2014; Visker, 2004; Sue, 2008; Sue, 2010).

In this study, the evaluation of racism towards Mixed-race people is based on their social positioning in relation to White people. *Whiteness* describes the social construction that entails power in society (Henry & Tator, 2006 in Dei, 2013). Hence, members of the socially constructed category *White* have a structural advantage, i.e. race privilege (Frankenberg, 1993, in DiAngelo, 2011).

Against the background that I examine the experiences of Mixed individuals in Belgium, a predominantly White society, and to narrow down the sample for this thesis, I only interviewed people who are mixed with White. Thus, in the context of this study, the term *Mixed-race* refers to individuals who have one biological parent, which is constructed in the socio-political context of Belgium as White, and one biological parent who is constructed to be any racial group that is not White. The notions *Multiracial, Mixed,* and *Métisse[4]* will be used as synonyms. However, this terminology will only be used in order to describe the individual in a general context. Other than that, I am going to name individuals based on how they identify themselves in a given situation in order to avoid essentialist labelling.

To further contain the sample, I chose to interview Mixed-race individuals who are perceived by larger society as Non-white and therefore are scrutinised constantly. Although White appearing Mixed-race people may have their own struggle with their identity development, I did not include them in the interview sample because they benefit from White (passing) privilege and therefore are not perceived as "other" by society in terms of physical appearance, even if other elements of their identity (e.g. their name) may take their White privilege away.

Taking into account that race and ethnic perception are intertwined and depend largely on the historical and geographical context and the specific community discourse that has emerged out of this context, I investigate to what extent the process of Mixed-race individuals' identity development in Belgium is similar to the one in the USA and the UK. Specifically, I examine how everyday racism that emerges out of the construction of Whiteness as the norm, affects how Mixed-race individuals in Belgium define their racial and/or ethnic identity. Bearing in mind both concepts of race and ethnicity, I focus on race rather than ethnicity. Nevertheless, I acknowledge how the concept of ethnicity is often mistaken for the concept of race, the effect being that ethnic identities are racialised and hence become racial identities. These identities, in

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[3] As racism refers to a system that privileges White people and/or everything that is associated with Whiteness, those who are considered White are member of the dominant group in society. A more detailed definition of Whiteness will be given in chapter 3.

[4] These terms are capitalised in order to emphasise their political meaning.

return, are not always congruent with the construct of race based on one's physical appearance. Finally, it needs to be stressed that this study is based on an intersectional approach, which acknowledges that discussions about race are linked with other aspects of identity, such as religion, gender, social class, (dis)ability and age (Dei, 1996, 1999, 2000; Collins, 1990, 1993 in Dei, 2013). In this sense, intersectionality is an ongoing work in progress, which attempts to grasp all the ways intersecting powers affect society (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays and Tomlinson, 2013). Having regard to intersectionality, I particularly focus on how the interplay of race and gender impacts the process of Mixed-race identity development of Cis[5]-women Cis-men differently.

By means of qualitative research, namely semi-structured interviewing, I produced knowledge based on the participants' subjective interpretation of their experiences. Following Polkinghorne's (1995) approach, I adopted a research methodology, which in a first step included the participants' life stories as Mixed-race individuals. They were given the autonomy to choose themselves which situations and events they consider to be pivotal of their racial experiences. The second part of the research interviews comprises more precise questions in order to verify the theories discussed in the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3). These theories include, amongst others, that Mixed-race identities are flexible labels (Mahtani, 2002 in Olsen, 2012), depend on phenotype (see e.g. Song, 2010), and the identity possibility that society allows one to have (Root, 2010).

In summary, the findings of this study show similar results to what has been found in the Anglophone literature with regards to two themes. Firstly, structural racism that reproduces the belief of Whiteness as the norm positions Mixed-race people as a racial "Other". Secondly, as Mixed-race individuals are less likely to experience a congruency between their own self perception of their ethnic and racial identities and the identity possibility that society allows them to have, their lived experiences are often misunderstood, and hence their self-identification is considered pathological.

Finally, the findings suggest that there is a discrepancy with regards to community discourse and how it constructs identities. As in the USA, the mainstream discourse acknowledges more persistently the existence of everyday racism, a more multifaceted vocabulary on racial identities than in Belgium. As a result, the Mixed-race individuals in this study are more likely to accept the social order dictated by society.


## 2 THE FLUID CONCEPTS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

### 2.1 The concept of Race

The concept of race structures a society's culture in profound ways (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). In order to analyse racism and Mixed-race identity in Belgium, one needs to understand how the concept of *race* is defined both inside and outside the socio-historical context of Belgium.

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[5] The prefix *Cis* is used when describing a person whose self-identity conforms to the gender that they were assigned to at birth. The term was recently introduced in order to create a vocabulary that de-normalises the cisgender experience as opposed to the transgender experience (Fischer and Seidman, 2016). Whilst acknowledging the existence of non-binary and non-cisgender women and men, this study examines cisgender individuals only. Hence, the terms "men" and "women" refer to the cis-men and cis-women experience only.

I have had several times the experience that whenever I use the term race around other social scientists, people quickly feel uneasy and retort something like "but race doesn't exist; it's a social construct!".

Whilst it is true that race is a social construct, this construct still creates the reality we live in (see Haney-López, 1994; Glassgow, 2009 in Dei, 2013). After all, from a sociological point of view, *all aspects of reality* are a social construct (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Yet, it does not come to people's minds to remind each other of this fact when the subject matter is not race. I have never witnessed people shouting "but gender doesn't exist", when talking about women and other gender minorities being discriminated against. Neither have I heard someone say "but sexuality is a social construct!" when discussing the discrimination that people face who are not heterosexual. But when it comes to discussing race, people tend to deny its existence.

Very often, race discussions are closed down because people fear to be accused of racism (Byrne, 2006 in Pitcher, 2014). Whilst societies try hard not to talk about race and how it works (Pitcher, 2014), it upholds the very racism that (most) people do not want to exist (Desmond et al., 2009). This process of racial misrecognition is a historical one that is both individual and structural. Yet, the aversion to recognise racial categories and to pretend to be "colour-blind" in a world that is not, is not only ineffective but an act of racism itself as it dismisses the fact that people are indeed treated differently due to the racial category that has been assigned to them. Most of the time, refusing to acknowledge race only worsens racial inequalities by making anti-racist programs impossible (*ibid.*, 2009).

Desmond and Emirbayer (2009: 336) define race as "*a symbolic category, based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, that is misrecognized as a natural category*".

A *symbolic category* in this context refers to language, ideas, and meaning-making, which is created by humans in order to mark differences between groups of people or things (Bourdieu, 2003, in Desmond et al., 2009). An example for a symbolic category is the term "Native American" which is used to describe all people that are indigenous to the land that is now called United States. However, the term "Native American" was not existent before non-Natives came to the land, but dozens of tribes existed, such as Crows, Hopis, Choctaws, Utes, Yakimas, Iroquois, Dakotas etc. Hence, the term "Native American" homogenises groups of people with different histories, traditional beliefs, languages and cultural practices into one racial category. This process of labelling creates different races. However, refusing to recognise these racial groups that have been created through centuries of colonialism, scientific manipulation, oppression, and political discourse will not lead racial inequality to disappear (Desmond et al, 2009). In other words, as Dei (2013:3) puts it: "Race is identity, but more importantly it is about a lived experience which is real".

Considering Desmond and Emirbayer's (2009) definition of race, the concept that individuals can be Mixed-race has been created through a labelling process, where phenotype and/or ancestry have been used as symbolic categories and misrecognised as inherently given. From this perspective, it can be argued that the development of Mixed-race identity emerges out of the assignment of that very label "Mixed-race", rather than the other way around.

Social scientists often falsely assume race to be a given and accepted label that attaches itself to people (Bonilla-Silva, 1997 in Desmond et al., 2009) or as an imposed category that creates racial identity (Marx, 1998). This approach overlooks how actors create and reproduce systems of racial classification (Desmond et al., 2009). This happens in a context where political and legal systems do not always recognise the quotidian identification that is practiced by classified subjects (Loveman, 1999 in Desmond et al., 2009). However, as no institution, regardless of its power, can monopolise the definition of race (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000), no correspondence between "official" categorisations and racial identification can be assumed (Desmond et al., 2009).

Against this background, it is necessary to understand the socio-political relations of different racial identities. For instance, when people are oppressed on the basis of their racial identity, race can be used as the basis of political mobilisation; claiming a racial identity affirms a person's sense of self and is a form of human agency, as it gives the individual the power to name oneself (as opposed to being assigned a category by institutions of power) (Dei, 2013). The French anthropologist Michel Agier (2013) points out that assigning identities onto others and believing that these identities represent the ultimate truth is essentialism. Agier calls this phenomenon *piège identitaire* (identity trap) and defines three errors that the concept entails. Firstly, there is an assumption that identities can be defined in rigid and absolute terms and taken out of contexts and specific situations. Secondly, the *piège identitaire* supposes that individuals are passively subordinated to their assumed collective identities that are assigned to them. And finally, the third error consists of a myopia, which impedes the recognition that time, space and context have changed. Agier (2013) suggests to take into account the ever-changing contemporary contexts, and to adapt an emancipative language accordingly. He further asserts that considering contemporary movements enables us to comprehend how language can serve to create specific situations of conflict.

Consider, for example, the categorisations of migrants, foreigners, and refugees in the contemporary discourse in Belgium. In the media, the terms are often used to describe People of colour and/or to refer to people who (supposedly) do not have as much economic power as White Belgians. Terms like "migrants", "foreigners", and "refugees" are almost exclusively used to emphasise "differences" in culture or religion instead of describing inequalities or hierarchies. This specific vocabulary enables a symbolic racism to flourish (Jamin, 2015). In this context, racial categorisations are created in order to oppress those who do not possess the institutionalised power to name themselves in a given situation.

In conclusion, the dynamic context of the creation of racial categories has to be taken into account when using the concept of race as an empowering tool to dismantle racism.

## 2.2    The concept of Ethnicity

Although in mainstream multiculturalism the terms ethnicity and race are often used interchangeably (Brandt, 1994, Roseberry, 1992 in Wallace, 2001) and even some social scientists have replaced the term "race" by the term "ethnicity" (Ali, 2003), these two concepts are not the same (Wallace, 2001).

Since there is an agreement that the meaning of race is not biological and that hence race in an essentialist sense does not really exist, there has been a tendency to discuss ethnicity rather than race (Pitcher, 2014). Ethnicity, describing a group of people sharing language, geography, history, tradition, religion, law etc., is seen as a more legitimate concept to discuss as it acknowledges the dynamism of the social. On the other hand, the concept of race is associated with biological essentialism. Pitcher (2014) points out that although the concept ethnicity is supposed to be anti-essentialist, it still assumes that people possess certain characteristics that are subjected to some test of authenticity or credibility as to why an individual "belongs" to a certain group. Hence, the term ethnicity is based on essentialism just as much as the concept race is. Even if the concept of ethnicity acknowledges the changeable nature of characteristics, it is often used as a fixed and frozen category (*ibid.,* 2014). Pitcher argues that the UK census, for example, has adapted the supposing anti-racist language of ethnicity. Yet, the term is used in an essentialist way because a community of origin (which is obtained at birth) determines ethnicity in this context. The community of origin is defined through language, skin colour, or cultural affiliation. In other words, "ethnicity" is used as a euphemism of "race" (*ibid.,* 2014). Pitcher suggests that both terms are important vocabulary in order to describe our experiences, rather than condemning the concept race as a "bad" one and glorifying ethnicity as a "good" one.

Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that ethnicity is partly ascribed by others based on ancestry and phenotype. Simultaneously, one's ethnic identity depends on her or his participation in a particular cultural community (Burkey, 1978 in Wallace, 2001). Therefore, ethnic identity development includes the recognition by the community and the individual. As an individual's ethnic identity largely depends on his or her cultural experience, a person may choose an ethnic identity that is not recognised by that community due to his or her physical appearance (Wallace, 2001).

Particularly in regard to describing the Mixed-race experience, I, too, consider it necessary to use both concepts of race and ethnicity. Consider Jobe's assertion that whilst usually, physical appearance and racial identity are congruent for most monoracial[6] people, Mixed-race individuals are less likely to experience a congruency between their phenotype and their racial identity due to their racial ambiguity (Jobe, 2014). When having a close look at Jobe's assertion, the term "racial" could also be replaced with the term "ethnic". Or, the notions "ethnic identity" and "ethnic ambiguity" could be added without erasing the notion "racial". What Jobe wants to describe is that Mixed-race individuals are more likely to define their ethnic and racial identities differently than what their environment would ascribe to them. For example, a Mixed individual of Belgian-Pakistani origin who grew up with White adoptive parents in Belgium will be more likely to identify her ethnic identity as Belgian. Yet, if her phenotype discloses that she is a Person of colour, her environment will not be likely to accept her as a "real Belgian". Consequently, she may define her racial identity as Mixed-race, whilst simultaneously hold on to being completely Belgian in terms of her ethnic identity.

At this point, the role of community discourse needs to be stressed when examining how the concepts of ethnicity and race are intertwined. A discourse is defined as a network of displays, common knowledge, and

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[6] The term monoracial refers to individuals who have ancestry of one racial group.

mental association accepted by a particular group of people (Gee, 1992 in Wallace, 2001). It is due to a particular community's discourse that we internalise what is valued and how values are expressed. Our behaviour becomes meaningful to others within a particular community by maintaining boundaries and excluding people who do not uphold the discourse's course. Although discourses tend to resist change from within a community, they can be flexible, overlapping and incomplete (Gee, 1992 in Wallace, 2001).

It is important to bear in mind this theoretical framework when analysing how *Métisses* in Belgium view their racial and ethnic identities within the discourse in Belgium on racialised identities. In particular, the discourse on migration reproduces a language that only racialises people who are not associated with Whiteness. As such, statistics about "second or third generation migrants" are being produced (see e.g. Bastenier and Dassetto, 1981; *Hanseeuw*, 2012; Faux, n.d.), which furthers both the idea of a biological determinism and confusion about the terms ethnicity, nationality and race. Other examples are notions like "*d'origine étrangère[7]*" and "*allochtone[8]*" (literally meaning "of foreign origin"), which are used almost exclusively to describe People of colour (see e.g. Cornil in Rea, 1998; Foblets, Martiniello, Parmentier, Vervaeke, Djait, Kagné, 2004). This will have an impact on how Mixed-race individuals perceive themselves and hence develop their ethnic and/or racial identities.

## 2.3    Shifting race perception and Mixed-Race people's identities

As opposed to monoracial individuals, Mixed-race people are more likely to have ambiguous phenotypic features, which makes it harder for their environment to classify them in established racial categories (Anastasi & Rhodes, 2006; Pauker et al, 2009; Shutts & Kinzler, 2007; Wright & Sladden, 2003 in Jobe, 2014). Consequently, ambiguous-looking Mixed-race individuals are more likely to be "othered" (Jobe, 2014) and considered to be part of the out-group as there is no single Mixed-race group to which they belong (Hermann, 2008, in Jobe, 2014).

Several studies have shown that a mixed-race individual's physical appearance (i.e. skin tone, hair colour and texture, nose and eye shape) strongly influences her or his identity (see Renn, 2004; Root, 2003; Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001 in Renn, 2008) and constitutes the base of identity itself (Jobe, 2014). As the definition and/or perception of race and ethnicity can vary in different countries throughout the world, this can impact the identity development of Mixed-race people in numerous ways (see Jackson, 2010; Jobe, 2014). International research on the experiences of Mixed-race individuals hence gives insight into how the specific social and political construct of race (and ethnicity) in one's environment affects their experiences as Multiracial persons and thus their identity development. Furthermore, an international comparison contributes to the overall understanding of the complexity of context (Jackson, 2010). For example, many US-American scholars use the racial categories Black, White, Asian, Native-American, and Hispanic (see e.g.

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[7] French
[8] Dutch

Jackson, 2010; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Sriken, Vargas, Wideman, Kolawole, 2014). However, the continent Asia consists of countries that are racially very diverse, such as Iran, India, Russia, and Lebanon. Yet, in the USA as well as in mainland Europe, an "Asian" person is associated with the phenotype widely found in South-East Asia (e.g. China, Japan, and Vietnam). In the UK on the other hand, "Asians" are being associated with the phenotype widely found in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (see Modood, 1983; Billig, in Fine, Weis, Pruitt, and Burns, 2004; the UK census, National Statistics, 2015) (see Appendix A). These examples show that racial categories are not lexicons of race but are used to measure the outcomes of individual identity development (Samuels, 2009).

Bearing in mind that race perception depends on so many aspects to the extent that even monoracial individuals receive different reactions (and treatments) in different contexts, those identified as Mixed-race have to deal with particularly contradicting perceptions of their environment due to their racial ambiguity. Indeed, there is a lot of research evidence, that due to the stress of navigating a Multiracial identity in society (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore and Catalano, 2006; Samuels, 2009 in Jackson, 2010), Mixed-race individuals have a greater risk to experience discrimination, struggle with mental health problems, show violent behaviour and/or use drugs than their non-multiracial peers (Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi and Barth, 2007; Choi, Harachi, Gillmore and Catalano, 2006; Jackson and LeCroy, 2009; Sanchez and Garcia, 2009; Udry, Li and Hendrickson-Smith, 2003 in Jackson, 2010). On the contrary, other studies also show that Mixed-race individuals are generally comfortable and happy with being Mixed (Binnings, Unzueta, Huo and Molina, 2009; Shih and Sanchez, 2005 in Jackson, 2010). In general, a positive Mixed-race identity is associated with good health. For instance, Multiracial individuals who are given the right to self-identify tend to have lower stereotype vulnerability and higher self-esteem (Bracey, Bamaca, and Umana-Taylor, 2004; Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck, 2007; Shih and Sanchez, 2004 in Renn, 2008).

Historically (in the USA), the concept of a racial identity that derives from a racialised self-perception only emerged in the 1950s (Ifekwunigwe 2004; Tizard and Phoenix 1994 in Samuels, 2009). Traditional identity development models were based on a linear process where one ideally feels positive about the racial category they are being ascribed to (see Cross 1991; Helms 1990; Phinney and Rotherham 1987 in Samuels, 2009). Within this framework, it is argued that there is a single healthy identity, which derives from an individual's racialised ancestry (Samuels, 2009). In contrast, contemporary researchers on mixed-race individuals, including the ones who suggest this typological framework, also claim that identities can be fluid and change across context (Harris and Sims 2000; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2000b in Samuels, 2009). Consequently, the use of typologies as racial categories can reconstruct the very term of identity that this framework initially rejects, i.e. that a racialised ancestry leads to fixed and predictable identity outcomes (Samuels, 2009). This idea that racial identity is linked to ancestry is particularly paradoxical when considering that inherited phenotypes can be completely independent from a person's racial and/or ethnic ancestry (Root, 1998 in Samuels, 2009). Burkey (1978 in Wallace, p.34) describes this catch-22 between racial self-concept through experiences and ascription of membership by racial ancestry as follows:

> "Racial identity refers to the dimension of a person's overall self-concept that is grounded in his or her experiences as a member of a broad racial group (…). A single racial group includes multiple ethnic groups and, traditionally, membership is ascribed by phenotype, or by genotype (racial ancestry), or both"

Against this background, Mixed-race people from the same ethnic background do not always share the same phenotype, and are ascribed identities based on their physical appearance rather than their actual heritage (Williams-Leo´n and Nakashima 2001 in Samuels, 2009). Consequently, even full biological Mixed-race siblings can identify differently on the basis of differences in phenotype (Song, 2010). Song (2010) found that racial thinking is so embedded in society that even within the same (Mixed-race) family, racial thinking is used by individuals to distinguish themselves from their family members. Thus, amongst other factors, phenotype is central to identity process as it is crucial for race perception (see Khanna, 2010 in Song, 2010). The everyday belief that "pure" races exist constrains the ways Mixed-race people are able to assert the ethnic and racial identity they desire (Song, 2003; Song and Hashem, 2010 in Song, 2010). In reality, as the emotional connection an individuals has to his or her racial identity is tied to their connection (inter alia) to their parents (Miville et al., 2005 in Jobe, 2014), Multiracial people's racial identity can range from identifying as monoracial to refusing to be put into a racial category entirely (Binning, Unzueta, Huo, & Molina, 2009; Cheng & Lee, 2009; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2000 in Olsen, 2012). As such, Mixed-race identity development is based on individual experience.

Samuels (2009) challenges the traditional model that a person should accept a racial identity based on their biological parents. Instead, the environment is seen as containing identity possibilities (Markus and Nurius 1986 in Samuels, 2009), which one then selects or rejects according to how peers, parents and communities make it available (Ezzy 1998; O'Toole; 1998; Waters 1990 in Samuels, 2009).

At this point, consider Belgium's colonial history and how it has given or denied Multiracial people the possibilities of racial identification. During the Belgian colonisation (1908-1960), the colonisers imposed a strong racial segregation between Black and White people. This segregation included the legalisation of Black women being raped whilst simultaneously prohibiting interracial marriages. In the face of mixophobia, Mixed individuals experienced a double exclusion from both Black and White communities (Jeurissen 2003, 2010 in Hennes, 2014). Most children born in the colonies were being referred to as "*mulâtres*" or «*métis de la colonisation* », were being abandoned by their white fathers and separated from their maternal families. Others integrated into Belgian society by re-joining their paternal families or in white host families (Pholien 1947 in Hennes, 2014). Briefly, during the colonisation, the restricted (or non existent) identity possibilities that (Black and White) Mixed people were given, mostly resulted in abandonment and exclusion from both social groups.

In contemporary Belgium, Mixed-race individuals are being referred to as *Métisse,* which is seen as a more empowering term as opposed to the pejorative term *"mulâtre" (*Hennes, 2014). The vast majority of participants of this study, confirmed that they embrace the term "métisse" as an identity option. Yet, all participants reported to have encountered restricted identity possibilities, which resulted in social exclusion in one form or another. This, in turn, has had an impact on how they identify racially and ethnically (either by

accepting the assigned identity or by rejecting it).

How someone's race is perceived can go beyond phenotype. Besides, factors like [perceived] ethnicity or name have a large impact on how an individual is categorised (Waters, 1990 in Sandefur, Campbell, Eggerling-Boeck, in Anderson, Bulatao, and Cohen, 2004). In addition, the hobbies one prefers or the way someone talks can also impact how their race is perceived (Olsen, 2012). Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* can be useful here. According to Bourdieu, habitus refers to the unconscious rules that are not inherent in human nature but have been constructed by a community with shared interests (Robbins, 1991 in in Fozdar, McGavin, 2016). It is the set of manners that an individual acquires during socialisation in a specific social milieu. These dispositions are unconscious and serve as an understanding of what is acceptable in every day practices and include language skills and cultural activities such as music, art and literature (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, 1993 in Fozdar, McGavin, 2016). Applying this theory to race perception, a Mixed-race person whose habitus is associated with Whiteness, will be perceived as White more often than a Multiracial individual whose habitus is (at least partly) not associated with Whiteness. Vice versa, if an observer associates an individual's habitus with a social group categorised as Non-white, the observer is more likely perceive that individual's race as Non-white.

In conclusion, as race perception is ever shifting, and racial identity is affected not only by how one perceives oneself but also how one is perceived by society (Khanna, 2010), Mixed-race people are oftentimes in particularly problematic situations. They constantly have to negotiate their own sense of self as a response to how they are being perceived by others. In fact, Rockquemore and Brunsma (e.g., 2001, 2002 in Jobe, 2014) found that an individual's belief of how someone else perceives them is more pertinent than what that other person actually perceives. Hence, if a Mixed individual perceives that another person is confused or disagrees with their race, this disagreement and/or confusion will be reflected in the Multiracial person's self.


## 3 CONCEPTUALISING RACISM

### 3.1 Whiteness

When speaking about race, one also needs to speak about Whiteness (Dei, 2013). The Mixed-race experience that is researched in this study can only be understood in comparison and positioning to White people.

According to Henry & Tator (2006), *Whiteness* is defined as

> "A social construction which has created a racial hierarchy that has shaped all the social, cultural, educational, political, and economic institutions of society. Whiteness is linked to domination and is a form or race privilege invisible to White people, who are not conscious of its power (p. 212)" (in Dei, 2013:122)

Moreover, Konyari (2013) asserts that the knowledge concerning Whiteness, i.e. *Euro-Colonial White Psychology/Logic (ECWP/L)* is so pervasive in the psyche of the White mind that it gives rise to a (sub)conscious *capacity* and *potentiality* to be racist in the face of the socio-historic problem to lose White privilege (Konyari, 2013 in Dei, 2013:124). Konyari further reiterates that this definition of ECWP/L does not essentialise Whites and/or defines them as racist (in Dei, 2013:124).

Whilst Konyari criticises white logic, he also reproduces this white supremacist knowledge to certain extent by reassuring that Whites are not being essentialised and/or defined as racist. This pressure to reinsure that whites are not racist, stems from an internalised dominance of what DiAngelo (2011) calls *White Fragility*.

> "White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation" (DiAngelo, 2011:1).

White Fragility emerges from an insulated social environment that protects whites as a racial group through institutions, dominant discourses, cultural representations, media, advertising, school textbooks, movies, etc. (DiAngelo, 2011). It is an environment where language about racism is coded in a way that maintains the illusion that race is something that concerns "them" (People of colour) but not "us" (White people).

Edward Said's piece on Orientalism (1977) is one example of how racialised categories are seen as something that concerns the "Other" but never concerns Whites. He examines how European (White) academics have gained strength and identity by producing a political and sociological image of the Orient when describing it, settling it, and imposing authoritative views upon it.

Another example of racially coded language is the fact that the term "ethnic" is mostly used to describe Non-whites, which simultaneously universalises and erases Whiteness and racialises People of colour as "Other" (Jensen, 2013 in Dei, 2013). Yet, the term "ethnic" is used as a synonym for "non-white" in international scientific articles (see e.g. Brown, 2015; Mears, 2011; Martiniello, 1993) as well as in the mainstream use of language. As such, the term "ethnic" is inter alia used as a means of commodification in the food selling business. For instance, in Liège, (the city in which I conducted most of the interviews) a supermarket chain called "Kausar Ethnic Market" sells food from countries that are not associated with Whiteness (see Kausar Ethnic Supermarket, n.d.).

These examples show how Whiteness becomes the "standard identity", within which Whites can see themselves as "normal", "natural", "neutral", and "objective" (Dei, 2013:4). This Eurocentric belief leads to a capability to dictate what is "valid" knowledge (Jensen in Dei, 2013:90).

Frankenberg (1993, in DiAngelo, 2011) concludes that Whiteness is multi-dimensional and can firstly be defined as structural advantage, i.e. race privilege. Secondly, it is a place from which Whites look at society, at themselves and others. Thirdly, Whiteness refers to cultural practices that are usually unnamed and unmarked. Against this background, Mixed-race people (who are mixed with white) have a specific position. Whilst their specific experiences in relation to Whiteness remains underresearched in academia, recent weblogs debunk Mixed-race people's specific positioning. This means, for example, occasionally having the privilege of being considered as an in-group member by White people (due to one's phenotype or cultural practices that is associated with Whiteness (see Sing, 2016) and hence being perceived as more beautiful than a monoracial person (see Reiko, 2015). Simultaneously, Mixed-race people are often racialised as the minority racial group due to their physical appearance that is not seen as White (see Sing, 2016, Fradet, 2017).

Whilst this knowledge on Whiteness emerges in the socio-historic context of the USA, I argue that the same applies for White people in Europe, including Belgium. Martiniello and Lafleur (2010 in Martiniello, 2014)

assert that there are similarities between Europe and the USA in terms of race and ethnicity as both continents are regions influenced by international migration. Yet, in most Western European countries, an explicit self-identification as White is considered awkward because it entails racial undertones (Essed, 2008). Although in Europe, "White" is not a formal category (Essed, 2008), power dimensions of Whiteness persist.

## 3.2    Structural racism

Having discussed the power dynamics of Whiteness, it is crucial to examine how it turns into institutionalised racism. Racism, as a system of oppression, works within structures and institutions of power that create advantages and disadvantages whilst distinguishing between the "self" (i.e. the White body) and "the other" (Dei, 2008 in Dei, 2013:37). People of colour are frequently being reminded in society that they are not White and hence are not part of the dominant group in society (Vargas, 2012).

Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing social, political, economic, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematise and uphold an unfair distribution of power, resources and privileges between White people and People of colour (Hilliard, 1992 in DiAngelo, 2011). Whilst this definition of racism acknowledges and marks the role of Whiteness in a system of oppression, other scientific definitions of racism are still racially coded in a way that it protects White feelings and upholds White invisibility, hence reproducing a White identity as a norm. Consider, for example, the definition of structural discrimination in employment by the ENAR (European Network against Racism):

> "It occurs when people are treated differently and less favourably because of certain characteristics, which are not related to their skills or the requirements of the job. This happens because the organisational systems were designed without taking into account the diverse needs of groups within the community in relation to e.g. their "race" or ethnicity, disability or gender"
> (Hieronymus, 2013:6)

Indeed, the ENAR refers to an organisational system that privileges the needs of one group over others, yet fails to name the role of the dominant group(s) in this dynamic (in the case of racism, that would be Whiteness).

This may due to the persistency in Europe to not name Whiteness and its power dimensions. The dominant view is that Europeans are White exclusively (Essed, 2008). Consequently, merely being a Belgian citizen does not prevent someone from being perceived as a foreigner and as "other" in everyday life. It also does not prevent one from the negative consequences that derive from this prejudice, including housing and labour market (Grégoire, 2013).

Nonetheless, most countries in Western Europe reject the idea that race hierarchies exist. Therefore, it is assumed that racism does not exist and is only a matter of a few extremist groups. Subtle forms of racism are either ignored or dismissed as "not racist" (Essed, 2008). This denial of the existence of racism within (Western) Europe finds its cumulating point in the belief that racism is an American thing (Essed, 2008).

Again, People of colour who are mixed with White hold a special position in this structure of racial oppression as they embody majority and minority racial identity status at the same time (Jobe, 2014). Just as Whiteness scholars have pointed out how institutions disadvantages People of colour (including Mixed-race people) in the USA and the UK, Mixed-race people in Belgium are also subjected to institutions that do not acknowledge their lived experiences. For instance, Hennes (2014) found that many Mixed individuals in Belgium are restricted in their identity development due to their lack of representation in the media, advertisement, or a representation that is limited to the stereotype of being the embodiment of the perfect reconciliation between two cultures and skin colours (see also Canclini, 1995 and Maisin, 2011 in Hennes, 2014). Hennes concludes that Mixed-race Belgians, particularly those of Belgian-Congolese descent, are constantly confronted with a society that not only excludes them but also pretends that they are non-existent. This is why *Métisse* in Belgium do not have a community network, as they do not share a particular socialisation. Some argue that the creation of a Mixed-race community would even be utopic as it would be difficult to find a common identification and objective amongst a group that is so heterogenic (Hennes, 2014).

### 3.3    Everyday Racism: Racial Microaggressions

Whilst I have outlined the dynamics of racial perception above, in the following, I will discuss more specifically and detailed the dynamics of everyday racism.

Contemporary racism manifests itself in more covert and indirect ways. In interpersonal encounters and relationships, Mixed-race people experience racism as a result of the construction of Whiteness as the norm. However, due to the public taboo of mentioning racism, and the aggressive response by most White Europeans, many People of colour are not aware of racism or lack the capacity to resist it. Often, they are told to be "oversensitive" when confronting Whites with racism (Essed, 2008). As such, racism is subtle and difficult to grasp. This form of racism has recently been conceptualised as *racial microaggressions*.

"Microaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientatation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, in Sue, 2010, p.5).

As microaggressions are constant and continuing throughout a lifespan, they can have negative consequences for marginalised groups in society, such as lower self-esteem, production of anger and frustration, production of physical health problems, and the denial of equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care (Brondolo et al., 2008; Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999; Franklin, 1999; King, 2005; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Liao, 2008; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; Yoo & Lee, 2008 in Sue,

2010). Similarly, Essed (2008) asserts that in Europe, everyday racism finds its most damaging form in the authority position of individuals who possess decision-making power to influence professional careers.

When applied to racism, the concept of microaggressions supports the idea that racism has become indirect, invisible and operates below conscious awareness (Sue, 2010). In other words, racial microaggressions can be compared to Dovidio and Gaertner's (1991, 1993, 1996, 2000 in Sue, 2010) theory of aversive racism: White people experience themselves as good and moral people who would never intentionally be racist. Yet, aversive racists still have unconscious attitudes that could lead to discriminatory actions.

Sue (2010) distinguishes three forms of microaggressions: *microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.* All forms can be verbal, nonverbal and/or environmental manifestations.

*Racial microassaults* refer to the conscious and deliberate biased attitudes towards People of colour. It is the form of racism that is portrayed in mainstream media and the one that is publicly associated with "true racism". The blatant nature of racial microassaults makes it easier for People of colour to deal with psychologically as the situation is not diluted by ambiguity (Sue, 2010). *Racial microinsults* are defined as messages that convey stereotypes and insensitivity, and that demean a person's heritage or racial identity. Microinsults mostly happen outside of the awareness of the perpetrator (Sue, 2010). Examples of racial microinsults are the ascriptions of intelligence and temper based on race or assigning the ability to dance or sing to a person of colour.

*Racial microinvalidations* are communications that exclude or negate the experiential reality of People of colour. They are potentially the most damaging form of microaggressions as they deny the reality of racial minorities. Sue (2010:37) concludes: "the power to impose reality upon marginalized groups represents the ultimate form of oppression".

The "What are you?" question (discussed in the introduction) and other questions that imply the message that a person of colour is a foreigner in one's own homeland are examples of microinvalidations. Jobe (2014:32) summarises Root's and Standen's viewpoint about the "What are you?" question as following:

> First it communicates confusion and "othering" on the part of the observer. Secondly, it communicates an expectation that the observed individual has an answer that is readily available and accessible for the observer. Feeling forced to choose a racial label can be potentially taxing to a multiracial individual.

Depending on how racially ambiguous their phenotype is, Multiracial people are confronted with the "What are you?" question regularly. Mostly, it comes unsolicited and with a marginalising and exotifying tone (Williams,1996 in Jobe, 2014).

The "othering" that is implied in the constant demand of explaining one's race can be categorised a racial microinvalidation on its own. "*Othering"* can be understood as "a process (…) through which identities are set up in an unequal relationship (Crang, 1998:61 in Brons, 2015). During the process of *Othering*, the self is being constructed to be a member of the in-group, whilst simultaneously the other is constructed as being part of the out-group. This construction creates an unequal opposition where the self/in-group is being associated with having some desirable characteristics, and the other/out-group is associated with some undesirable characteristics or the lack of desirable characteristics that the in-group has (Brons, 2015). Hence, *Othering*

creates a superior self and an inferior other. Yet, this value is almost always left implicit. The conclusion of *Othering* is to establish a distance between the self and the other by means of an over-inflation of the other, which is dehumanising. Thus, the other is not necessarily seen as inferior, but radically alien. These two effects of *Othering*, i.e. the construction of the inferior out-group and the radically alien out-group, serve to "justify" discrimination and social exclusion (Brons, 2015).

Other examples of racial microinvalidations are the pretense to be "colourblind" and claim that "there is only one race, the human race". This comment denies the racial experience of People of colour (Bonilla-Silva, 2005 in Sue, 2010), and is also intended as a defence to not appear racist (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008, in Sue, 2010), and/or to avoid discussing race issues at all (Sue, 2010). Another common microinvalidation is the denial of individual racism. Perpetrators communicate statements that imply that they are immune to racial biases and therefore deny the individual's racial experiences. To insist that one cannot be racist because he or she has a best Black friend, is such a comment.

When faced with microaggressions, People of colour often have difficulties with dealing with the situation. They have to devote all psychological energy to identify the truth, to protect themselves from insults and invalidations, and to figure out what actions they should take (Sue, 2010). The ambiguity of the situation makes it difficult for the recipient to know whether the incident was offensive or not. Even if it was an obvious microaggression, the recipient may be confused about how to respond. Oftentimes, the incident only lasts for a few seconds, which makes it difficult to respond in that very moment. In addition, individuals are often reluctant to respond because they are in a close relationship with the offender and cannot deal with the idea that a loved one may be unconsciously biased against them, and/or they are scared to accept that they are being perceived negatively. Finally, an individual may fear the consequences of speaking up. Often, standing up for oneself has minimal positive outcome or may make the situation even worse as the individual may be perceived as a troublemaker and be socially isolated. As a consequence, the recipient of a racial microaggression often ends up with anger and frustration (Sue, 2010).

The inhibitions that many People of colour experience when it comes to microaggressions can be explained by internalised racism. Internalised racism as a form of internalised oppression is rooted in *Othering*. Through stereotypes, images, symbols, myths, and ideologies the alleged inferiority of the subordinated other is viewed as "truth" in society. As these "truths" become common-sense knowledge, [racial] inequalities are legitimised and naturalised (see, Gramsci, 1971 in Pyke in Elliott, Payne and Ploesch, 2007). Hence, the dominant subject gets the subjugated to reproduce structural beliefs and practices that naturalise the supremacy of the dominant class to the extent where privilege, subjugation and oppressive practices are normalised to the extent that they go unnoticed (Kandiyoti 1988; Sa'ar, 2005 in Pyke in Elliott, Payne and Ploesch, 2007). This veil of normalcy leads members of the subordinated group to participate in social arrangements that result in a subtle dynamic of internalised oppression (Pyke in Elliott, Payne and Ploesch, 2007).

Whilst Sue does not include specifically the mixed-race experience in his theory, Johnston and Nadal (2010, in Nadal et al., 2014) suggest that there are five categories of microaggressions that multiracial people experience as a particular group. (1) *Exclusion or Isolation* happens when an individual is excluded because of being mixed-race. For example, his Black family is telling a person who is mixed with Black and White that he is not Black enough. (2) *Exoticization and Objectification* occurs when a mixed-race person is dehumanised by being treated like an object (e.g. being asked "What are you?"). When applied to the Mixed-race experience, exoticization and objectification can be categorised into three themes: *Race on display, Sexual objectification*, and *Objectifying Mixed-raced people as the "racialised ideal".* As to the objectification of being the "racialised ideal", participants of Nadal's study described to have strong negative reactions to being idealised and put on a pedestal of being the "perfect melting pot". (3) The third category of microaggressions experienced my Mixed-race people is the *Mistaken Identity to be monoracial*. For example, a Mixed-race individual may overhear a joke about one of her racial groups because the people in her environment do not know she is part of that group. (4) *Denial of Multiracial Reality* describes when a mixed-race person's experiences are invalidated, for example when being told to stop being so sensitive about race. (5) *Pathologising of Identity and Experiences* occurs when a Multiracial individual's identity is viewed as abnormal (e.g. being told that one "has issues" because she is Multiracial).

In conclusion, Multiracial people face identity development challenges that their monoracial peers do not (Gillem et al., 2001; Logan, 1981; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002 in Jobe, 2014). This is mainly because Mixed-race individuals oftentimes define themselves differently compared to how the world defines them (see e.g. Jobe, 2014) and because of a societal paradigm that assumes the monoracial experience to be the norm (Olsen, 2012). Hence, the microaggression of having one's identity mistaken to be monoracial occurs.

As for the impact on racial identity development, Sin (2012 in Dei, 2013) states that the more one experiences racism, the more one is obliged to detach or embrace his or her racial identity. I also observed this phenomenon in this study; most participants went through phases where they particularly embraced or detached themselves from a racial identity associated with minority status.

## 4　THE MIXED-RACE EXPERIENCE

### 4.1　Mixed-race identity development theories

To begin with, a general definition of the concept *Identity* is helpful in order to comprehend mixed-race identity in particular. Identities are acquired through social interactions (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1980 in Jobe, 2014). Erikson (1968 in Jobe, 2014) claims that a stable development of feeling of uniqueness emerges by differentiating oneself from others. Thus, identity development does not happen in a vacuum, but is dependent on social influence. Specifically, racial identities arise from both the social conception of race and

the claiming of a particular group membership (Jobe, 2014). In other words, racial identity is a negotiated process between the individual and society (Khanna, 2010).

Traditional identity approaches used to theorise the Mixed-race experience as pathology. For example, Stonequist (1937, in Lavia, S. Mahlomaholo, 2012) suggests that multiracial are in psychological uncertainty between different social worlds, and are temperamental, moody, and irrational. He further asserts that Multiracial individuals who choose to resist assimilation into either of their social groups would experience distress (Stonequist 1937, in Lavia, S. Mahlomaholo, 2012).

In order to counteract these oppressive models on Mixed-race identity, recent models have been developed in order to both comprehend better the dynamics of identity development and to find out what aspects constitute positive identities for Mixed people. These newer models provide fluid concepts of how the interconnection of the individual (i.e. self-esteem, phenotype), the interpersonal (i.e. relationship with family and peers), and the environmental (i.e. homogeneity of the community) have an impact on Mixed-race people's identity development (Root, 2003 in Jobe, 2014).

Also, recent theories assert that the racial identity of Mixed-race people are not static but can change throughout their lifetimes (Jackson, 2010). Likewise, Mahtani (2002 in Olsen, 2012) asserts that people who identify as Mixed-race consider this identification as a flexible label, which negotiates the essentialism that comes with this form of identity categorisation.

In her study, Jackson (2010) conceptualises five major themes that challenge the Mixed-race experience: (1) shifting racial/ethnic expressions; (2) racial/ethnic ambiguity; (3) racial resistance; (4) feeling like an outsider; and (5) seeking community. These themes serve to explain the dynamics within which Mixed-race individuals react to the structural racism of constantly being racialised.

As to the theme *shifting racial/ethnic expressions,* Jackson found that all of the participants of her study described changing the expression of their racial identity in different periods of their lives and/or depending on the social environment. Jackson found three reasons as to why multiracial individuals shift their racial expression. Firstly, they try to align with their interpretation of the other person's racial identity. Secondly, it is an attempt to make the other person (or group) feel more comfortable. And thirdly, it is a reaction to the environmental pressure to claim membership in a certain monoracial group.

Regarding the theme *racial/ethnic ambiguity,* Jackson (2010) found that Mixed-race people often find their racial identity questioned due to their racial and/or ethnic ambiguity (i.e. hair texture, skin complexion, eye colour etc.). Oftentimes, they are assumed to be monoracial. Olsen (2012) asserts that this racial ambiguity leads to Multiracial individuals not only having to mediate confusion and endure that their own identity is being used against them, but also are asked to proof authenticity when claiming a racial identity. Identity claims are often linked with the hegemonic notion of authenticity. This very authenticity then serves as a barometer for determining whether an individual belongs to certain spaces and places in both material and symbolic terms (Surajbali, 2013 in Dei, 2013). As this search for authenticity is often connected with culture, many Mixed-race individuals are left wondering to fulfil an image of cultural practices because they constantly

are bombarded with questions about a culture that they never had contact to (Olsen, 2012). Along with appearance, cultural knowledge is another factor that provoke questions of legitimacy, authenticity, and fitting in (Renn, 2000, 2004; Wallace, 2003 in Renn, 2008). In this context, it is necessary to acknowledge that the individual itself does not operate alone in their identity development (Renn, 2008). Wijeyesinghe (2001 in Renn, 2008) asserts that the social and historical context matters in choice of racial identity.

A common reaction to this race questioning is *racial resistance.* Jackson (2010) states that many Multiracial individuals resist social racial conventions by purposely avoiding answering questions about their correct racial background. I want to point out here that Jackson's statement assumes that there is such thing as a "correct" racial and/or ethnic background and that therefore nobody can "deny" their racial and/or ethnic heritage. In fact, if individuals were given the right to self-identify even within the socio-political and historical context of racial categories, then no individual can "deny" their racial heritage, as one's self-conception is always right and legitimate, no matter the individual or environmental context. The idea that a "correct" racial identity exists derives from (racial) essentialism. In traditional identity models, racial essentialism is prevalent, meaning that through biological determinism, one's "most healthy" identity is the one that matches their racialised ancestry (as discussed above) (Samuels, 2009). Nevertheless, Jackson's choice of wording to describe *racial resistance* proves that biological determinism is still present in recent Multiracial research. It is crucial that empirical Multiracial research challenges this biological determinism and stops theorising certain identities as inherently healthy or predictable and deriving from a racial essence (Samuels, 2009).

Jackson found that racial resistance is often used to "educate" (often in a patronising way) prejudiced people. Individuals react with racial resistance not because they question their own identity, but because they question the convention why they are obliged to answer questions about their racial/ethnic identity all the time (Jackson, 2010). In contrast, Olsen's study (2012) notes that many Mixed-race individuals express being confused about their own identity as a consequence of constantly being questioned about it. Therefore, I will pay particular attention in this study as to how Mixed-race individuals perceive racial questioning and what the motives are if racial resistance occurs.

Moreover, in Jackson's study, all of the participants described *feeling like an outsider* because they had a different physical appearance, culture and/or beliefs than their peers.

As to the aspect *seeking community,* Jackson found that the Multiracial individuals in her study actively sought peers who could relate to their experiences of being different in society. Participants travelled both domestically and internationally, or made use of the Internet in order to find like-minded people.

Whilst Jackson outlines both positive and negative aspects that occur whilst negotiating a Mixed-race identity, Root (1990 in Renn, 2008) suggests four resolutions that can potentially counteract the tensions of Mixed-race identity and lead to psychological well-being. Firstly, the individual accepts the identity that society assigns to them. This behaviour often takes place when the individual has a supportive family and a strong alliance with the racial (minority) group, which others assume the individual most belongs to.  Secondly, the

Mixed-race person may identify with both racial groups. This depends on the societal support as well as personal ability to maintain this identity when facing resistance from others. Thirdly, the individual may identify with a single racial group, independently from social pressure. Fourthly, Root suggests the identification as a new racial group. Although the individual may move amongst racial groups, he or she identifies mostly with other Mixed-race persons, regardless of what exactly their racial background is. Renn (2008) adds a fifth resolution, namely an extra-racial identity by deconstructing race, or by refraining of identifying with racial categories at all. Just as in Jackson's theory, this behaviour represents a racial resistance to the categories that were socially constructed by the White majority. Renn (2008) also found that the option to accept the identity that society assigns to the individual is constrained because others may not interpret their physical appearance in the same way.

In summary, Renn's and Jackson's propositions of positive identities amongst mixed-race people derive from an idea that identity is ever-evolving. Chopra statement about Mixed-Race identity summarises this idea perfectly: "Identity is performed, shifted, filtered, interpreted and composed of complex, multiple, overlapping and contradictory subjectivities and affiliations" (Chopra: 2004:22 in Dei, 2013:102).

## 4.2 Intersectionality: Mixed-Race Women

As aforementioned, race does not stand in a vaccuum but interacts with other aspects. Therefore, I use *intersectionality* as a theoretical framework in order to acknowledge that several aspects of social identity intersect with one another. When talking about intersectionality, I refer to Choo's and Ferree's (2010 in Jones, Misra, and McCurley, 2010) relational model. This model suggests that two statuses (e.g. race and gender) interact with one another, rather than additively affecting one's life.

Amongst others, race correlates with gender (Essed, 2008). Root (1990 in Renn, 2008) found that gender differences among Mixed-race youth can alleviate or exacerbate the impact of racial discrimination.

More specifically, Mixed women experience simultaneously racism and sexism as the images of Mixed women are often presented as commodities to consume (Streeter, 1996 in Wallace, 2001). Their presentation is linked to sexuality, beauty, intelligence, group alliances, wealth and femininity (Mahtani, 2014).

Historically, Mixed-race women have been called "*exotic*" – a term that has both positive and negative connotations. Yet, the term exotic always has a sexual connotation. On the one hand, it has been used in order to sexually objectify women who supposedly are "different" from other women. On the other hand, there is a suggestion that women who are associated with the term "exotic" are physically attractive in a different way than other women (Root, 2004 in Gillem and Thompson, 2004). As historically, women's worth has been attached to their physical appearance, Mixed-race women have been more subjected to suspicion and jealousy in heterosexual relationships than Multiracial men (Root, 1990a in Root, 2004 in Gillem and Thompson, 2004). When it comes to dating, Mixed-race women are often considered attractive due to their "exotic" looks, or because it is believed they have "the best of both worlds" (Gillem and Thompson, 2004). In a heteronormative

society, men often want to date Mixed-raced women because it is a "safe" option to cross cultural boundaries since these women share partly their racial heritage. This idea comes from a racist and sexist perspective, which classifies Mixed-race women's physical features as "exotic", and then generalises this idea to personality stereotypes (Hall in Gillem and Thompson, 2004). For example, Latina, Black, and Arab women, as well as many other racial groups that present women of colour, are stereotyped to be "hot-blooded" or "having a lot of temper", whilst White women are considered to have little or "the normal" amount of temper. Yet, since Whiteness is the norm, the latter stereotype is rarely directly communicated; and in case it is actually explicitly stated, this happens only in a context where it is a reaction, or a comparison to the explicitly stated stereotype of the Non-white, "other" woman. Hence, a Mixed-race woman is often seen as "hot-blooded" enough to be interesting and exciting for the male consumption, but still "normal" enough to not be seen as an alien threat. These stereotypes do not allow Mixed-race women their individuality (Gillem and Thompson, 2004).

As already mentioned, in Johnston and Nadal's study (2010, in Nadal et al., 2014), all participants (men and women) reported being asked by strangers about their race due to their unique phenotypes. They talked about being sexually objectified because of their physical appearance and the fact that they are Mixed-race (e.g. being called "exotic" or "hybrid" as a pick-up line). Both White people and people of minority monoracial groups were perpetrators of this sexual objectification. Whilst all participants reported to have experienced to be sexualised and simultaneously exotified, only the women explained being frustrated in such situations, whilst the male participant described to not be bothered about it (Nadal, 2010, in Nadal et al., 2014). Likewise, Mahtani (2014) found in her study that many Mixed-race women find themselves confronted with the stereotype that all Mixed-race women are beautiful, which many Mixed women find problematic.

Ifekwunigwe's (2004) assertion of being exotified and simultaneously sexualised, is an adequate summary of Mixed women's reality. Mixed-race women are often seen as "more beautiful" due to their White ancestry, yet "other" enough to be a "sex maniac" in the White male gaze (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). This picture of Mixed women is also depicted in Hollywood filming, where these women represent simultaneously the margins of Whiteness and the racial Other (Brown, 2015). They are racially "Other" enough to be different enough in physical skills, temperament and sexuality, but white enough to even out these racially "problematic" [*my own quotation marks*] traits (Brown, 2015).

## 5    RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1    Qualitative Research: Semi-structured Interviews

I carried out qualitative research as a means to conduct more in-depth and context-specific data about human experience than a quantitative approach, which examines human life numerically (in statistics) (Marvasti, 2004). Quantitative researchers (positivists) claim that social facts can be objectively observed and measured via standard methods and procedures, from where ultimate laws about human behaviour can be

derived (Popper, 1959 in Obaro and Omoyibo, 2012). As the experiences of Mixed individuals are very unique, I do not believe that their life experiences can be summed up and measured with analytical statistics. Hence, I decided to obtain people's own reports of situations and events of being Mixed-race. More specifically, I carried out face-to-face interviews in order to decode their perspectives and feelings. By means of the interviews, I interpreted the participants' subjective state, i.e. their motives, beliefs, values and consciousness (Obaro and Omoyibo, 2012). The interviews were semi-structured; i.e. the questions were structured sufficiently to address the participants' experiences of everyday racism, whilst simultaneously leaving space for the interviewees to offer new themes and meaning as regards to the topic (Galletta, 2013).

I started off with lean questions, such as "Tell me your life story about being mixed-race" and "What does every day racism mean to you?" in order to allow the participants to speak freely about their experiences rather than imposing theoretical aspects to think about (see Appendices D.a) and D.b)).

The very first question is based on the life story interviewing approach. I asked the participants to tell their life stories starting from their earliest childhood memories. As a qualitative research method across disciplines, life story interviewing serves to gather information from a person's whole life. Sociologists use this approach to comprehend and define relationships, memberships, and group interactions (Bertaux 1981; Linde 1993 in Atkinson, 1998). Although no interview can be perfectly controlled, there are still certain means to what extent the life story interview is reliable and valid. If a certain set of questioning leads to the same answers whenever and wherever it is carried out, it is a sign of reliability (Atkinson, 1998).

Finally, the life story interview can clarify a social reality outside the individual story (Bertaux, 1981 in Atkinson, 1998) and help explain the story as a social construct (Rosenthal 1993 in Atkinson, 1998). Therefore, it is useful to distinguish between *life as lived* (the occurrences that touch an individual's life), *life as experienced* (how the individual perceives what happens and ascribes meaning to it, based on his or her experiences and cultural repertoire), and *life as told* (how experience is communicated in a specific context and to a specific audience) (Bruner, 1986 in Eastmond, 2007). At this point, the power relationship between the narrator (the interviewees) and the listener (me, the researcher) needs to be acknowledged. Indeed, which events are remembered and told depends on the situation and is shaped by the relationship between narrator and listener (e.g. Crapanzano 1980; Skultans 1999 in Eastmond, 2007). As such, my own racial identity and cultural repertoire (described in section 5.7.2) has shaped the dialogue we had about the participants' lived experiences. Ultimately, a fourth level of the relationship between the interviewees and me as a researcher can be identified, namely *life as text,* which refers to the researcher's representation and interpretation of the story (Eastmond, 2007). In other words, the findings of this study represent the reality that was created via the interaction between the participants and me.

In a second instance of the semi-structured interview, I asked more specific questions, such as "Can you give a specific example of a situation where you ascribed yourself an ethnic/racial identity?". This way, I could examine to what extent the participants' identity development process can be compared to the theories

outlined in the literature review. Following Burawoy et al.'s advice (1991 in Samuels, 2009), I chose theories that are more likely to be improved rather than be rejected: The development of Mixed-race identity is largely dependent on their phenotype, how their environment perceives that phenotype and treats them accordingly. Their racial and ethnic identities are also dependent on how they react to racial microaggressions. Finally, Mixed-race individuals' identities are not static and can change throughout their lifetimes.

## 5.2    Interview population

I interviewed Mixed-race individuals whose intersecting identities are mostly the same, i.e. all of the participants are cis-gender, aged between 18 and 28 (young adults), and able-bodied. In total, I interviewed 14 individuals (7 women and 7 men). I chose a relatively small sample in order to collect in-depth data as well as being able to conduct a detailed analysis.

As I was searching for participants mostly in my own environment, 10 out of 14 were high-school or university students. 3 participants have already finished their university education and one interviewee has completed vocational training. 9 interviewees live in Liège and surroundings, 3 are from Brussels, one is from Arlon, and one lives in Gent.

All of the participants were born to one White Belgian parent and one parent of colour and have experienced situations where they self-identified as *Métisse (Mixed-race).* Their self-identification of being Mixed-race (at least in some contexts) has been evident from the very beginning of the interview process because they had responded positively to my enquiry of whether I could interview them about their Mixed-race identity. In addition, their Mixed-race identity became even more apparent during the interview process.

## 5.3    Participant Recruitment

I availed myself of my own social network in order to find participants for the study. Although I do not use digital networks (e.g. facebook), I found many participants via my friends and acquaintances who spread my recruitment flier (see Appendix B) via digital networks. Also, I published the flier on *myulg,* the university's online BlackBoard. In addition, I printed the flier and hung it all over the university buildings. After each interview, I asked each participant if he or she knew other Métisses who would want to participate in the study. Two of the participants are my own acquaintances (one colleague from the restaurant I work in and one peer from the university's hiking club I am a member of).

In the beginning of the recruitment, I was only searching individuals who were born and grew up in francophone Belgium. However, when I was having difficulties to find enough participants, I broadened the participation conditions and accepted to conduct interviews with Mixed-race individuals who were born

outside of Belgium. I also changed the participation conditions to Mixed-race individuals who (partly) grew up in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium. This was necessary as I interviewed 3 participants from Brussels who speak French and Dutch. Even though some of participants have lived outside of Belgium, the vast majority grew up in Belgium. All of the participants have in common to have lived in Belgium at least during the last five years.

## 5.4 Data Collection and Coding

The interviews took place either at my private accommodation, at the university, or in a public café, depending on what the participants preferred. Before I started an interview, I briefly told the participant about my own ethnic and racial identities and how it relates to my family situation. This way, I was more likely to be seen as an insider researcher (see below) and gain the participants' trust. I audio-recorded the interviews and took notes when necessary.

As the semi-structured interviews consists of two parts, namely the life-story interview (first question) and the more specific questions that are based on the literature review (questions 2-10), I availed myself of a different data analysis approach for each part of the semi-structured interview.

As to the life story interview, I used the *paradigmatic type of narrative inquiry* (Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach identifies categories of the life story (in this case, the participants' life stories as regards to their experiences as being Mixed-race) and hence produces knowledge of concepts. Using this method, I looked for correlational and influential relationships between the defined categories. One type of the paradigmatic analysis is the *inductive* approach. This means the researcher derives concepts directly from the data rather than imposing previous theories (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this study, four themes emerged out of the data, namely *Dynamic and fluid identities by means of autonomous self-identification*[9], *Acceptance of the social order due to internalised community discourse, Confusion and opposing perspectives, and Self-Healing.*

With regard to the coding of the second part of the data collection (interview questions 2-10), I used Burawoy's (1998, in Samuels, 2009) extended case method in order to theorise Mixed-race identity development. The extended case method epistemologically reflects the methodological challenges of Multiracial scholarship that is pursuing to be simultaneously non-essentialist and structurally grounded. Samuels (2009) derives from that approach the application of three elements when researching Mixed-race identity development:

1) use of fluid concepts of race and identity;
2) conducting multi-systemic analyses; and
3) using interpretative findings to extend existing theory
(Samuels 2009: pp. 1599).

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[9] Although the idea that Mixed-race identities are flexible is already mentioned in the literature review, the new emerging theme specifies particularly that identities shift along with an individual's feeling of autonomy to self-identify.

This approach develops theory by analysing the diversity of an experience and linking these outcomes onto pre-existing theories. Taking into account that individual experiences can both resist and reify social structures, the extended case method includes the reciprocal relationship between the individual experience and the broader social, economic and political environment (Burawoy et al. 1991 in Samuels, 2009). In other words, I acknowledge the interconnection between the concepts of race and ethnicity during the analysis. In addition, I compared the theory on Mixed-race identity development (mainly from the USA) to the findings from my own data collection (Belgium) by taking into account multi-dimensional structures, such as internalised community discourse, the intersection of race and gender, and family socialisation.

## 5.5    Interview Process

Just as Samuels' (2009) study, I used more dynamic and fluid interview questions, such as "What are all the ways you identify racially and ethnically?" in order to leave space for the fluidity of the participants' racial and ethnic identities. Yet, as the idea that identities are fluid and dynamic is not as widely present in Belgian discourse at it is in the USA and the UK, this phrasing of the question confused most participants. I realised during the first three interviews that especially the formulation "all the ways" (*toutes les façons*) was too vague. I had to clarify that this question stems from the idea that identities are fluid and that they can vary depending on the environment and the context. Starting from the fourth interview, I directly gave this explanation along with the question itself, which lead to a better understanding about what the participants were questioned.

Another challenge was the issue of translation of the English words "*race"* and "*racially"* into French ("*race"* and "*raciale"*). Although these words translate easily in a literal sense, their connotations and use in both formal and informal language differs a lot. In French, the words "race" and "raciale" are used much less often than in English as it is associated more intensely with a biological nature (Lentin and Amiraux, 2013).

As I noticed during the first few interviews that these words made the participants feel uncomfortable, I removed these words from my vocabulary. I also noticed that most participants used the terms "ethnicity" "nationality", "culture" and "origins" interchangeably. In order to adjust my vocabulary to the participants' discourse, I rephrased my questions and comments. I described the concept of ethnic identity as "identity in terms of culture" and the concept of racial identity as "identity in terms of origins and ancestry".

## 5.6    Ethical concerns

As racism is a sensitive topic, I assured that the participants' well-being was protected. Consent-forms, which informed about the purpose of the study and my contact details, were given to the interviewees (see Appendix C). The forms also served to ask the participants for their consent that the interviews were being

recorded. Before conducting the interview, I informed each participant that he or she had the right to refuse answering questions that made him or her feel uncomfortable. The participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms in order to keep their identity anonymous.

Finally, following Pack's advice, I allowed the participants to read and critique the final version of what I had written about their narratives in order to avoid a power dynamic where I as a researcher have more control about what is being written about the individuals than them (Pack, 2012; Rose, 1990:38 in Pack, 2012). Also in order to protect the participants' autonomy, I tried my best to not describe observations of the "other". Instead, the findings derive from the interactions with the participants (Burawoy et al. 1991; Burawoy 1998 in Samuels, 2009). During the interview I frequently summarised the interviewees' answers to enable them to confirm or disapprove my understanding of what they wanted to express.

## 5.7    Positionality

### 5.7.1    Mixed-race researcher as an Insider and Outsider

Researchers, including myself, are not passive observers. They do not simply collect data but actively construct the data they collected (Creswell, 1994; Gordon et al., 2000 in Obaro and Omoyibo, 2012). Therefore, I did not separate the personal from the data (Bruner, 1993:4, in Pack, 2012), as I do not *have to* keep an objective distance from the participants in order to produce collaborative knowledge (Samuels, 2009). According to the postmodernists approach, researchers are not able to discover the objective truth about society. Rather, the social world can be examined from different points of views. From there, existing explanations of society can be taken apart or deconstructed, i.e. researchers are left with many different accounts of the social world, where no particular view can be labeled as better than others (Obaro and Omoyibo, 2012).

Against the background that I collected, constructed, and produced data from my own subjective viewpoint, it is necessary to examine to what extent I am an insider and/or outsider when interviewing Mixed-race individuals.

There is a risk that the complexities of being Mixed-race limit the applicability of the insider/outsider dynamic: A researcher's phenotype can destabilise them from being an insider as they can have very different racial identities and experiences from the study participants based on the dominant features of their physical appearance (Mohan and Chambers, 2010, in Olsen, 2012). Indeed, I interviewed many *Métisses* who identify as Black in a given context, or who are labelled Black by their environment due to their phenotype. As I am a conditionally White passing Mixed-race individual without ancestry that has been racialised as Black, I was an outsider when participants talked about their experiences that are specific to being (partly) Black (e.g. the encounters they had with others due to their hair structure). However, in other situations we had common grounds, which shifted the dynamic of me being insider. For example, many participants reported being

excluded from their own ethnic group(s) due to the fact that their phenotype was considered the determiner of whether they belong.

Whilst bearing in mind the insider/outsider dynamic, it is recommended that the researcher is Multiracial as it can increase the participants' comfort level during the interview, which allows them to share more relevant and personal information (Root, 2002).

Although multiracial researchers are not free of bias, our lived experience is a potentially valuable perspective, rather than an automatic bias that needs to be controlled (Samuels, 2009). Therefore, in order to enhance the reliability of this study, I acknowledged unexpected variance during fieldwork and did not assume a shared experience with race (Samuels, 2009). Furthermore following Samuel's advice, I avoided assuming a biological determinism to interpret identity claims as pathological or healthy. I made myself aware that my own experiences are not universal and that hence it is necessary to be accepting of any identity that my participants would claim for themselves.

### 5.7.2 My own racial identity development

It is often assumed within controversial fields, that a researcher's choice of topic is a reflection of her or his stance, or that there is a "widely-held, though often un-stated belief that what a field researcher studies, to some degree, reflects his or her personal values, interests or preoccupations" (Jacobs, 2006: 166).

This statement also applies to me. Yet, I state the usually un-stated belief. As a self-identifying Mixed-raced individual, I use auto-ethnography as a means to explain the relevance of this autobiographic data in relation to the research process (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2016). By telling and analysing my own life story, I explain how my lived experiences have influenced my own Mixed-race identity development as well as my perspective as regards to how I chose to design the interview questions and to interpret the data (see Chang, Ngunjiri, Hernandez, 2016).

I grew up as the youngest of three daughters of a single mother. My father, a person of colour, had abandoned the family before I was born and has never come back to this day. Whilst this situation was and is in itself a traumatic experience, being Mixed-race complicates it even more. I did not know what my father looked like, nor his name. I was not allowed to ask my mother any questions about him. Yet, she enjoyed the attention and proudly displayed me whenever strangers questioned her as to why I was "so brown" compared to her.  As my parents were married initially and my mother took on her partner's surname, I bear a typically (White) German first name and a surname that is not associated with Whiteness. But what I find to be the most striking trouble of my racial experience is the fact that I am the only Person of colour in my family. My mother has light blonde hair, green eyes and very pale skin. Despite having the same biological parents, my two sisters look completely White, one having blonde hair and blue eyes. Whilst I am acknowledging the essentialist character of referring to biological ancestry, this family situation has shaped my worldview and my

understanding of racism tremendously. Already at a very young age, I was very aware that I was treated differently than my sisters based on my skin colour. By the time I was 8 years old, I was aware of the community discourse in which terms like "migrant", "foreigner" and "person with a migration background" are racially coded words to refer to people of colour almost exclusively. I was particularly frustrated and angry when faced with the reality that my sisters never had to deal with being called a "foreigner" in their own homeland (and hence also being treated as commodities), although they have the same ancestors as me and grow up in the same house as me. Even worse, when watching the news or talking about the "integration problems" of "people with a migration background", my family members engaged in this kind of discourse without realising that they were talking with me about an "other"-group that I belonged to but not them. At times, my family as well as other people in my environment talked to me as if I was in their in-group because I am conditionally white passing. Yet, in other situations I was made aware that my physical appearance does not represent the norm.

The following anecdotes will exemplify how I developed a strong Mixed-race identity I hold today.

*Gronau, Germany, 1995*

It was summer and as a child 5-year-old, I had been playing outside all day long. Whilst I was minding my own business, my 8-year-old sister, Lisa[10], came up to me, shouting: "You're *so tanned!* Look at you, *you're sooo brown! Quick,* go and see mom!" My sister was shouting at me out of the blue and in such a hysterical voice that I got scared, not knowing whether my brownness was a good or a bad thing. And when she repeated herself even more hysterically, I ran home as fast as I could, hoping my mom would resolve the situation and tell me what was going on with me. My sister followed me, and when we got into the kitchen where my mother was cooking, my sister presented me in an exhibiting way: "Look at Anna-Lena, she's *sooo brown*!" My mother turned around, smiled at me, and responded: "Wow, how beautiful". Instantly, my fear and confusion turned into pride. I was just told that my skin colour made me particularly beautiful and special. Still excited about the situation, Lisa told me to walk upstairs and show our 12 year-old sister, Caroline[11], how "tanned" I was. We got upstairs to her room and again, I was presented as if I was an exhibition object: "Look, how *brooown* she is!". Proudly, I showed my two arms, expecting my oldest sister to be fascinated just as my mother was. Caroline came close to me; she had a severe expression on her face. She wiped her hand along my cheek and said in a cold voice: "You're not brown, you're dirty. You need to wash yourself".

I was in shock. Three minutes ago I felt particularly beautiful because of my skin colour, and now my brownness was compared to mud. I wiped my face, but I couldn't see any dirt on my hands. I remember I wanted to go to the bathroom, wash myself, and proof a point to my sister. But I was frozen.

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[10] Pseudonym
[11] Pseudonym

This event between my family members and me is illustrative for the fetishisation and ostracism I have had to endure due to my olive skin colour. On the one hand, I am told that I am particularly beautiful as my otherness is supposed to make me special. The associations that arise in people's minds when they hear about my racial ancestry lead them to fetishize over an "exotic" idea of a "particularly rare mix" that they equate with my entire personhood. On the other hand, I am deemed unappealing and my existence is seen as a threat to German *Leitkultur* (core culture), especially in the face of being mistaken as Turkish[12]. The idea that my mere physical appearance is inherently "different" in itself is one aspect of my identity that has led me to experience countless incidents of being "othered" (both in a "positive" and negative way). Another factor that leads to my "otherness" is the assumed "cultural difference" and ethnic identity that is associated with my phenotype. Although I never used to identify myself as Mixed-race whilst growing up, I could not escape the reality that my own self-image of my ethnic identity did not match the image that other people had of me. I remember clearly one of the striking incidents that stuck with me.

*Gronau, Germany, 1997*

It was a sunny spring day when I walked home from primary school. I was walking on the pavement as a man tried to cross the street and stumbled across me because he hadn't seen me passing by. He stopped. "Excuse me", I said. The man looked at me and responded: "Where are you coming from?". I was bewildered. I felt like this complete stranger was talking to me as if I knew him. I looked more closely at him, trying to figure out where I could possibly know him from. After starring at him for a while, I still couldn't detect who he was, or if I knew him. Yet, I still felt obliged to answer his question. *From school,* I wanted to say, but then I realised that I was wearing my schoolbag and that hence it was obvious that I just finished school. I speculated about what answer the man was looking for, and I finally I figured he wanted to know which town I was from. "Gronau", I responded. The stranger shook his head: "No, I mean your *home!".* I got even more confused when I understood that the name of my hometown was still not the answer the man was looking for when asked about my home. I kept thinking of a different answer, and as the man saw my confused facial expression, he reiterated: "Where are you *at home?"* I named my address, feeling helpless and scared as a 7-year old on my own and being asked private questions from a complete strange man. The man became impatient and rephrased: "No, I mean what language do your mom and dad speak at home?" I thought about how my mother spoke Low German when my aunt came to visit us, and how I disliked hearing their conversations and not being able to understand what they were talking about. I was afraid the man would assume I understood the regional Low German, too. Therefore, I replied: "Just German". As a response, the man walked away without saying a word, leaving me wondering what this dialogue was supposed to be about.

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[12] In Germany, Turks, or German Turks are seen as an ethnic/racial group that has particular problems to „integrate" into German society and are hence amongst the ethnic/racial groups that are the least accepted in Germany (Crossland, 2012).

If I had known back then what the encounter was all about, it would have ruined my day. This anecdote is a prime example of one form of the everyday racism that has largely impacted my racial identity I claim today. It illustrates the power dimension of radically being categorised as "Other" in public spheres. As I was going on my daily routine, a complete stranger felt the need to categorise me the second he meets me. The radicalness of "Othering" became particularly apparent in the moment the stranger left without even saying a word to me once he was done trying to figure out "what" I was: Not only was I immediately categorised the very moment our paths crossed, but also it was the stranger's *only* interest of interacting with me.

As time went by, stories like this one accumulated. I soon experienced frequently being asked private questions about my family and my assumed ethnic identity. I used to politely respond. I always felt ashamed when I was coerced to tell a complete stranger that I was a fatherless child. Even worse, the questioners almost never showed any compassion for my family situation, as they were too busy fetishising about an "exotic" idea of where I was "really" from. Oftentimes I experienced people getting angry with me when I could not tell them anything about my father or about a culture that they insisted I should feel connected to. I found it painful to be racialised and having to explain why I look the way I do and to be assigned an ethnic and/or racial identity that I did not want to accept. I was accused of lying even if I did respond according to a biological determinism because people oftentimes insisted that I should be from wherever they thought I was from based on how they interpret my phenotype (which is very ambiguous). I hated being called "Mixed" or "not a real German, but just half" because I refused the idea of a biological essentialism that determined that I could not identify as German. Yet, the societal agenda of a biological determinism was (and is) so radical that my choice of a monoethnic and monoracial identity was and has been viewed as pathological (at the time, I did not differentiate between my ethnicity and race). My racial resistance made people assume that I felt ashamed about my skin colour or my "origins". Being consistently told that I "had issues" because I did not accept labels that were assigned to me, I internalised racism to the extent that I believed that there was indeed something wrong with me. As a result, I tried to authentically accept that I was a "foreigner", but I failed to do so. I was trapped in a conflict between rebelliously refusing any ethnic/racial[13] identity that I was given against my will and a feeling that my autonomous choice was a pathological one that needed to be fixed.

It was by living abroad in the UK and escaping Germany's normalised community discourse that opened me to a more positive use of racial identity labels.

*Birmingham, UK, 2010*

In 2010, at the age of 20, I went to the UK to start my bachelor's in sociology with French. It was during the university's fresher's welcoming week that I came across an Ethnic/Racial identity census for the very first time in my life. I was in shock. Having grown up in a country that makes a conscious effort to uphold the idea that racialised categories do not exist, I was confronted with an official piece of paper that demands me to tick a

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[13] As mentioned above, the concepts ethnicity and race are often not differentiated and used as synonyms. Although I personally do distinguish between the two concepts, I acknowledge that the public often does not and hence assigns an identity to me based on the blurred definitions of these two concepts.

box describing my identity. Although the form explicitly asked me about my ethnicity (not race), the first three lines read *White British*, *Black British, White Other,* which I considered to be racial categories. I knew I wasn't white, so I kept reading. When I came across the Mixed-Race categories, I became even more confused. On the one hand, I was asked to describe my ethnicity, which I considered to be German (and not Mixed). On the other hand, I was explicitly asked about my race. I assumed I would need to tick a box of a Mixed-race category. Yet it did not quite feel right, as the only experience I had had with that label was when it was used against me (e.g. "You're not a real German, just half"). Whilst I knew that society would ascribe the Mixed-race label onto me, I had never self-labelled myself as Mixed-race as a resistance of having my monoethnic identity viewed as pathological. I carefully read all the other ethnic/racial categories but there was none that presented my lived experience except for the last category on the very bottom of the list: *Other, please specify.* Ultimately, I felt out of place when I was faced with being officially *othered*. I just wanted to write in "German", when I realised that officials would be very likely to assume that I was *White Other,* when reading that I self-identify as German. However, I knew I wasn't and I didn't want to be White. I re-read all of the categories over and over again; trying to find authentic reasons that would justify whatever box I wanted to tick. I was overwhelmed. My reasoning and thoughts went in circles, and when after 10 minutes I still hadn't found "the right" box to tick, I decided to ask the lady who had given me the sheet.

*"Excuse me",* I said *"I don't know what box I have to tick".* As I was used to people telling me what my ethnic/racial identity is supposed to be based on how they interpret my phenotype, I assumed she would simply do the same. To my surprise, she responded: *"You can tick whatever category you feel you belong to".*

For the very first time in my life, someone directly told me I was allowed to ethnically and racially self-identify. Looking back, I am grateful for that experience. But at the time I didn't understand the British (anglophone) way of tackling racism. I felt being asked to put myself into a racial and/or ethnic category was racist. I was confused; I could not handle to be given the right to self-identify, so I insisted: "*But I don't KNOW what box to tick".* The woman looked at me empathetically and reiterated: "You can choose whatever category *you* feel like you belong to". I sat down. I had to make an effort to hold my tears back. After ruminating for another 10 minutes, I finally ticked the box *White Other* despite my gut feeling that this box really was not for me.


Here I was, after years of rebelliously, yet unavailingly refusing to be told what my identity was, I voluntarily begged a white person to assign an identity to me. Being labelled by others had become such a habit for me, that it was the only way I felt safe to be labelled at all because it meant that nobody could pathologise my own choice of my identity. The British community discourse of allowing every individual to self-identify was new to me. In my sociology courses on racism, I learned that the purpose for these ethnic/racial surveys were conducted in order to produce statistics that will be used to counter-act racism, based on the idea that although race is a social construct, it still has an impact on real people's lives. I was impressed by this openness to acknowledge the existence of racism and appreciated that I was being asked how I identified, rather than

being labelled by the government as "a person with a migration background" without my permission. Yet, I still felt left out because the identity surveys did not differentiate between ethnicity and race and therefore did not create a space for my lived reality.

It took a few more years until I developed through reading, travelling, and discussion with other people (of colour) a racial identity that for me is primarily a political statement about privilege (and the lack thereof). Based on my lived experiences, today I identify as a monoethnic German, a Mixed-race person of colour, conditionally white passing, and racially ambiguous.

On grounds of my sensitivity to distinguish between ethnic affiliations, racial identities, and the interplay of the societal agenda and the individual self-perception, I analysed the findings of this study.

## 5.8 Limitations

Qualitative interviews also have their limits. Firstly, as the sample of the study is relatively small (14 participants), the findings cannot be generalised. Hence, the reliability of the data is relatively poor (Walsh, 2001). Secondly, the effectiveness of the interviews depends inter alia on the researcher's communication skills (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007 in Newton, 2010). As such, it also needs to be acknowledged that my native tongue is German, whereas the interviewees are native or multilingual French speakers. Although I am fluent in French, this may have had a negative impact on the interview process in terms of understanding with regards to content, not to mention the differences in understanding of the Belgian culture, including Belgian's mainstream community discourse. Also with regards to linguistic issues, the difficulty to translate specific terms and concepts from French into English (and vice versa) may have resulted in alteration of content. At this point, I would like to stress that this very issue is part of the research findings, which contributes to a global understanding of how the perception of race and racism (and thus Mixed-race identity development) depend on community discourse, which is embedded in a geographical context (as examined below).

Finally, although my personal life story and identity as a Mixed-race individual cannot be seen as an inherent bias that needs to be controlled, it still may have impacted the interview dialogue in a way where the interviewees did not reveal their true thoughts but rather reproduced what they thought I would like them to say.

## 6 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYTICAL DISCUSSIONS

This section represents both the empirical and analytical part of the study. As regards the empirical part (findings), I introduce the interviewees in a first instance (Chapter 6.1). Then, I describe the interview findings by reviving the scheme of the literature review (Chapters 6.2) and identifying additional themes regarding Mixed-race identity development that have not been outlined above (Chapters 6.3). All along the outline of the

empirical work, I analyse the findings with regards to three aspects (analytical discussions). Firstly, I conclude to what extent racist occurrences have had an impact on how the participants self-define their ethnic and/or racial identities. Secondly, I compare the findings of this study, which emerge out of the socio-political and geographical context of Western Europe (Belgium in particular) to the theories outlined in the British/US-American literature review. Thirdly, I suggest explanations as to why this study shows certain discrepancies in terms of how the interviewees respond to everyday interactions as opposed to the participants of Jackson's and Root's studies. These explanations find their culminating point in chapters *6.3.2 (Acceptance of the social order due to internalised community discourse) and 6.3.3 (Confusion and opposing perspectives*).

## 6.1    Presentation of the interviewees

To begin with, a short overview of the interviewee's age, place of residence, and heritage gives an insight about their racial identities. Whilst I am acknowledging the danger of essentialising identity by labelling and racialising the interviewees' biological parents, it is useful information as it can be compared to how the participants identify autonomously.

Marie is a 19-year old student and is the daughter of a Congolese mother and a Belgian father. She was born in Kinshasa, Congo and she came to Belgium when she was a baby.

Zoé is 18 years old and is still going to school in Arlon, Belgium. Her mother is of Indian heritage and her father is Belgian. Her mother was adopted at age 3 and a half (by a White Belgian family), so Zoé and her mother are the only People of colour in their family.

Jean is 23 years old and works as a chef.  He has a Korean mother and a Belgian father. His mother was adopted when she was 4 years old. Jean was born and grew up in Liège.

Christopher is a 22 year-old student. His mother is from Mauritius and his father is from Belgium. Christopher was born and raised in Liège.

Aline is a 20 year-old student with a Belgian mother and a Togolese father. She grew up in Liège and was raised only by her White Belgian mother and does not know her Togolese father.

Ophelie is a 25 year-old student and grew up and lives in Brussels. Her mother is Congolese and her father is Belgian.

Jack is 28 years old and recently graduated. His mother is Belgian and his father is of Chinese descent and is

from Mauritius. Jack grew up in Brussels and moved to Liège for his studies. During the interview, it became clear that Jack is much more White passing than I had interpreted his physical appearance.

Zapata is a 20 year-old student. She is the daughter of a Congolese mother and a Belgian father. She was born in Congo and grew up there half of her childhood. At age of 8, she moved to Belgium.

Yannic is 26 years old and recently graduated. He is the son of a Belgian mother and an Ivorian father. He was born and grew up in Belgium. Yannic grew up mainly with his Belgian mother because his father works in Luxemburg.

Bernard is a 21 year-old student from Liège. His mother is Belgian and his father is from Ivory Coast. Bernard is Yannic's brother.

Nina is a 23 year-old student and she grew up in Brussels. Her mother is Belgian and her father is Guinean. She grew up with her only mother because her father worked in Guinea.

Paul is a 23 year-old student. He is the son of a Congolese mother and a Belgian father. He was born and grew up in Belgium.

Diana is 25 years old and recently graduated. She grew up in Senegal and Niger. She is the daughter of a Vietnamese-Beninese-Senegalese mother and a Belgian father. She came to Belgium in 2011 in order to study.

Nicolas is a 20 year-old student. He was born and grew up in Belgium (Liège). His mother is Cuban and his father is Belgian.

## 6.2    Examining existing Mixed-race identity development themes

Following both types of Polkinghorne's approach of paradigmatic search, I firstly derived concepts from the previous theory and compared them to the newly collected data in this study. These theories include Jackson's (2010) themes of the Mixed-race experience (*shifting racial/ethnic expressions*, *racial/ethnic ambiguity, racial resistance, feeling like an outsider*, *seeking community),* Root's (1990) and Renn's (2008) resolutions to counteract the tensions of Mixed-race identity (*Acceptance of the identity that society assigns to the individual, Identification with both racial groups, Identification with a single racial group, Identification as a new racial group**, Refraining from identifying with racial categories altogether).* Finally, I examine how racial microaggressions and the intersectionality of gender and race impact the interviewees' racial identity development.

### 6.2.1    The dynamics of the mixed-race experience: Jackson's theory

*Shifting racial/ethnic expressions*

The participants reported just as persistently as in Jackson's study that they change how they express their racial and/or ethnic identities. Although Bernard and Nicolas reported that occasionally, they make a conscious effort to express their identities, most participants did not engage in specific behaviour in order to justify their racial identity in a specific moment.

Bernard explained that he likes to play with stereotypes. Whenever he eats out with friends, he purposefully never eats chicken to prove a point that not all Black people eat chicken. When in company with monoracial Black people, he avoids eating chicken as a means to show that unlike them, he does not adhere to the stereotype. Similarly, when he is in company with White friends or friends of any other race, he sees the act of not eating chicken as a means of debunking the stereotype that Black people eat chicken. Although Bernard admitted that he even avoids eating chicken in a situation where he would prefer it but does not do so for the only reason to debunk the stereotype, he stated that he feels a satisfaction of shifting his racial expression. Unlike the findings of Jackson's study, Bernard's behaviour of purposefully shifting his racial expression is not due to the desire to make people around him more comfortable or to align with their interpretation of his race. Rather, it comes from a place of debunking stereotypes. As such, Bernard's desire to shift his racial expression is a result of the racist belief that, as opposed to the White part of his identity, the Black part of his identity is *"othered"* by means of stereotypes (in this case, the consumption of chicken), which is seen as a deviation from the construction of Whiteness as the norm. As a consequence of relating to his experiences with escaping to be reduced to a stereotype that is associated with Blackness, Bernard referred to himself as Black.

Also, Nicolas told me about two incidents where he changed his racial and ethnic expression. He reported that in primary school, he only got attention from his classmates when he offered ethnic aspects as a means for consumption, e.g. pretending to speak with an Italian accent or when he spoke in Spanish in order to make his classmates laugh. He disliked the situations where he felt like he had to depict these stereotypes in order to please others. At one point during the interview, Nicolas stated: "For me, to integrate myself, that means trying to please others"[14].

This incident is very similar to what Jackson conceptualises as reasons as to why Mixed-race people change their racial expression: Nicolas tried to align with his classmates' interpretation of his racial identity as they did not seem to care that he has no attachments of being Italian but wanted to be entertained. His decision to speak Spanish can be interpreted as a means to comply with the environmental pressure to claim membership of a single racial group (in this case, Cuban).

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[14] See appendix E for the original quote in French

The second incident that Nicolas told me about comes more from a place of autonomy. During nights out, Nicolas drinks rum in order to show people that he is Cuban. Although this action also stems from a desire to comply with the environmental pressure to claim a monoracial membership rather than a Mixed-race identity, Nicolas stated a clear and autonomous desire to express his racial identity this way. He concludes:

> Anyways, if I have experienced all these negative and positive things in inverted commas, and that is the reason why I am who I am today…well then I'm proud of who I am now, I am proud of what I have experienced[15]

*Racial/ethnic ambiguity*

All of the participants reported to be mistaken for racial groups that they feel they have nothing to do with. Moreover, the interviewees indicated that most people assign racial labels onto them that are monoracial. On very few occasions, their environment assumes that they are Mixed-race. This finding approves of Jackson's, and Johnston and Nadal theories, that Mixed people are often mistaken to be monoracial.

That their environment expresses confusion with their racial and ethnic ambiguity is part of the interviewees' everyday lives. As opposed to what Jackson found in her study, the participants of this study hardly reported being annoyed or frustrated with having to deal with their environment's incapacity to understand their racial and/or ethnic ambiguity. All participants except for Ophelie, expressed either indifference or even amusement about confusing others with their racial ambiguity in most situations. Only in situations where strangers were too insisting, or where the participants' autonomous self-identifications were considered as not authentic or even lies, they reported being angry in said situation. Also, 9 out of 14 interviewee's stated that they had trouble with having their identity mistaken when they were children, but learned to care less about it as they grew older and as they became used to it. Even though most interviewees reported not to care about their racial ambiguity, all of them stated that they would correct other people and stated their racial self-identification in most situations. Similarly to Jackson's findings, most participants explained that various types of people interpret their racial makeup differently.

For example, Christopher reported that his physical appearance makes it mostly clear that he is Mixed-race Black and White. Yet, he has been mistaken for African (which, in Belgian discourse, mainly means Sub-Saharan African and/or Black) and Latino. His racial ambiguity became even more apparent when Christopher stated that whilst growing up, he got labelled a "foreigner" more often when he was seen with his Moroccan friends than when spending time with White people. His White part of his identity then acted as a conditional privilege, where being associated with White people had the result that his environment interpreted his racial ambiguity as being more close to Whiteness. Yet in another context, Christopher got called a "foreigner" due to his curly hair, which for his environment was a determiner of not being Belgian. In particular during primary school, Christopher used to feel excluded from Belgian society when being labelled a "foreigner", but now he feels more included as comments about his physical appearance happen less. As regards to changes in his racial identity, he did identify less as Belgian when he was labelled a "foreigner". In other words, when his

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[15] See Appendix F for the original quote in French

racial ambiguity lead others to perceive him as "not Belgian", his identity shifted to the extent that he accepted the label to a certain degree.

Furthermore, Zoé, who is of Belgian and Indian heritage, is often mistaken for Indonesian. Usually, she feels indifferent to being mistaken for another racial group. However, she has gotten mistaken for being "African" (on the basis of Belgian discourse, she means Black). Zoé is especially annoyed when people assume she is "African" because she feels it is particularly ignorant not to notice the difference in phenotype between her and a Black person in terms of facial features and hair structure. Having her racial ambiguity misinterpreted in such a way, it results in her claiming more proudly an Indian and/or Mixed-race identity in such a situation.

Jean most often gets mistaken as being monoracial Chinese. Consequently, people attach Chinese stereotypes to him and ask him if his parents had a Chinese restaurant. In general, Jean is indifferent to such incidents and it even makes him laugh about people's ignorance because he thinks his physical appearance shows well that he also has White European ancestry. Yet, most of the time, he corrects people and tells them that he is part Korean and part Belgian. Besides, Jean reported that he got mistaken for Albanian, Turkish, or Arab more often during a period of time where he spent time with people of Arab origin. Just as for Christopher, how people interpret Jean's racial ambiguity, is situational and depends on his environment.

As for Marie, most people do not think of her as either White or Black, or both. She is often mistaken for being Moroccan, Brazilian, and Arab. She does not mind having her identity mistaken, but she corrects people when they get her identity wrong. Briefly, as Jean and Marie both do not mind when people mistake their racial identities, it does not have an impact as to how they identify in that very moment.

Bernard is often mistaken for an Arab. He told me about an incident where a stranger stopped him at the street and asked him in Arabic where the next mosque was. The stranger was astonished when Bernard responded that he was not Arabic, nor a Muslim. Bernard expressed being frustrated about the situation because the stranger kept insisting that Bernard should know where the next mosque was. However, unlike Zoé, Bernard did not feel the need to clarify his racial identity in that very moment. Yet, interestingly, whilst he told me the story during the interview, he stressed that he was Belgian, which implies, one could argue, that as a result of having is identity mistaken as not being Belgian, his identity shifted towards his Belgian side as a means to counteract a feeling of otherness.

For Ophelie, her racial ambiguity plays out differently depending on whether or not she straightens her hair. When she straightens her hair, many people assume she is Maghreb, Latina, North African, or Pakistani. Very often, people assume that she is from wherever they are from themselves. Once, someone speaking Arabic to her approached her. That person even accused her of lying when she responded that she did not understand the language. As a child, it really bothered her when people mistook her identity. However, now as an adult it bothers her less but she will still correct people and tell her about her racial/ethnic identity (Belgian-Congolese). Whilst her capacity to deal with these types of everyday interaction has changed for the better, having her identity mistaken has always resulted in an awareness of her status as a Mixed-race individual, which turns into a consciousness of her racial identity in general.

When Ophelie does not straighten her hair, she is much more often recognised as Black or Mixed-race Black and White. These experiences strengthen her identity as a Mixed person.

Summing up, most participants did not report changes of their racial identities as a result of having their identity mistaken. Rather, in most cases, the participants simply become conscious of their status as Mixed-race individuals. In the case they did shift their racial identity, it was due to the tenacity of the situation, where the people in their environment were particularly ignorant.


*Racial resistance*

Contrary to Jackson's theory, most participants did not engage in racial resistance, i.e. purposefully not giving the answer about one's racial identity that one assumes a questioner wants to know. All participants, except for Ophelie, are not bothered in most situations when being asked about their racialised origins, nor did they report to shift their racial identity specifically in that situation. The interviewees explained that if they see that the questions stem from a place of curiosity and interest, they embrace being asked about their origins. The discrepancy between Jackson's findings and the ones of this study may be explained by the internalisation of an oppressive social order that stems from the idea of the biological determinism that only White people can be Belgian. This is due to the fact that in the USA, discussions about racism are more overtly mainstreamed than in Belgium. By means of the community discourse in Belgian society, the unconscious belief of a biological determinism is being upheld (as shown below in paragraph 6.3).

For those participants who do engage in racial resistance in certain situations, reasons are *(1) amusement and/or a feeling of superiority when observing people's frustration and confusion about not getting the answer they want* (2) a *feeling of specialness/uniqueness for being so racially ambiguous that people keep staring and guessing about "where" someone is from* (3) *a feeling of anger and frustration about being othered and racialised in an indiscrete way*, (4) *a feeling of exclusion as one is not given the identity possibility to be Belgian (5) having one's autonomous self-identification invalidated (6) to protect oneself from stereotypes.*

Whilst the first two reasons represent positive motivations to engage in racial resistance (although one could argue that they depict a projection of narcissism), the last four reasons are similar to what Jackson found: a conscious understanding of everyday racism and an unwillingness to accept it.


Zoé is not bothered when strangers ask her about where she and/or her mother are from, because she knows that people are interested. It has happened that strangers ask her about her origins even before wanting to know her name. She did not mind this situation too much either, but she would have appreciated to be asked questions about her personality, too. Zoé feels great when being asked about her origins because she feels she that she is more interesting due to her Indian heritage. Therefore, she does not refuse explaining her racial background to other people. In fact, most of the time, the idea of Whiteness has mostly positive consequences for Zoé, as she takes particular pride in her Mixed-race identity.

Similarly, Nicolas reported that at school, he was regularly asked about his racial background and that he did not mind these types of questions. To this day, he enjoys when being asked where he is from so that he can tell people about Cuba and he feels that he is seen as being special. However, when he feels that questions about his origins are asked in a malicious way, he refuses to answer. In that context, his racial identity shifts towards the Belgian side.

Yannic and Aline stated to even feel amused when people try and guess origins. Although Yannic enjoys being asked about his racial background just as much as Nicolas, he engages in racial resistance in order to prolong the experience of being the centre of attention. Yannic even went as far as idealising mixed-race identities himself. This became apparent when he stated that he enjoys being questioned about his origins and when people do not know how to categorise him because he feels more special. He also claimed that he would enjoy it even more, if instead of saying that he had Ivorian and Belgian origins, he could claim to be of Ivorian and Indian heritage because it would be more "exotic". This belief stems from an idea that Whiteness represents the global norm and hence, being seen as the norm, labels associated with Whiteness are seen as boring. Consequently, being asked about his origins has the result that Yannic takes conscious pride in his Mixed-race identity.

Christopher usually does not mind the "What-are-you" question when it is asked with curiosity and no malicious intention. Yet, he was once approached by a stranger and was asked in an indiscrete way about "where" he was from. Christopher did not respond because he did not appreciate the stranger's feeling of entitlement. Likewise, Nina is not bothered answering the "What-are-You" question if it is asked in a context where the other person is also interested in her as a person. However, if this question comes from a stranger who only wants to put her in a box and does not respect her self-identification, she engages in racial resistance. Simultaneously, her identity converts into a monoracial and/or monoethnic one. She said:

That's a question that I get asked often: "Where I am from?" I always answer Brussels… First I say: Belgium.
"Yes, but where are you from" I answer: But I'm from Brussels.[16]

Diana reported to engage in racial resistance in order to escape negative stereotypes that are associated with being Non-white. She explained:

Here….in general, here, if someone asks me where I'm from, I say I'm Belgian. Period. Even if I'm several things, I say I'm Belgian because I know how people think. I know that it's easier like this. And I know if I say I'm Belgian…you'll avoid all the stereotypes and all the questions…but it depends…it depends who is asking.[17]

Diana also stated that it depends whether people ask with discretion or not. She gave another example of when she was waiting at the bus stop and a woman asked her where she was from and insisted that she was not from Belgian. She did not engage in a further conversation with the woman because she asked in such an indiscrete way and with a feeling of entitlement, that Diana did not give her the answer the woman wanted to hear.

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[16] See appendix G for the original quote in French
[17] See appendix H for the original quote in French

> People are clumsy. They enter your private space just like this, with indiscrete questions, whilst thinking that that's normal when it's not. I want to discuss with you but there's a way of doing that.[18]

Briefly, even though Diana often does not give people the answer they want to hear, internally, she does not change her racial identity. Rather, she privately upholds a Mixed-race identity, whilst simultaneously adapting to her environment's understanding of their perception of her physical appearance.

Aline's summary about how she feels about being asked about her origins portrays how the internalisation of everyday racism has lead her to accept the social order that she is being seen as an "other" and that in many situations, she is not given the identity possibility to be Belgian. She stated that as a child, she used to feel very uncomfortable when being asked about her origins by strangers. This was because she was wondering what exactly was so different about her that made people so curious about her physical appearance. Yet, as she grew older, she became used to the questions. In other words, she has developed a conscious and positive awareness of her status as a Mixed-race individual. Today, she is not bothered by it anymore, unless she feels people make a conscious effort to exclude her.

Ophelie is the only participant who reported a clear dislike towards people who imply with their questions that she is not Belgian and did not hesitate to call this behaviour racist. When asked how she feels about being labelled "half" anything, Ophelie responded that it particularly bothers her in a context where she is asked about her origins. She explained that she always responds with "Belgium". She gives a specific example of when she was in the train and a strange man asked her about where she was from. She knew what the man wanted to hear but she said provocatively that she was from Belgium. As a response, the man touched her cheek, implying that her skin colour does not come off and that therefore she cannot be Belgian.

Unlike the other participants of this study but similarly to the participants of Jackson's study, Ophelie's identity changes towards a monoethnic and/or monoracial one whenever she feels her choice of claiming a Belgian identity is threatened. As opposed to Diana, her racial identity actually does shift towards her Belgian side in that very moment, whereas Diana maintains a Mixed-race identity whilst refusing to give people the answer they want to hear.

In summary, the interviewees asserted that being put into a situation of not being "allowed" to identify as Belgian by their environment, does not result in a situational change of racial identity, except for Ophelie.

*Feeling like an outsider*

Whilst all interviewees, except Jean, related to feeling like an outsider due to their physical appearance at least at one point in their lives, the situations in where they felt this way are various.

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[18] See appendix I for the original quote in French

For example, Zoé feels excluded when she is asked if she was adopted because she feels that people do not see her as a "real" Belgian and as a foreigner. These situations occur when people do not believe that Zoé's father is her biological father. In that context, Zoé takes particular pride in being Belgian.

Surprisingly, when I asked Bernard how he identified, he first explained how other people identify him (as "African" rather than Ivorian or Belgian) instead of saying how he identifies himself. His detailed response about the discrepancy between his own identification and the labels that people assign to him results in him feeling excluded and like an outsider of whatever group of people he is present:

> Bernard: Well…, I see it in a particular way…so there are particular people, often these are white people, who see me often as a….yes as an African, not as an Ivorian but just as an African. However, when I talk to other people, for example my mate, he is….Congolese…he's a mixed, I think he is a quarter of different origins…so he's a good mixture himself. And he, who he is considered mixed-race himself, sees me as a white person…And…I have the impression that for white people, I am black, and for black people I am white. So this is definitely something that I have noticed…errmm…I have never been called a….nobody has ever said "Belgian", or "Ivorian". I am considered either a black person, or a white person. But I am neither black nor white, I am both. Yet, people don't see me as someone who is black and white. People see me as either the one, or the other.
> Me: So if I got it right, you don't like it when someone calls you white, but you don't like it either when someone calls you black?
> Bernard: Well no, because I should be called as regards to who I am. I imagine a Dutch person. If he's being told that he's Chinese, he wouldn't like it either. So people should use the right terms…and I don't understand people's world views…I mean, you can tell if someone is African, you can tell if someone is a black-black person; you can tell if someone is a white-white person. And mixed people?! I have the impression that people have difficulties to see that a white person and a black person have come together and that it results in mixed-race people. And I would really like if people used the right terms, so that they don't say…the black one…or the white one.
> Me: So if I got it right, other people's ignorance is annoying you. You don't like to be called just black or just white because you see yourself differently.
> Bernard: Yes…and especially, especially, if I can add this, it always happens that black people see me as a white person, and white people see me as black person. If it was the other way around, it would be okay: White people think I'm with them, and black people think I'm with them. Yet, everyone plays the opposition, the opposite side. And this has the result that you ask yourself: where are you from? With whom are you? You are on which side? [19]

This dialogue clarifies that the feeling of being an outsider is a consequence of the racist belief that one cannot be given the identity options that one chooses for oneself in a specific situation. Briefly, Bernard's feeling of being an outsider has three outcomes. Firstly, he reiterates and strengthens his identity of being Mixed-race as a result that this identity option is not present in most situations to an extent where it is considered as not even being existent. Secondly, given the radicalness of being excluded from all monoracial groups that Bernard is part of, he feels lost and confused about where he fits in. This feeling of confusion about one's racial identity clearly is a consequence of racism, rather than an inherent issue that Mixed people have (as opposed to what Stonequist suggested). Thirdly, since he is assigned a monoracial label in order to be excluded, he counteracts in these situations by insisting that he is indeed also part of that very racial group that excludes him. In this context, his identity changes into a monoracial one.

Six other participants reported these incidents of being assigned a monoracial identity as a means to being excluded. For instance, when Nicolas was in Cuba, he felt excluded when he was called Belgian because it was used in a way to tell him that he is not Cuban (enough). Likewise, Zapata expressed being called White by Black

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[19] See appendix J for the original quote in French

people and being called Black by White people. Similarly, Yannic reported that he felt excluded in Ivory Coast because he was seen as a White person, whilst he also feels excluded in Belgian society because people remind him that he looks different.

When talking about being called White in Senegal and Niger, Diana stated:

> Actually, it's a way of saying: "You, anyways, even if you have a part of us, you have this other part that we don't know and we don't like"….So it's a way of pointing the finger on everything that is bad about this group that you don't know….entirely…and a way of saying: you represent that. That's it actually…that I DON'T LIKE! At all! Eww![20]

Diana often felt like an outsider whilst growing up in Senegal and Niger because people would remind her that her skin colour was "too light".

In contrast, Nina's experience in Guinea clarifies that whether or not a monoracial group accepts a mixed-race person as being part of their group, depends on how much the individuals resembles that racial group in in terms of physical features. Nina reported that she did not feel like an outsider when she visited her father's tribe in Guinea. As she resembles them in terms of her physical appearance, she was accepted as being part of their group more easily than she is accepted whilst being in company with white Belgian people.

Summing up the participants experiences: whenever one feels excluded, his or her racial identity is shifting in a way that they feel would counteract that feeling of exclusion.

*Seeking community*

Although only Zoé and Aline expressed that they actively are looking for other mixed-race individuals in order to find a community where they feel fully accepted, 12 out of 14 participants described that they feel more of a sense of belonging whenever they find themselves in an environment where there are many People of colour in general, and Mixed-race people in particular.

Whilst Zoé's desire to actively seek a community stems from a desire to get to know different cultures, for Aline, seeking other Mixed-race people is based on the idea that Mixed-race people share a specific horizon of experiences. She stated:

> It's just that it's always difficult to identify myself…as in you have asked me several questions about this topic: do you identify as Belgian or African or both? I would say it's the two and it depends on the circumstances…there is something that is very funny: when I'm with my Belgian friends…for them, I'll be more the one in the group with the "exotic" touch; whereas when I'm with Africans, it's the opposite. For them, I'll be more like….nearly the white one amongst Blacks (*laughing*)…so it's…errmmm…it's really difficult to find one's place…and it's only when we are with mixed-race people like us that we have a feeling of community…As I told my boyfriend, now there is really a community of mixed-race people; when we see other mixed people we recognise each other […]. And besides, I have a blog where I wrote an article about being mixed-race and I got the most feedback for this article. There were loads of women who responded to me, saying: "yes, me, too, I've gotten the "What are your origins….but really are you sure because you really don't look like that" […]. Immediately when I approach another métisse, I feel close to her…automatically even without knowing her […], I say to myself, so her too, she knows certain situations that other people cannot understand"[21]

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[20] See appendix K for the original quote in French
[21] See Appendix L for the original quote in French

### 6.2.2   Potential resolutions: Root's theory

As to Root's (1990 in Renn, 2008) resolutions that can potentially counteract the tensions of Mixed-race identity and lead to psychological well-being, all of the participants in this study found themselves in one of the themes.

*Acceptance of the identity that society assigns to the individual*

Even though most of the participants dislike to be labelled by others and hence have the desire to correct people when their identity is being mistaken, Jean, Zapata, Nicolas and Yannic feel generally positive about accepting a racial label that is being assigned to them by the people in their environment.

Zapata does not correct people when they get her identity wrong because she experienced that people do not believe her anyway. Hence, in order to avoid conflict, she just accepts any label people assign to her. The dialogue below clarifies Zapata's stance:

> Me: What are all they ways you identify?
> Zapata: Me? Both….it depends actually…I also play with it, …when it's convenient for me, I say I'm mixed-race (*laughing*), when it's not convenient for me, I'm not mixed-race (*laughing*)…so..well…I try to adapt to society, I try to…my philosophy now is: I give people what they want. That means, if you approach me and you think I'm mixed-race, I say ok, I'm mixed-race. If you approach me and you think I'm black, I'm black (*laughing*). If you approach me and you think I-don't-know-what, I'll say yes, that's what I am. This way, actually, I get along well with everyone…because…
> Me: In order to protect yourself?
> Zapata: In order to protect myself and in order to get along well with everyone. Why? Because there are people who don't understand. At first, when I was with black people, they said: "You're white, you're white. And I told them "no, I'm not white, I'm mixed-race. I have one black parent and one white parent". And they responded: "Yes but look how you came out, you're light skinned. There are mixed-race people who come out a bit black, but look at you and how you came out!"…You see?! And when they don't think about it, it becomes annoying…and you have an argument for nothing[22]

Zapata gave another specific example of when her identity was seen as not authentic. Whilst chatting with a group of friends, one of her friends insisted that she was not Mixed but simply a light skinned Black person. They argued for a long time and her friend simply refused to believe her that she is mixed and not a light skinned black person. After this experience, Zapata chose to stop trying to convince people what her identity is. She developed enough self-confidence to know her identity and not having to prove it to others. She even learned to use the fact that she is capable of accepting labels from others to her advantage. For example, whilst going shopping with her mother, she tricked a Moroccan salesperson into thinking that she is half Moroccan so that she got a better price in a grocery store. In conclusion, the essentialist nature of racism lead Zapata to shift her identity accordingly.

Similarly, Jean has always experienced to be labelled "Chinese". As he has accepted this term ever since his childhood, to this day, his friends call him "the Chinese guy", which does not bother him. Jean is so used to

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[22] See appendix M for the original quote in French

being called "Chinese" to the extent that he accidently even referred to himself as "Chinese" during the interview, although he is of Korean heritage.

Also, Nicolas explained that he does not necessarily fight against labels that are given to him. Instead, he tries to take advantage of these labels and accepts them in a way where he can feel good about the labels.

*Identification with both racial groups*

Jack and Marie indicated that their racial identities have always been stable ever since they can remember and they have always identified with both racial groups. Jack calls himself a Belgian-Chinese-Mauritian. Whilst he does not mind just to be called Belgian, he always explains to people his origins. This is because when he says his Chinese first name, people have troubles processing his White-passing physical appearance in combination with his name. Another reason why Jack can easily identify with both racial groups is that unlike my interpretation of his physical appearance (that I had thought to be clearly to be a Person of colour), he is passing as White most of the time. Therefore, strangers do not approach him and "other" him due to the minority part of his identity.

As for Marie, she has always had access to both the Belgian and Congolese culture. As a result, she formed racial and ethnic identities that of are congruent to one another.

However, the vast majority of the participants felt more attached to one racial group than another, even if it changed over time. This identification was often linked to an ethnic identity, rather than a racial one.

*Identification with a single racial group*

Although most participants reported to have self-identified with a single racial group (mostly Belgian/White) in a given context, Yannic and Ophelie were most likely to identify with only being Belgian. However, they both clarified that this identification was more linked to an ethnic identity than a racial one.
Yannic identifies mostly as European in a sense where he feels attached to the democratic values of a European lifestyle. He does not feel attached to Belgium because he is regularly made aware that he looks "different". Yannic prefers a European identity because he does not want to be associated with Africa and/or Blackness. He associates these terms with bad stereotypes of African people because he has experienced African people who are homophobic and/or who are late all the time for meetings. He has little attachment to his African/Ivorian heritage except for the African cuisine. Yannic directly admitted that he prefers staying away from Black people because he knows that there is a negative stereotype and status attached to being Black, so he wants to be associated with Whiteness. Even though Yannic does not actually like being labelled "White", his racial identity is defined by his distancing from Blackness. His identity choice is a result of internalised racism that glorifies Whiteness as well as the need to protect himself from Anti-Black racism, which has the consequence of being reduced to negative stereotypes.

Finally, Paul reported that there is always one part of identity that is stronger than the other. As a child, he felt more attached to his Congolese child than now but now as an adult he feels more attached to the Belgian

side. Paul stated that his mother was strict with him and therefore he associates negative things with the Congolese culture (which is why he feels less Congolese now). As such, his self-identification is an ethnic one, rather than a racial one, which is due to his family socialisation rather than racism.

*Identification as a new racial group*

All of the interviewee's stated that they embrace the term "Métisse".
Ophelie specified that she does not appreciate when people tell her that she is a "real" White person or a "real" Black person because she wants them to acknowledge that she is Mixed-race and not monoracial. Bernard and Nina reiterated clearly that they are Mixed-race and that they would like to be viewed as such by their environment, too.

Likewise, Marie has always self-identified as mixed-race Belgian-Congolese and she has never experienced any change in the way she identifies.

Zoé describes her pride of being mixed-race as follows:

> Métisse? That's actually something I own with a lot of pride. I find it…errm we cross our borders and…people…when I say I'm Métisse, they are immediately interested …about where I'm from and that my mother was adopted and that's something that can combat racism I think [...] I'm very proud to be Métisse.[23]

*Refraining from identifying with racial categories altogether*

Zoé, Zapata, Nina, Jack and Paul stated at one point that they do not see why people should be called Black, White, or any other racial label. Nina, Zapata and Paul explained that they do not appreciate being labelled with racial terms in a context where it is not relevant. These terms can be "Black", "White", or "Mixed-race" as well as any other term that is used as a racial category in a specific situation, such as "Foreigner" or "African". The way Zapata and Paul expressed their dislike of being labelled made it clear that they refrain from identifying with any racial categories when they feel "othered".

Also, Nina explained that she dislikes racial labels in a context where labels are being used in order to reproduce stereotypes. For example, she has been told by Black people that she acted "like a White person", implying that her mannerism of speaking calmly and in a sophisticated way is something that only White people are capable of doing. Furthermore, she felt that this type of labelling was depriving her of her authentic identity, which also consists of having grown up with her White Belgian mother, which resulted in her internalising Belgian culture the most.

Briefly, refraining from being put into a racial category is a counter-reaction to racist behaviour.

Summarising these findings, all of the participants of this study show behaviour associated with at least one of Root's and Renn's resolutions to develop a stable racial identity. What is more, most participants did not embrace a single of the above-mentioned resolutions in a one-dimensional way. Instead, all of the

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[23] See Appendix N for the original quote in French

interviewees choose two or more identities at the same time, over different periods of time, or in different situations. This illustrates once again that Mixed-race identities are flexible labels (Mahtani, 2002 in Olsen, 2012), and can change throughout their lifetimes (Jackson, 2010) along with or in spite of their experiences with racism.

### 6.2.3    Changing identities due to Racial Microaggressions

As the concept of microaggressions is not present in Belgium in mainstream media, I interrogated the interviewee's about what they feel is everyday racism, rather than imposing a definition of racism onto them. This way I could determine to what extent they made a conscious decision to shift their racial and/or ethnic expression and identity and to what extent incidents that they have not considered a form of everyday racism themselves may still have affected their racial identity in a given situation or over periods of time.

Only Marie and Jean defined everyday racism as something that is exclusively based on a malicious intention. Interestingly, Zoé and Aline changed the way they viewed everyday racism during the interview process, as I reassured them that it is legitimate to call everything racist that hurts them based on their racial identity. In addition, given that it is part of systemic racism that White fragility is protected, most participants (e.g. Diana, Bernard, Christopher) were confused themselves when it came to defining racism and/or gave contradicting definitions of what type of situations they considered racist. So, for example, Christopher asserted that he distinguishes between a malicious intention and ignorance, whereas both reasons can lead to racist behaviour. However, when it came to discussing a specific situation (i.e. the fact that he consistently got called a "foreigner" in primary school), he did not define that specific situation as racist. This paradoxical perception stems from the belief that People of colour's lived experiences are less valid than those of White people. Whilst most participants believe that people can be racist consciously and unconsciously, all of them felt the need to protect the image they had of their (mostly White) friends and family.

On the one hand, they asserted that everyday racism can be seen as hidden insults that do not seem offensive in the first place but actually are offensive. As such, even though the participants did not seem to be familiar with the concept of microaggressions, their experiences linked to their racial identities showed them that everyday racism is often due to ignorance. Bernard even acknowledged that everyone, including himself, says racist things sometimes based on ignorance, or because one speaks without thinking about it.

On the other hand, Nicolas, Paul, Christopher, Zoé, Bernard, and Jean explained that they differentiate between their friends and strangers as regards to whether they accept a racist joke. They all argued that considering they know that their friends do not have a malicious intention, they allow them to tell racist jokes. Although not all of the interviewee's friends who do make racist jokes are White, it is due to the interest of Whiteness that People of colour have internalised to be "easy-going" about racist jokes that devalue their racial identity. Bernard, Nina and Zoé explicitly said that they wish to protect their friend's feelings. The

dialogue I had with Zoé shows clearly the conflict between feeling hurt and having to be "easy-going" in order to protect White people's feelings.

> Zoé: I'm not going to say that it doesn't bother me at all because that's not true. It still does hurt a little….but…but I try to move on because…that's how it is… I know if I don't accept this…and…well…
> Me: So, it's like, you are scared that if you say something, the others won't take it well, they won't understand…they might say that you're the problem and that you shouldn't take it seriously and that it was just a joke.
> Zoé: Yes, that's exactly it. It's hard but I have to admit that sometimes it does make me feel uncomfortable[24]

Having clarified the nature of everyday racism and how the participants approach it, it should be stressed that certain situations, regardless of whether the individual views that experience as racism herself or himself, have an impact on how a Mixed-race person develops, maintains and/or shift their own racial identity in relation to how society views him or her. Hence, these situations can be regarded as racism on grounds of a sociological definition. In the following, I will analyse how racial microaggressions cooperate in how *Métisse* form their racial and/or ethnic identities.

Bernard and Nina are the only participants who reported to have experienced a racial microassault during their adult life, i.e. conscious and blatant racism. Strangers in Gent called Nina the n-word when she was out in a nightclub, which is microassault in itself. Yet, she also explained that in general, people from the Flemish speaking part of Belgium do not know that it is an insult. Thus, the conscious nature of racism is not clear. In contrast, the incident that Bernard experienced was unquestionably conscious racism. About 5 years ago, he went to a friend's party where he had a conversation with a White man who explained to him that White people were superior to People of colour. Bernard kept listening to this person until he became really angry and left the party. In his anger, he hit a vending machine and broke his wrist. He reported the man to the police after the incident.

As Sue describes in his theory on microassaults, the racist nature of the situation was so clear that Bernard did not question his perception, nor did he hesitate to take action. The situation was clearly racist not only according to him, but also to the people in his environment who witnessed the conversation. Whilst both Nina and Bernard obviously feel negatively about the incidents, they did not report to have changed their racial identity in that situation. That is, they neither felt the need to distance themselves from their identity part that is associated with being a Person of colour, nor did they express feeling more Black, African and/or (Ivorian and Guinean respectively).

In contrast, Aline experienced racial microassaults as a child, which had a large impact on her racial identity. In fact, she had not been aware that she was Mixed-race before and it was due to her first racist experience in primary school that she became aware of her brownness. This was the turning point that triggered her journey of identifying as Mixed-race. She stated:

> I grew up with my mum. It was very difficult for me because I'm mixed-race, but I didn't realise that at the time… As I have always stayed with my Belgian family…with my grandmother, who is blonde, my mum who has green eyes, I had the impression that I was like them, when in reality that's not the case. Whenever I drew pictures of myself, I

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always drew myself with blonde hair and blue eyes like my grandmother, although I didn't look like that at all but I didn't realise….especially because in kindergarten nobody ever made a comment… because in kindergarten children don't make a difference between skin colours… and so we all played together and that's how it was. And then when I started primary school, I was 5 years old, that was the moment when everything changed. My classmates pointed their fingers at me and insulted me; they said that I was a black chocolate and…they were insults that really marked me; I was 5 years old and I really didn't realise, especially because I spoke with an accent from here, from Liège and… I wondered what was so different about me in comparison to them; they also pulled my hair because it was all curly…and so I returned home crying at my first day of school. I explained what happened to my mum and my grandmother and they told me: "Yes, it's because you're different but that doesn't mean that you're less beautiful. It just means that you're brown and that you have curly hair…but that doesn't matter". And after this day at school, it was the very first time that I drew a picture of myself and (*speaks proudly*) I drew myself with brown skin and curly hair; and that was the very first time…and at this point, I really…I really became conscious that I was different from others, in particular because I was the only mixed-race person in my class and in the whole year, I was really the only one in the whole school"[25]

Moreover, 12 out of 14 participants reported to have experienced racial microinsults, i.e. unconscious messages that convey stereotypes and/or demean a person's heritage.

When I asked him what everyday racism means to him, Yannik referred to environmental racism that is being reproduced in the media, such as blackface and stereotypical images of Black people.

Paul gave a specific example of a microinsult he experienced whilst seated in a friend's father's car. The driver asked him where Paul lived in order to drop him off. When Paul gave him his address, the man responded: "Oh that's where all the Black people live. But they're nice, aren't they?". Although Paul knew that that was a racist comment, he did not confront the person because he was shocked and did not know what to say and he was embarrassed.

Ophelie once found herself in a situation where a friend of hers did not understand why an image of Black people with bananas in their hair is racist. She tried to explain it but her friend kept being ignorant. As Ophelie was telling me about this incident, she referred to herself as "African", which in the context was used as a racial label. In other words, the fact that she was confronted with environmental racism as well as individual (her friend's) racism, where African and/or Black people were being reduced to a stereotype, made her shift her identify towards Blackness.

In another context when Ophelie experienced a microinsult as regards to her identity as being Mixed-race, her self-identification also shifted towards being Mixed-race: during a private party, Ophelie's friends asked her whether she liked Beyoncé and if she wanted to dance to her music. Ophelie refused because she felt she was being reduced to a stereotype of being the "exotic" Mixed-race woman.

Similarly, Nina had to endure to be stereotyped as regards to her African heritage. When she was living in her student accommodation, she and her housemate went to visit her neighbour, an elderly White woman. The woman asked Nina what she would usually eat at home, implying that due to her physical appearance, she was not Belgian and therefore would not eat Belgian food either. When later during the conversation, Nina told that sometimes, she would eat plantains (cooked bananas), the woman assumed Nina would eat bananas all the time. Since Nina felt overwhelmed by the situation, she did not confront the woman in order to explain to her that her assumptions were racist. As a consequence, Nina justified her identity as being Belgian by

[25] See Appendix P for the original quote in French

asserting that she was born and raised in Belgium. Being reduced to a racist stereotype associated with the minority part of her racial identity, Nina's identity shifted towards the White Belgian part as an attempt to escape racism. (Needless to say, even if Nina were indeed much more attached to the Guinean culture, that would not have justified the woman's ignorance to assume that Nina radically eats bananas all the time).

Moreover, Zapata reported to have experienced a microinsult. She described how people assume she would be late for a meeting even before they have gotten to know her, implying that she would be late only because she is assumed to be "African". Just as Ophelie, Zapata self-identified as Black/African whilst telling me the story. Again, claiming a monoracial identity was a situational consequence of a racist incident.

What is more, the prevalent negative stereotypes about People of colour also have had an impact of how Diana expresses her racial identity. She explained that whenever she experiences a racist incident, regardless of whether it is intentional or stems from ignorance, she makes an effort not to become angry because she wants to represent a positive image of her country and Africa in general and not reinforce negative stereotypes. In other words, she claims a strong African identity (whilst simultaneously trying to escape from negative stereotyping). Whilst this shift to monoracial self-identification happened to all three, Ophelie, Zapata, and Nina, her identity shifted towards a different direction for Nina, who emphasised her White Belgian heritage when she was confronted with racist stereotypes.

As regards to racial microinvalidations, all the participants have experienced this type of racism (i.e. they had their lived reality negated).

Aline told a story about her summer as a waitress in ice cream café. As it was 2014 and the men's soccer world cup was taking place, Aline had drawn the colours of the Belgian flag on her cheeks. Whilst serving, a client asked her why she had drawn the Belgian colours on her cheek when she was "not Belgian". Aline was shocked about the clients ignorance and the invalidation of her Belgian identity. She responded that she was indeed Belgian. She then asked her colleague to serve the client. After her colleague had talked to the client, he understood his ignorance, apologised and offered her his hat with the Belgian flag drawn onto it. Although Aline appreciated the apology, this experience was hurtful for her. She asserted:

> This really stuck with me. This really hurt me because yes, I have origins but…what does that change? I was born here, I have the same customs. On the 21st of July I celebrate the National Day, and on the 14th of August, I'm at the 15 Août Square here in Liège…and I love it, so here we go. I really know the traditions here, and so this really stuck with me.[26]

Certainly, having her identity as being Belgian invalidated, Aline's racial identity shifted strongly towards a monoracial identity in that situation. Whilst she was telling the story, it was important for her to defend her Belgian identity. The quote above demonstrates clearly what 7 other participants also manifested: by asserting her cultural knowledge and attachment to Belgian (and Liègoise) culture, she justified her identity and felt the desire to prove that her self-identification of being Belgian was and is authentic.

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[26] See Appendix Q for the original quote in French

Moreover, Ophelie experienced having her reality invalidated during her internship at Oxfam. As her colleagues were taking pictures of everyone for their website, all employees were supposed to be disguised to present a profession. One of Ophelie's colleagues jokingly told her that she would not need to be disguised because her hair looked funny enough. Clearly, Ophelie's colleague did not realise that there is no humour in being othered due to not representing the white beauty standard. Ophelie did not dare to confront her colleague because she felt it was unprofessional and she still had not completed her internship.

Besides, Jack had a teacher who never made an effort to pronounce his name properly. The same teacher treated Jack as if he was not able to speak French properly because of his Chinese name. Jack felt indignant in a twofold way. Firstly, he felt that his Chinese identity was invalidated and not seen as legitimate; and secondly, his teacher did not accept him as Belgian. Since there was a power hierarchy where the teacher had to let Jack pass his exams, he did not dare to tell him off. Yet, after Jack passed his exams, he confronted the teacher and told him how his name is pronounced. Briefly, Jack became conscious of his identification with both racial groups whenever the teacher invalidated it.


As regards to Nadal et al.'s theory that mixed-race people experience specific types of racial microaggressions, all five themes but one were also found in this study. Yet, incidents that reflect these themes were less prevalent than in Nadal et al.'s theory.

As to the theme that Multiracial people are often reduced to being the "racialised ideal", only one interviewee reported to feel negatively about being objectified in this way. Zapata has been objectified for being Mixed-race and for being Black but not "too" Black. She feels disgusted by the way how Black people idealise Mixed-race people and try hard to find a White or Mixed-race partner for the only reason to have a light skinned baby. She criticises that both Black and White people find it trendy to be with a Mixed-race person. In this context, Zapata does not appreciate the label "Mixed-race" and does not like to identify as such because she feels this identity is being used against her in a way where she is not seen as an individual.

In contrast, due to an internalised discourse where Whiteness is being seen as the norm (and hence as boring) both Zoé and Yannic objectified themselves by idealising the part of their heritage that is not associated with Whiteness, namely Ivorian and Indian respectively. Basically, in this context, their self-identification of being Mixed-race emerged from an unconscious internalisation of environmental racism.

Ophelie and Zapata experienced that people pathologised their identity and assumed that they had identity issues because they are Mixed-race. Both women expressed disgust about these comments. They both argued that there are many people who have been socialised within several cultures but whose identity is not being pathologised because their physical appearance is not ambiguous. For both women, these experiences resulted in claiming a Mixed identity.

As regards to the theme *Exclusion or Isolation*, Yannic, Aline and Nicolas reported that their own family members have excluded them because they are Mixed-race. Yannic felt excluded from his extended family when he travelled to Ivory Coast. He did not feel welcome because many family members saw him as the rich

European who has money to buy expensive gifts for them, such as a laptop. Even when he was back in Belgium, he received calls from relatives who asked for money. Yannic was annoyed by this request and explained to his family that he did not have a lot of money himself as he was still a student. He felt excluded because he had hoped to be welcomed and be seen as a full member of the family instead of being treated as the rich European man. As a result of feeling excluded from his Ivorian family members, Yannic's ethnic identity shifted once again more towards identifying as European.

Nicolas described a similar experience he had with his Belgian grand-mother who called him "Cuban" in a condescending way in order to let him know that he is not a "real" Belgian. This behaviour came from a place where she did not accept that her son (Nicolas' father) had a Mixed child with a Cuban woman of colour. As Nicolas reported that nowadays he feels more attached to his Cuban part of identity as a reaction to have continuously not been given the identity possibility to be Belgian, this incident can be viewed as a subcomponent that lead Nicolas to self-identify primarily as Cuban.

As already mentioned in the section *Ethnic/racial ambiguity*, all of the participants reported that people assume they are monoracial. Whilst this observation can be compared with Nadal et al.'s theme "*Mistaken Identity to be monoracial",* Nadal et. al. referred to the fact that Mixed-race individuals often overhear comments about one of their racial groups because people assume they are not part of that group. Yet, none of the interviewees reported to have heard racist comments about one of racial groups because people did not know that they are part of that group. Rather, it happened the other way around, that some participants experienced racial microaggressions on the basis that people assumed they were another race (as describe in the next section).

Finally, some of the participants reported to have had their reality as Multiracial people denied. Already at a young age, Nicolas experienced having his lived reality invalidated. In primary school, at age 7 or 8, his classmates called him "Mogli", "Indian", and "Tarzan". Whilst his classmates thought it was funny, he felt hurt as he was labelled in a condescending way. At one point Nicolas told the teacher that he was being teased with racial slurs. The teacher told his classmates to stop. As a result, it was hard for him to find friends because his classmates felt he should be able to deal with these "jokes". At times, even the teacher told him not to take it too seriously. Nicolas' lived reality was denied to such an extent that he had to accept racist "jokes" to a certain degree in order to not be completely excluded. As Nicolas continued telling stories about how his reality as a Mixed-race person was invalidated via racial slurs and essentialist labelling, it become evident why he does not care anymore about it these days. As he has become used to everyday racism Nicolas ended up to accept the racial identities that society assigns to him.

Also Zoé has had her multiracial experience denied. She described a situation in where her White Belgian father racialised people as Black in situations where it is not relevant and therefore inadequate. Zoé felt offended because even though she is not Black herself, she felt the pain of being "othered" due to her racial identity of being a Person of colour. In that situation, she stated her anger. Yet, her father did not understand her anger and hence invalidated her reality of being a Mixed Person of colour. Although Zoé claimed several

times during the interview that her ethnic identity is "100%" Belgian, she also expressed that as time passed by, she felt more the need to surround herself with other People of colour. This may be due to incidents (like the one she had with her father) that stem from White ignorance.

In conclusion, most interviewees altered their racial and/or ethnic identity as a consequence of experiencing racial microaggressions. Either, they distanced themselves from that part of their racial identity that was used as the "reason" for racist comments (that is, the part of their identity that is not associated with Whiteness), or they took particular pride for that part of their racial identity, which resulted in a shift towards a racial identity that is associated with being a Person of colour. Besides, there is a tendency that those participants (in particular Nicolas) who reported the most microaggressions shifted their racial identity towards the aspect that is not associated with Whiteness. This reaction emerged out of a necessity where one either claims a monoracial identity of the minority part of their identity, or not being accepted at all.

### 6.2.4    Differences in mixed-race experiences based on gender identity

Overall, three differences came to light when comparing the experiences of Mixed-race men and women. Firstly, as women in general have to endure a much higher pressure to fulfil a beauty standard than men, and due to the fact that this beauty standard is constructed to be a White norm, the women in this study reported more often incidents of everyday racism where their physical appearance was under scrutiny as regards to how beautiful they are.

Secondly, although being othered by means of the "What-are-you"-question does not necessarily happen more often to the women in this study than to the men, more women than men explained that they experience being asked about their origins by male strangers, who asked about the women's origins in order to flirt with them. Just as outlined in the literature review, the women in this study reported to be racialised, sexualised and exotified simultaneously. As such, 4 out of 7 women expressed to feel disgusted when being called "exotic", whereas none of the men in this study reported to dislike the term. When looking at the effect this has on their racial identity, is has the consequence of not wanting to be categorised as Mixed-race in that context.

Thirdly, three men in this study talked about how they have been criminalised due to being People of colour, and have stereotypes attached to them based on other people's interpretation of their phenotype.

As regards to normalised beauty standards, Aline stated that especially during her teenage years, she wanted to be skinny like the other (White) girls in her class and not have curves. Similarly, Zapata used to hate her body shape. At one point, she lost weight in order to not have a big bottom anymore, to be less sexualised, and to deconstruct the stereotype that Black women have big bottoms.

These two stories portray the double effect of Whiteness as the normalised female beauty standard. On the one hand, physical appearance that is associated with Whiteness (i.e. white skin, slim body with little curves, small lips and nose, big eyes, straight thin hair), is seen as desirable. On the other hand, only those who are not categorised as White will be racialised, overtly sexualised and are seen as less desirable simultaneously if they do not fit these normalised beauty standards.

As a consequence to this environmental racism, both women reported to not feel comfortable in their skin and to adhere more to their White side of their identity. Whilst Aline said that these days, she feels comfortable in her skin, Zapata talked about how she wanted to loose weight again in order to have a smaller bottom.

Whilst growing up, Aline also experienced discomfort with her lips, which do not represent the white norm. She did not dare to wear red lipstick for a long time, as she was afraid it would emphasise her "big" lips. Yet, at age 16, she started wearing red lipstick. Aline reported that as she experienced more acceptance from her environment whilst growing older, she simultaneously gained more confidence about her physical appearance.

Briefly, Aline's and Zapata's racial expressions are shifting in alignment with the everyday racism they experience. Simultaneously, along with their racial expression, their racial identity shifts as well. Zapata referred to herself only as Black and talked about debunking Black stereotypes when she talked about how she is racialised and sexualised due to the shape of her body. In other words, as a consequence of anti-Black racism, her racial identity shifted to a monoracial Black identity in the particular context of being reduced to a Black stereotype.


What is more, most women, who are mixed with Black and White, except for Diana, talked at least at one point about comments they have heard due to their hair. This example portrays how the normalised beauty standard views any type of hair that is not associated with Whiteness as abnormal. Again, along with racial expression as a reaction to racism, the women's racial identity shifted.

For instance, Nina explained that from primary school until her teenage years, she mostly identified as Belgian. However, three years ago she started wearing her natural hair instead of straightening it. Nina explained that as soon as she started wearing her natural hair, she felt more equally attached to her Guinean side. One reason why she decided to cut her hair was the influence of her sister and because there was a Black awareness movement which encouraged her to wear her natural hair. In other words, the environmental influence of counter-acting racism lead to Nina feeling more attached to the Guinean part of her identity.

Likewise, Aline and Ophelie used to straighten their hair in order to appear "more beautiful", which resulted from their experience of having their hair seen as abnormal (e.g. at school, her teacher compared Ophelie's hair to wool). However, along with the activist movement five years ago, they cut off their hair and let it grow naturally as a means to express their newly claimed racial identity. Unfortunately, the consequence of this decision is that they have to endure experience more racism. Strangers touch Ophelie's hair without even asking. Also Marie reported that she receives comments about her hair as she does not straighten it. The fact

of having to deal with more racism as they are wearing their natural hair, acts as another factor that leads Aline and Ophelie to consider themselves People of colour.

Two men, Jack and Paul, have also received comments about their hair. For Paul, comments about his curly hair were linked to being called a "foreigner". Jack occasionally got called a hedgehog at primary school. Whilst these comments stem from the idea that hair that is not associated with Whiteness is abnormal, Jack and Paul have not received comments about their hair as systemically and prevalently as the ones the women have had to endure, neither are they linked with a pressure to be beautiful.

As to the theme of being racialised and sexualised simultaneously, Aline expressed being asked questions about her origins as a pick-up line. This makes Aline feel uncomfortable to the extent that she refuses to answer in this context, although she usually does not engage in racial resistance.

Zapata told me about an incident that stuck with her: In the train station, a strange man who was walking behind her followed her. At one point (although she had not looked back at his face), he shouted "Wow, look at that ass! What are you?! What are you?!" as a means of hitting on her. Zapata felt particularly disgusted by the situation because the man had not seen her face, only her bottom. She immediately understood that she was being sexualised due to the stereotype that Black women have "curvy" bottoms. She told him that she would not respond to this kind of behaviour.

Zapata recalled another example of when she was being racialised in order to nurture an idea of "exoticness" as a sexual fantasy. On the bus, a stranger aske her where she was from in order to hit on her asked her. The man kept asking whether she was from the Isles of Mauritius because he attached a sexual fantasy to the idea of that region. The man kept staring at her face in order to figure out "where" she was from. Zapata expressed that she feels objectified when people try to sexualise her in a way where her desirability is attached to an idea of an "exotic" place. She summarised that she feels objectified primarily by Black men who only find her attractive based on the idea that she is mixed with White and hence more desirable than a monoracial Black woman. In this context, she feels she is being reduced to her racial background because without wanting to know who she is as a person. Since in this context, it is a disadvantage for Zapata to be Mixed-race, she does not want to be called "Mixed-race" and refrains from being categorised in a racial group at all.

On the contrary, none of the men in the study expressed having negative feelings when being labelled "exotic". Paul, Yannic, Nicolas even stated that the find the term has positive connotations.

As regards to the third theme, Yannic and Paul both have had to deal with the Arab-Muslim stereotype of being a jihadist. They both have been told by family members that they should not grow their beards in order to not appear like a jihadist.

Christopher experienced racial profiling when walking outside his house. A police officer asked him to show his identity card. Even though Christopher did not appreciate the situation, he showed understanding for the police officer that had to do his job. On the basis of this understanding, Christopher did not express to have felt

more attached or detached to any of the parts of his identity.

Briefly summarised, these findings confirm Ifekwunigwe's and Nadal et al.'s theory that Mixed-race women are particularly objectified, othered, and sexualised in a context when they are being labelled "exotic". In this context, Zapata in particular, felt the need to distance herself from being labelled "Mixed-race".

## 6.3      Identifying additional Mixed-race identity development themes

Following the second type of paradigmatic analysis (Polkinghorne's inductive approach), I identified additional concepts that derive directly from the data collection of this study.

As already mentioned in the literature review as well as shown in the analysis, shifting race perceptions and associations result in flexible and fluid identities. Although this theme on Mixed-race identity is not new, it is not always clear how exactly flexible identities are functioning. The analysis of this study so far has shown several times that Multiracial individuals identify differently in different situations, whilst simultaneously upholding a mixed-race identity. Oftentimes, racial and/or ethnic identities shift not only in specific day-to-day interactions, but also over different periods of time. Mainly, individuals alter their racial identities as a reaction to everyday racism. Individuals attach or distance themselves from the identity possibility that society allows them to have, whilst simultaneously moving within a community discourse that protects Whiteness as the status quo. Amongst others, Aline's story about how proud she was when she became aware that she is a Person of colour as a reaction to the racist comments from her classmates, Nina's decision to wear her natural hair regardless of how society treats her consequently, and Yannic's decision to identify as "European" in an ethnic sense, show that whenever an individual chooses autonomously his or her own identity, it leads to a feeling of liberation. As such, independently of whether a racial and/ethnic self-identification is a consequence of racism or not, it remains an autonomous choice.

Against this background, a new theme emerges that promotes positive Mixed-race identity development: *Dynamic and fluid identities by means of autonomous self-identification.*

### 6.3.1      Dynamic and fluid identities by means of autonomous self-identification

All of the interviewee's expressed to not only self-identify differently in different contexts, but also stated to identify with several identities at the same time, which exist next to each other rather than being mutually exclusive.

For instance, Christopher summarises his identities as following:

> I consider myself Belgian but I am Mixed-race nevertheless. That is marked on my forehead in inverted commas. I have

family in Mauritius but I consider myself Belgian[27]

Similarly, Zoé proudly identifies as Métisse and as Belgian. She stated:

Métisse ?…that is…that really shows that I am Belgian, but half Indian. So there is another nationality that is added, but which still means that I remain 100% Belgian.[28]

Likewise, Nicolas described to have a Belgian identity because he was born and raised in Belgium, while identifying mainly as Cuban in another context. Just as Christopher and Zoé, he thinks these two categories do not exclude one another.

Interestingly, when it comes to using specific terms in order to self-identify, one interviewee can embrace specific terms that others clearly disclaim. For example, Zoé is ok with the expression "half -Indian" but dislikes the term "half-Belgian" as she feels it discredits her identity of being Belgian, whilst simultaneously taking pride in identifying as Métisse. In contrast, Nicolas does not appreciate at all to be labelled "half". Rather, he prefers to state both his Belgian and Cuban heritages without discrediting any of his identity with "half". Yet again, Jean explained that he does not mind any being called "half Belgian" nor "half Korean".

Moreover, Diana and Ophelie feel differently about the French word "noir" (meaning "Black" in English). Ophelie, who grew up in Belgium, explained that she prefers to be described as "noir" instead of being told that she is "of African origin" or having the term "noir" translated into the English "Black". For Ophelie, it means that the other person attaches a negative association to the word "noir", when in reality it does not mean anything negative. In contrast, Diana, who grew up in Senegal, prefers the English translation "Black", or the terms "African" or "European" as opposed to the French term "noir" because she feels that there is a negative association with the French term, whereas when she thinks of the English term "Black", she thinks of positive Black-awareness movements in the USA.

In conclusion, how someone autonomously self-identifies depends on how they experience the use of language. Consequently, the same term can be lived as an insult by one person, and can be embraced by another person.

Yet, there are two terms that all participants in this study agreed on. Firstly, all of the participants reported to identify as Mixed-race in general terms, i.e. a category that can represent a political statement, an ethnic or a racial identity, and which does by no means interfere with other identities, such as considering oneself "100%" Belgian. Secondly, all of the participants stated that they do not appreciate to be called a "foreigner" in their own homeland(s).

As we have seen, the same terms can have positive as well as negative effects, depending on what someone associates with them. In addition, the very same person can experience the same term as positive in one situation and as discrediting in another situation. This may be due to two reasons. Firstly, the term is used in a way that it (supposedly) represents something negative and hence it is used against the Mixed-race

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[27] See Appendix R for the original quote in French
[28] See Appendix S for the original quote in French

individual. Both Zapata and Yannic explained that any term – (whether it is "Black", "White", or "Mixed-race") that is used in order to reduce them to stereotypes of that racial group, becomes a label that they do not accept in that specific situation. Zapata gave the specific example of when Black men label her "Métisse" as a means to tell her that she is more desirable than a monoracial Black woman as she has lighter skin. In this context, she feels disgusted by the term "Métisse" because she it makes her feel like an object and not an individual. Likewise, Nicolas does not embrace to be called a "foreigner" by a stranger who uses the term to exclude him. But in case his friends use the term in order to acknowledge positively his difference, Nicolas views the term "foreigner" as a racial identity that describes his experiences as a person of colour.

Secondly, an individual can experience the very same term as positive in one, and as negative in another situation if he or she is not granted their autonomy. Briefly, an individual is able to identify autonomously without restrictions from others either because others do not tell him or her how they can or should identify, or because the individual possesses enough self-confidence in order to know that their identity is legitimate no matter whether others agree or not. The dialogue I had with Ophelie reveals how the same word can be experienced as discrediting for the only reason that one feels their autonomous choice is not being accepted. When I asked Ophelie how she feels about the term "Belgian", she responded:

> Ophelie: Yes, I am Belgian, it's written on my Identity Card (*laughing*). So yes, I primarily see myself as Belgian because that's my nationality and that's…one of the parts of my identity. So it's true that I'm half Belgian in my blood…and half Congolese…but yet 100% Belgian on my identity card because it's my nationality…and also in the sense where I was born in Belgium and I have always lived in Belgium…and so…yes I am Belgian
> Me: So there are two contexts. In one context, you…it doesn't bother you to call yourself "half Belgian" if it's in a context where you explain it yourself...
> Ophelie (*interrupting me*): No, I'm not half Belgian, I am 100% Belgian! Errmm, I am 100% Belgian, but I am half white and half black. Yet I am 100% Belgian in the sense where….not only in my blood, it's my identity card, it's my life.
> Me: So in an ethnic sense you are 100% Belgian.
> Ophelie: And in a cultural sense, too. Actually that's it…it's cultural…well no….. so we'll say on paper I'm 100% Belgian…but then in terms of culture…I'm not a 100%....but it's also true that I know more of the Belgian culture than of the Congolese[29]

In the context where Ophelie called herself "half-Belgian", she felt a sense of autonomy when identifying herself. However, when I used the very same term as I wanted to give her feedback about what I understood she wanted to express, she quickly interrupted me, implying that I had misunderstood her identity. The desire to explain her identity stems from a desire not only to be granted the possibility to self-identify, but also to be fully accepted as Belgian. This behaviour to desire autonomous self-identification is evident in the face of the community discourse on different racial groups, identities are, as Agier stated, too often and to radically essentialised in a sense where an individual can only be one or the other. As the analysis of Ophelie's (and the other participants') stories indicate, she has experienced to be excluded from being fully accepted as Belgian based on her Mixed-race identity (and physical appearance). She has founded (inter alia) her racial identity on her experiences in secondary school, where many of her classmates labelled her Métisse. She asserted:

> It's just… if I hadn't met my classmates in secondary school, I would have stayed…maybe someone with one black parent and one white parent, but without asking myself questions about this…and finally it was my environment that

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[29] See appendix T fort he original quote in French

made me think about it…as in why is it so important for others that I'm mixed-race? Because I have the impression that it is more of an intellectual problem for other people than it is for me[30]

Having internalised this type of discourse, where one is either a "real" Belgian (based on a biological determinism) or a person of "foreign" origin (regardless of whether or not they are a Belgian national), Ophelie felt the need to justify her "Belgian-ness" in front of me. In addition, as in the French language and the Belgian discourse, there is little to no differentiation between the two concepts of race and ethnicity, it was difficult for Ophelie to communicate that her racial identity of being Mixed-race (White Belgian and Black Congolese) is valid at the same time as her ethnic identity of being Belgian. As such, the same term can be used to describe a racial identity in one context, and an ethnic identity in another.

The way Yannic flexibly changes his identity is another representation of how ethnic and racial identities are intertwined, and relate to how society creates identity possibilities. In the beginning of the interview, Yannic stated that he is a "real" European. At another point, he said he was not a "real" European. When I called attention to these seemingly paradoxical statements, he specified that in the sense of his worldview, he sees himself as European (his ethnic identity equals European). However, as he knows that he is not White and does not "look European" in terms of his physical appearance, he does not feel European (his racial identity equals Person of colour; Mixed-race Black and White).


Finally, it needs to be stressed that several stories show that racist incidents are not the only reason why mixed-race people shift autonomously their identity. How individuals are socialised in their families as well as in their environment also plays a crucial role. For example, Diana reported that after she has spent 5 years in Belgium, she feels more attached to her Belgian part of identity than ever before.

Nicolas, Aline and Paul described how their family socialisation is linked to their identity development. Nicolas reported that during primary school, he felt more attached to his Belgian side, although this was a time when got called racial slurs the most. Yet, when at age 15, his father left the family, he felt more attached to the Cuban part of his identity.

Aline experienced a similar story. As she grew up with her Belgian mother only, she used to not feel very attached to her Togolese origins. Then, she contacted her father at age 13, as she wanted to know more about her origins. Ever since she is more in contact with her extended family from Togo, she identifies as Togolese, too.

Furthermore, Christopher, Marie, Zapata and Diana described having grown up in a household where they were educated about being mixed-race. As a result, they described that they already felt comfortable in their skin as children. Diana and Zapata explained that only because of comments they received from outside their family, they questioned their identity.

Amongst all participants, Marie and Zapata were the ones who the most assertive to autonomously claim their identities.

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[30] See appendix U for the original quote in French

### 6.3.2   Acceptance of the social order due to internalised community discourse

As examined above, most of the theories on Mixed-race individuals written by scholars from the USA and the UK are applicable to the participants in this study. Yet, there is a discrepancy between the behavior of the participants in this study and those in the studies recapped in the literature review. The interviewees of this study reported to not be particularly bothered with having their identity mistaken, as opposed to Jackson's theory on *Racial/ethnic ambiguity.* Besides*,* in particular as regards to the theme *Racial Resistance,* the interviewees in this study reported much less often to refrain from answering questions about their ancestry. Indeed, Ophelie is the only participant (out of 14) who stated that she uses racial resistance as a regular behaviour pattern. Another surprising finding is that most participants downplayed racism, such as defending their friends' racist jokes or even obvious racist behaviour like being called a "foreigner".

Bearing in mind that race perception and its associations depend on the geographical context; it is evident that so does the definition of racism itself. The examples of how the interviewees self-identify based on how they interpret language and how language is used in their favour or to their disadvantage in a given situation, show that their definition of what is (not) racism depends on the community discourse they internalised. Consequently, the discrepancy between Jackson's and this study is due to a disparity of community discourse between the USA and Belgium. As a matter of fact, racism is part of mainstream discussions in the USA. These discussions include both malicious acts of racism as well as the nature of racial micoraggressions, with newspapers like "The Washington Post" writing about the issue (see Barbash, 2015). Furthermore, in the USA there is an understanding that autonomous racial self-identification is crucial in order to counteract the idea of a biological determinism due to the national Census that asks people to self-identify (see U.S. Census Bureau).

As mainstream discussions about racism in Belgium mostly revolve around animosity (see e.g. "Le racisme, vous valez mieux que ça », Wallonian Campaign, 2017), the participants have internalised the idea that Whiteness is the norm, which needs to be protected, in a more intrinsic way than the participants of Jackson's study.

The interviewees' understanding of racism came particularly apparent when I asked them to tell me about their life story as a Mixed-race person. As before the interview started, the interviewees had read and signed a document that informed them that I was examining how everyday racism affected their identity development, many thought they had to recall deliberate racist incidents and therefore did not know what to say. Zoé and Marie immediately assured that they had never experienced racism; and the first thing Bernard thought of was the hate-crime that happened to him. Hence, I had to clarify further that I was interested in his experiences in general at first. The same applied when I asked: "What are all the ways you identify?". The majority of the participants did not understand the question as they are used to the idea that identities are essential and mutually exclusive.

The internalisation of the community discourse that protects White fragility also lead most of the participants to accept their position in the social order that is established, which also explains why racial resistance was not

reported very often. Christopher explained that as he was repetitively labelled "foreigner" in school, he had accepted at one point the term "foreigner" as a racial category because he had been told very often that he was one because of his physical appearance. Nevertheless, Christopher stated that as he grew older, he earned the capacity to distance himself from what others told him.

> Now I feel better in a way that…despite of what people say, I know who I really am, whereas during my teenage years, there was a period where I considered myself more as a foreigner.[31]

Despite acknowledging that everyday racism can result from ignorance, Christopher thinks that the situation of when he got called a "foreigner" was not racist. Even when I asked him to focus on his own perception rather than other (White) people's feelings, Christopher still reiterated that he does not judge the situation as racist. Similarly, Zoé protected her friends and family when I asked her of whether she finds racist jokes racist. Again, these examples show how the mainstream Belgian discourse is more oriented towards protecting White fragility than the discourse in the USA, where the participants of Mixed-race studies are more likely to find something like being racialised in an indirect way as disturbing.

Many interviewees in this study, such as Paul, Nicolas, Aline and Zapata, reported to be so used to everyday racism in the form of microaggressions that they do not take it seriously anymore and have just accepted the social order. In particular, Aline described how she used to feel uncomfortable as a child when strangers were asking her about her origins, or when people approached her speaking Togolese to her. She also explained that today, she has accepted the social order that she is being seen as an "other".

Ultimately, the way how participants used language, demonstrates how they have accepted a racial code that reproduces Whiteness as the norm, which is another contributing factor of why the interviewees have accepted their position as "other" within the social order. For instance, Zoé used the words "culture" as a synonym for race; and when she was talking about "migrants", she was referring to migrants who are people of colour exclusively. Moreover, Aline called herself "exotic" in order to describe her otherness whilst amongst White people.

Even though these instances reflect what also happens in the USA (as examined above), racial codes that render Whiteness invisible are even more prevalent in Belgium; the most striking expression being "*avoir des origines*" ("to have origins"), which is only used in a context to refer to that part of someone's identity that is not associated with Whiteness. Both Marie and Aline expressed "I have origins", implying that they are People of colour.

### 6.3.3   Confusion and opposing perspectives

As shown in the previous paragraph, the interviewees have internalised Belgium's community discourse, which is a contributing factor to internalise racism. As a result, participants often downplayed racism. Simultaneously, they reported incidents that invalidated their experiences as Mixed-race individuals of colour.

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[31] See Appendix V for the original quote in French

This conflict between the idea that racist actions are inherently tied to malicious intention and actually feeling insulted based on one's racial identity, lead some participants to be confused and/or to express paradoxical perspectives. At this point, it needs to be stressed that the confusion is a consequence of racism and is not inherently given. In addition, paradoxical perspectives should not be confounded with the shifting of racial identification, and the legitimacy of holding several racial identities simultaneously.

The following examples demonstrate how individual perspectives that stand in contrast to the beliefs that have been established in society lead to confusion and opposing perspectives.

Aline responded that most questions and comments about her physical appearance do not bother her. She also explained that now as a young adult, she does not mind when her response about where she is from is not accepted. However, she has developed a strong Mixed-race identity based on these experiences. At the end of the interview, she talked about her weblog in which she discusses the incidents that occur to her due to her Mixed-race identity, and which include her impatience with people who second-guess her racial identity. She pointed out that sometimes she does not feel understood by others.

Several interviewees expressed these two opposing perspectives. Likewise, Zoé feels like anything that is well intended, cannot be racist, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that ignorance is part of everyday racism. Diana undergoes the same confusion as regards to the definition of racism. As a Mixed person, she finds it hard to "blame" White people of racism because she feels part of that very same racial group and hence wants to protect them.

Besides, due to the lack of positive terminology that the French language offers to describe the interconnection between racial and ethnic identities, as well as the restrictions of identity possibilities that society enables one to have, it is evident that some Mixed-race individuals can become confused about their identity at one point.

When discussing all the ways he identifies, Bernard expressed this confusion:

> I admit that sometimes I feel lost. I don't know how people see me[32]

Although Yannic did not state specifically that he feels confused about his identity, his opposing perspectives came to light when he explained his identities to me. On the one hand, Yannic expressed to not feel attached to Belgian society because he is being seen as a Black person. Also, he feels he never shared cultural values with Belgians because he is very interested in fashion and he does not like going out to clubs or binge drinking like other "typical" Belgians. On the other hand, he really enjoys being asked where he is from originally and he enjoys explaining his origins to people. Surprisingly, Yannic described an unusual identity development: during his one-month trip to Brazil, he felt Brazilian because locals thought he was Brazilian, too. He described that for the first time in his life, he felt completely accepted as a full part of a society. After that experience, he felt even less Belgian than ever before.

When as a response, I gave Yannic my feedback as to how I interpret his identity development, he agreed: it is

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[32] See appendix W fort he original quote in French

unlikely that if a White Belgian person does not enjoy binge drinking and is interested in fashion, he or she would also question his or her identity of being Belgian the same way Yannic does. Hence, it is more likely that his feeling of detachment of Belgian society stems from his everyday experiences of being reminded that he is an "other" by means of questions and comments about his phenotype. As these experiences were not existent when he travelled to Brazil, he was not treated as an "other" and thus felt included.

Briefly, even though in the very moment he enjoys when people question him about his race due to his racial ambiguity, the repetitive occurrences have the effect that overall, his racial and/or ethnic identity is disconnected from being Belgian.

### 6.3.4  Self-Healing

Despite the fact that most participants have had negative or even confusing feelings that are tied to their racial identity as a consequence of racism, these experiences lead them to strive for coping mechanism from within themselves.

For instance, Aline is drawn to African-American culture that promotes a positive image of Black people. Furthermore, by means of her weblog, she actively seeks for a community where she can experience a sense of belonging with other Mixed-race people.

Besides, educating oneself about racism is an initiative that Diana and Ophelie took in order to heal from negative experiences that are tied to their identity as Mixed-race individuals. Diana read Trevor Noah's "Born a crime", which helped her better understand the Mixed-race experience. Ophelie's research on being Mixed-race helped her to get the confidence to know that it is her autonomous choice to identify her racial and/or ethnic identities. She asserted:

> Now…I say it as a demand…I will say to myself that I define myself how I want. It is not for other people to identify me…errmmm, as a mixed-race person, being more black, more white…there is always ups and downs of being mixed…and so here we go, now I demand people: be quiet, I identify myself, I identify how I want to, so if I identify as 10% black and 90% white, there's no problem…and there's no….people have no right to define my identity[33]

## 7      CONCLUSION

In conclusion, everyday racism plays a crucial role in how Mixed-race individuals in Belgium develop their racial and/or ethnic identities. As a reaction of being put in a position of being an "Other" in contrast to the construction of Whiteness as the norm, individuals shift their self-identification according to whether or not they agree with the racial category that is being assigned to them in a specific moment. Depending on the individual, Mixed-race people either distance themselves from the part of their identity that is associated with being a racial minority group, or they take particular pride in it. Besides, in a context where the participants experience exclusion due to their Mixed-race identity in particular, they tend to develop a stronger identity

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[33] See appendix X for the original quote in French

that is tied to being Mixed-Race as a whole new racial category. Alternatively, they experience confusion due to a conflict between the restrictive racial identities that society has constructed as acceptable by means of community discourse and their own self-identification based on their lived realities. Nevertheless, regardless of how Mixed-race people actively change their identities as a response to everyday racism, their identity choice will always be an autonomous one as racial and/ ethnic identities are fluid and flexible, and emerge out of the interaction between the individual and society.

This study contributes to a global understanding of race relations and racism when comparing to findings from North America and the UK. Since anglophone race theories mainly come from and apply to the population of the USA and the UK, this paper illustrates that these theories also apply to Belgium (and most likely other countries in Western Europe). With a detailed investigation of Multiracial individuals' experiences in a Western European country, I strengthen the threefold argument that (a) theories about Mixed-race individuals' identity development emerging out of the historical context of the USA and the UK hold true for other predominantly White countries; (b) Mixed-race identities are fluid and are largely affected by both (an individual's perception of) racism and community discourse in a given geographical region; and (c) racism is indeed existent in Western Europe just as much as (or even more than) in the USA and the UK. Hence the denial thereof is yet another oppressive act of racism.

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# 9       APPENDICES

Appendix A: UK National Statistics



**Box 2.1. Ethnic group question for England when show card is used for face to face interview or self completion survey**

*Applies to all*
Interviewer to read:

**What is your ethnic group?**
**Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background**

**White**
1. English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
2. Irish
3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller
4. Any other White background, *please describe*

**Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups**
5. White and Black Caribbean
6. White and Black African
7. White and Asian
8. Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, *please describe*

**Asian / Asian British**
9. Indian
10. Pakistani
11. Bangladeshi
12. Chinese
13. Any other Asian background, *please describe*

**Black / African / Caribbean / Black British**
14. African
15. Caribbean
16. Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, *please describe*

**Other ethnic group**
17. Arab
18. Any other ethnic group, *please describe*

Version 3.3 Office for National Statistics, May 2015
*Harmonised Concepts and Questions for Social Data Sources Primary Principles*
*Ethnic Group*

**Recherche : L'expérience métisse**

Comme votre apparence physique ne correspond pas au stéréotype blanc, des inconnus se sentent encouragé de pénétrer dans votre vie privée sans la moindre discrétion. Entre autres, la question de votre ressemblance se pose régulièrement, et de façon aigüe.

Étant métisse moi-même, j'écris mon mémoire sur l'expérience des métis(ses) dans le cadre de mon Master en Sociologie, à finalité « Immigration Studies ».
L'objectif de la recherche est d'analyser l'impact du racisme sur les identités des métis(ses) en Belgique francophone.

Pour l'étude, j'effectue des interviews individuelles. La durée de l'interview est de 1h - 1h30.

Je cherche des participants qui

- ont biologiquement un parent blanc et un parent non-blanc
- ont une apparence physique non-blanche
- ont grandi en Belgique francophone
- ont 18-35 ans

Si vous êtes intéressé à participer, contactez-moi sur

**alhalloun@student.ulg.ac.be**

Bien à vous,

Anna-Lena Halloun

## LETTRE INFORMATIVE

Université
de Liège

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Titre de l'étude :
**The impact of everyday racism on mixed-race identities in francophone Belgium**
« L'impacte du racisme sur les identités des métis(ses) en Belgique francophone »
Étudiante : Anna-Lena Halloun
Promotrice : Elsa Mescoli

---

Madame, Monsieur,

Vous allez participer à une étude scientifique dans le cadre d'une recherche de Master en Sociologie, à finalité Immigration Studies, menée par Anna-Lena HALLOUN.

La présente lettre vise à vous apporter l'ensemble des informations relatives à l'étude elle-même, à son déroulement et à votre participation (formulaire de consentement).

L'objectif de la recherche est d'analyser l'impact du racisme sur les identités des métis(ses) en Belgique francophone. Dans ce contexte, le terme « métis(se) » désigne un individu ayant biologiquement un parent blanc et un parent non-blanc. « L'identité » fait référence aux expériences des métis(ses) et leur propre interprétation de celles-ci. Également, la définition du racisme de tous les jours est traité comme sujet subjectif : partant du principe que l'interprétation subjective de chaque individu constitue une réalité valide, l'étude veut développer l'interrelation entre le racisme ordinaire et la perception de soi des métis(ses). L'étude analyse également les différentes expériences entre hommes et femmes.

L'étude consiste en des interviews qualitatives. Vous participerez à une interview qui sera enregistrée. Pendant l'interview, je vous poserai des questions concernant votre expérience étant métis(se). Comme l'étude se focalise sur les réalités subjectives, il n'existe pas de « fausses réponses ». Toutes vos réponses sont légitimes à tout moment.
L'interview sera effectuée en français. Le mémoire sera rédigé en anglais.
La durée de l'interview s'élève à 1h - 1h30.

Liège, le ………………………………

Université de Liège

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Titre de l'étude :
**The impact of everyday racism on mixed-race identities**
**« L'impacte du racisme sur les identités des métis(ses) »**

---

1. Je soussigné,

   .........................................................................................................
   déclare avoir lu le document d'information et accepte de participer à l'étude d'Anna-Lena Halloun.

2. J'ai reçu une explication concernant la nature, le but, la durée de l'étude et j'ai été informé de ce qu'on attend de ma part. On m'a remis une copie de ce formulaire de consentement éclairé, signé et daté, précédé d'un résumé de l'objectif de la recherche.

3. Je suis libre de participer ou non, de répondre aux questions, complètement ou non, d'abandonner ma participation à l'étude à tout moment sans qu'il soit nécessaire de justifier ma décision et sans que cela n'entraîne le moindre désavantage pour moi.

4. J'accepte que ces données fassent l'objet de traitements ultérieurs à des fins scientifiques, en relation directe avec les objectifs de la recherche ci-dessus mentionnés, dans le respect de la loi belge du 8 septembre 1992 relative à la protection de la vie privée à l'égard des traitements de données à caractère personnel. Mon nom et mes informations personnelles seront gardés confidentiels. Les responsables scientifiques de cette étude et les personnes qui traiteront les données s'engagent à respecter cette confidentialité de données.

6. J'accepte que les résultats de cette étude, qui seront toujours anonymisés, soient diffusés à des fins scientifiques et en respectant les règles déontologiques de la communauté scientifique.

7. Je peux à tout moment demander la consultation des données à caractère personnel collectées ou leur rectification sans frais. Ces données seront conservées durant le temps nécessaire à leur analyse et ce, jusqu'à un maximum de dix années. Les responsables du traitement de ces données peuvent être contactés à l'adresse suivante :
   Anna-Lena Halloun
   Rue de Serbie 78
   4000 Liège, Belgique
   0032 (0)477833349
   alhalloun@student.ulg.ac.be

8. Je consens de mon plein gré à participer à cette étude.

Nous vous remercions d'apposer la mention « lu et approuvé ».

_____                    _____

*Signature du participant*                                      *Date (jour/mois/année)*

Je confirme que j'ai expliqué la nature, le but et la durée de l'étude à l'étudiant(e) mentionné ci-dessus.
Le sujet confirme son accord de participation par sa signature personnelle datée.

_____                    _____

*Signature de la personne qui procure l'information (étudiant/mémorant)*      *Date (jour/mois/année)*

Anna-Lena HALLOUN
_____

*Nom en lettres capitales de la personne qui procure l'information*

Appendix D : Interview Questionnaire

D.a) ENGLISH

**a) How do you identify your gender?**

**b) What is your date of Birth?**

**1. Tell me your life story about being mixed-race.**
Give an outline of events that you consider the most important ones.
Please start with your earliest childhood memory and finish with the most recent event.

**2. What are all the ways you identify racially and ethnically?**
- Can they explain these identifications with examples?
- Probe on whether they have always identified this way, or if there was a change in their identity at some point.
- Are there specific terms and/or labels that they like to describe their identity?
- What are labels that they dislike?
- "Black, White, Foreigner, Migrant, Exotic"?

**3. What does every day racism mean to you?**
- Can they give specific examples?
- How does it make them feel?

**4. Do you receive unwanted attention regarding your race?**
- For example, being stared at or being asked about their racial background/origins.

**5. Have you ever been mistaken for being a race or ethnicity other than the one you identify with?**
- Probe on whether they think people are "right" or "wrong" about who they are.
- Probe on how it makes the individual feel when they are told "what" they are by others;
- Can they provide an example of a situation? Does it happen more with a certain group of people such as coworkers, family, friends, etc.? Did he/she correct the person that identified him/her incorrectly?
-Probe on what makes them feel like they do or do not belong

**6. Have you ever felt ignorance by your parents, your relatives, and/or friends as regards to your identity as a mixed-race individual?**
- Probe on how it made them feel.
- Did they confront the person or did they remain silent? Why?

**7. Do you do things to make others approve your race and/or ethnicity?**
- Probe on if they eat certain foods, or dress a certain way. Do they act a certain way?

**8. Do you think mixed-race women are being treated differently than mixed-race men?**
- Examples?

**9. Has there ever been a situation where you felt you were given an advantage because you're mixed with white as opposed to people who do not have white heritage?**
- Examples?

**10. Is there anything else you would like to say?**

D.b) FRENCH

**a) Comment identifiez-vous votre genre ?**

**b) Quel est votre date de naissance ?**

**1. Racontez votre histoire de vie étant métis(se).**
Résumez les évènements que vous jugez les plus importants.
Commencez par vos premiers souvenirs d'enfance et finissez avec l'événement le plus récent.

**2. Que sont toutes les façons dont vous vous identifiez racialement et ethniquement ?**
- Peuvent-ils expliquer ces identifications avec des exemples ?
- Se Sont-ils toujours identifiés de cette manière ou y-avait-t-il été un changement de leur identité a un moment donné ?
- Y-a-t-il des termes spécifiques qu'ils préfèrent ?
- Y-a-t-il des termes spécifiques qu'ils n'aiment pas ?

**3. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire pour vous, le racisme de tous les jours ?**
- Peuvent-ils donner des exemples spécifiques ?
- Ils se sentent comment ?

**4. Recevez-vous une attention non-sollicitée concernant votre apparence physique ?**
- Par exemple, se faire regarder ou se faire demander de leurs origines raciales.

**5. Est-ce qu'on vous a jamais pris pour une ethnie ou une catégorie raciale autre que celle dont vous vous identifiez ?**
- Demande s'ils pensent que d'autres gens "ont raison" ou pas en ce qui concerne leur identité.
- Demande comment ils se sentent quand d'autres gens leur disent ce qu'ils sont.
- Peuvent-ils donner des exemples spécifiques ? Est-ce que cela arrive plus souvent avec un groupe spécifique, tel que les collègues, des camarades, des amis, la famille etc. ? Est-ce que l'individu métis corrige l'autre personne si cela arrive qu'il/elle n'est identifié(e) correctement ?
- Que sont les aspects qui font qu'ils se sentent inclus dans la société belge ? Que sont les aspects qui font qu'ils se sentent exclus ?

**6. Avez-vous jamais ressenti de l'ignorance de la part de vos parents, d'autres membres de la famille ou vous amis en ce qui concerne votre identité métisse ?**
- Ils se sentent comment ?
- Est-ce qu'ils ont confronté la personne dans une telle situation ou sont-ils resté silencieux ? Pourquoi ?

**7. Faites-vous des choses afin de légitimer votre identité raciale et/ou ethnique ?**
- Mangent-ils une certaine nourriture, s'habillent-t-ils d'une certaine manière ? Agissent-ils d'une certaine manière ?

**8. Pensez-vous que les femmes métisses sont traitées différemment que les hommes métis ?**
- Peuvent-ils donner des exemples spécifiques ?

**9. Y-a-t-il jamais été une situation où vous aviez eu un avantage à cause du fait que vous avez des origines blanches par rapport aux gens de couleur qui n'ont pas d'origines blanches ?**
- Peuvent-ils donner des exemples spécifiques ?

**10. Y-a-t-il autre chose que vous voulez dire ?**

Appendix E: Quote 1 Nicolas
« Pour moi, m'intégrer, cela veut dire essayer de plaire aux autres »

Appendix F: Quote 2 Nicolas

« De toute façon, si j'ai vécu toutes les choses entre Guillemets négative et positives jusque maintenant et que ca fait qui je suis maintenant...bah si je suis fier de qui je suis maintenant, je suis fier de ce que j'ai vécu »

Appendix G: Quote 1 Nina

« C'est souvent la question qu'on me pose, de d'où est-ce que je venais...et je réponds tout le temps "Bruxelles". D'abord je dis "Belgique". Oui mais je veux dire d'où est-ce que vous venez...ahh mais de Bruxelles »

Appendix H: Quote 1 Diana

« Ici....en général ici, si on me demande d'où je viens je dis je suis belge. Point-barre. Même si je suis plusieurs chose, je dis que je suis belge, parce que je sais comment les gens pensent...et je sais que sais plus simple comme ca...et je sais si je te dis je suis belge....tu vas éviter d'avoir toutes les stéréotypes et toutes tes questions et err...mais ca dépend...ca dépend qui me demande »

Appendix I: Quote 2 Diana

« Les gens sont mal à droit, ils rendent dans ton espace comme ca, avec des questions indiscrète, en pensant que c'est normale, alors que ce ne l'est pas...je veux discuter avec toi mais il y a une façon de le faire »

Appendix J: Quote 1 Bernard

«Bernard: Bahh....je la vois d'une certaine manière...donc il y a certaines personnes, souvent les personnes blanches, qui me considèrent souvent comme un....oui comme un Africain, pas comme un Ivoirien...pas...juste: Africain. Par contre, quand je parle avec d'autres personnes, par exemple avec un pote, il est....errr Congolais.....c'est un bon mélange, je pense il est quarteron...donc c'est un bon mélange et pour lui, lui, qui est considéré métisse, il me voit comme un blanc. Et...j'ai l'impression que aux yeux des blancs, je suis un noir, et aux yeux des noirs je suis un blanc. Donc, ca, c'est un tout cas ce que je remarque....errr on m'a jamais appelé comme un...on m'a jamais dit "Belge?" ou Ivoirien?". Je suis pris soit pour un noir, soit pour un blanc. Or, je ne suis ni noir, ni blanc, je suis plutôt les deux. Mais on ne me prend pas pour quelqu'un noir et blanc. On me prend toujours soit pour l'un, soit pour l'autre.
Me: Donc si j'ai bien compris, si quelqu'un t'appelle blanc, tu n'aimes pas ca, mais si quelqu'un t'appelle noir, tu n'aimes pas ca non-plus?"
Bernard: "Bahh...non, parce que il faut m'appeler comme je suis. J'imagine qu'une personne néerlandaise, si on lui dit qu'il était chinois, il n'aimerait pas non-plus. Donc, il faut utiliser les bons mots...et voilà ce que je ne comprends pas c'est la vision des gens...fins...une personne africaine on le voit, un noir-noir, on le voit; une personne qui est blanche-blanche, on le voit. Les personnes qui sont métisse? J'ai l'impression que les gens ont du mal à se dire que le blanc et le noir se sont mélangés et ca fait du métissage. Et moi, j'aimerais bien qu'on utilise les bons termes. Pour ne pas dire...un noir...ou...un blanc"
Me: Donc si j'ai bien compris, ca te gène, l'ignorance des autres; tu n'aimes pas si on t'appelle juste noir, ou juste blanc parce que tu te vois différemment.
Bernard: Oui...et surtout, surtout...si je peux ajouter...c'est que, c'est toujours les noirs qui me voient blanc, et que c'est les blancs, qui me voient noir. Si c'était le contraire...je veux dire ca va...les blancs pensent que je suis avec eux, les noirs pensent que je suis avec eux...mais chaqu'un joue l'opposition, dans le camps inverse...et ca fait que on se demande...on vient d'où, on est avec qui? On est dans quel camp ? »

Appenix K: Quote 3 Diana

« En fait c'est une façon de dire, toi, de toute façon, même si tu as un côté de nous, tu as ce côté là, que nous on ne connait pas et qu'on n'aime pas. Donc on fait c'est une façon de pointer du doigt de tout ce qui est mauvais d'un groupe que tu ne connais pas...entièrement...et dire que toi, tu représentes ca. C'est ca en fait...que je n'aime pas! Du tout! Je...beurk! »

Appendix L: Quote 1 Aline

« C'est juste que c'est toujours difficile de s'identifier, voilà vous m'avez posé plusieurs questions là-dessus: vous vous identifier en tant que belge ou africaine ou les deux? La je me dis c'est les deux et ca dépend des circonstances...il y a quelque chose qui est très drôle, quand je suis avec mes amis belges, alors pour eux je vais être un peu plus la touche exotique du groupe; alors que quand je suis avec les Africains, ca va être le contraire...pour eux je vais plutôt être...une...presque blanche parmi les noirs (laughing)...alors c'est vraiment ehh...c'est vraiment difficile de trouver une place...et c'est juste quand on est avec des métisses comme nous quand on ressent la communauté...comme je disais à mon copain, maintenant il y a vraiment une communauté métisse quoi...quand on voit les autres métisses on se reconnait (...) et en plus j'ai un blog, et sur mon blog j'ai écris un article sur le métissage et c'est celui sur lequel j'avais le plus de retour, j'ai eu plein de femmes métisses qui m'ont répondu en disant que oui, moi aussi, j'ai eu ca "vous êtes de quelle origine?...ou mais vous êtes sur parce que tu ressemble plutôt à ca ou à ca..." (...) directe, quand je me rapproche d'une métisse je me sens plus proche d'elle...automatiquement même sans la connaître (...) je me dis, alors elle aussi, elle connaît telle situation que d'autres personnes ne peuvent pas comprendre »

Appendix M: Zapata Quote 1

« Me: Que sont toutes les façons dont vous vous identifiez?
Zapata: Moi?, Les deux...ca dépend en fait...moi, aussi, je joue avec ca, je dis...quand ca m'arrange bien, je suis métisse (laughing), quand ca m'arrange pas, je ne suis pas métisse (laughing)...donc...comment...j'essaie de bien m'adapter bien dans la société, j'essaie...ma philosophie de maintenant...je donne à la personne qu'il veut. C'est à dire, si tu viens vers moi et tu crois que je suis métisse, je dis ok je suis métisse. Si tu viens vers moi, et tu crois je suis noir, je suis noir (laughing). Si tu viens vers moi et tu crois je suis je-sais-pas-quoi, oui, je le suis, c'est tout. Comme ca, c'est en fait, pour être bien avec tout le monde...parce que…
Me: Pour te protéger ?
Zapata: Pour me protéger et en même temps pour être bien avec tout le monde. Pourquoi? Parce que il y a des personnes qui ne comprennent pas. Au début, chez les noirs, ils disaient, mais toi tu es blanche, tu es blanche. Et je disais, non, je ne suis que blanche, je suis métisses. J'ai un parent noir et un parent blanc. Et eux, ils disaient: oui mais fais voir, comment tu es sortie, comment tu es sortie, t'es claire de peau. Il y a des métisse qui sortent un peu noir, mais toi, fais voir comment toi tu es sortie!"...tu vois?! Et quand ils ne réfléchissent pas ca devient chaud...et tu te dispute pour rien »

Appendix N: Quote 1 Zoé

« Métisse? En fait, c'est quelque chose que je porte avec beaucoup de fierté en fait. Je trouve que ca fait...err on dépasse nos frontières et...les personnes… quand je dis que je suis métisse ils sont toute de suite intéressés…. de d'où je viens et que ma mère a été adopté et c'est quelque chose qui peut combattre le racisme je pense [...] je suis très fière d'être métisse »

Appendix 0 : Quote 2 Zoé

« Zoé Je ne vais pas dire que ca ne me gène pas du tout parce que c'est pas vrai. Ca me fait quand même un petit pincement...mais...mais j'essaye de le laisser passer à côté parce que...c'est comme ca et...je sais si j'accepte pas ca...et...bon voilà...
Me: Donc...errh... tu as peur que si tu disais quelque chose, les autres vont mal prendre, ils ne vont pas comprendre...ils vont te dire que c'est juste toi, que tu ne devrais pas le prendre mal et que c'était juste une blague
Zoé: Oui, voilà c'est ca. C'est dure quand même mais je dois avouer que parfois ce me fait un peu me sentir mal à l'aise »

## Appendix P: Quote 2 Aline

« J'ai vécu avec ma maman, c'était très difficile pour moi parce que je suis métisse, mais je me rendais pas compte; comme j'ai toujours été dans ma famille belge, avec ma grand-mère qui est blonde, ma maman qui a les yeux verts aussi, j'avais l'impression que j'étais comme eux, alors que pas du tout. À chaque fois que je me dessinais, je me dessinais toujours blonde aux yeux bleus comme ma grand-mère, alors que je ne ressemblais pas du tout à ca, je ne me rendais pas compte. Et surtout parce qu'on ne me faisait jamais la remarque à maternelle, parce que en maternelle les enfants ne font pas la différence entre les couleurs de peau et tout donc on jouait tous ensemble et voilà quoi. Et c'est vraiment quand je suis arrivée en primaire, j'avais 5 ans, là ca a changé. Les enfants m'ont pointé les doigts et m'ont insulté, ils disaient que j'étais un chocolat noir et...c'était vraiment des insultes qui m'ont marqué, j'avais 5 ans et je ne me rendais pas compte en plus, surtout car j'avais vraiment l'accent d'ici, de Liège et...voilà, je me disait qu'est-ce que j'ai différent par rapport à eux, encore ils me tiraient les cheveux parce qu'ils étaient tout bouclés...et maintenant je suis rentré de mon premier jour de primaire en pleurant; j'ai expliqué à ma maman et à ma grand-mère et elles me disaient, mais oui, tu es différente, mais ce n'est pas pour ca que tu es moins belle, c'est juste que toi tu es tout brune, tu as des boucles et tout, mais ce n'est pas grave....et c'est la première fois donc en rentrant de l'école que j'ai fait un dessin de moi… et *(speaks proudly)* je me suis dessinée brune, avec des boucles; et c'était la première fois. Et là, j'ai vraiment...j'ai vraiment pris conscience que j'étais différente des autres, surtout car j'étais la seule métisse de ma classe et vraiment dans toute l'année, j'étais vraiment la seule dans toute l'école »

## Appendix Q: Quote 3 Aline

« Ca m'a vraiment marqué, ca m'a vraiment blessé car oui, je sais j'ai des origines mais...qu'est-ce que ca change ? Dans le fond, je suis née ici, j'ai les mêmes coutumes, quand c'est le 21 Juillet je suis partante pour fêter la fête nationale, quand c'est le 14 août ici à Liège, on est au 15 août et euhh...j'adore donc voilà quoi, je connais vraiment les traditions ici, et donc ca m'a vraiment marqué »

## Appendix R: Quote 1 Christopher

« Je me considère comme belge...mais je suis métisse quand même...c'est marqué sur mon front entre guillemets. J'ai de la famille en Maurice mais je me considère comme Belge »

## Appendix S: Quote 3 Zoé

« Métisse, c'est que...ca montre vraiment que je suis belge, mais à moitié Indienne, donc il y a une autre nationalité qui vient en plus se rajouter, mais qui fait que je reste quand même Belge à 100% »

## Appendix T : Quote 1 Ophelie

« Ophelie: Oui, je suis belge, sur ma carte d'identité c'est écrit (laughing). Donc oui, je me voit premièrement comme étant belge parce que c'est ma nationalité et c'est...une des autres parts de mon identité...donc c'est vrai que je suis à moitié belge dans le sang...à moitié congolaise ..mais si à 100% belge sur ma carte identité car c'est ma nationalité...et aussi dans le sens où je suis née en Belgique et j'ai toujours vécu en Belgique...donc oui, je suis belge!"
Me: Donc il y a deux contextes. Dans un contexte tu...ca ne te dérange pas de t'appeler "à moitié belge...si c'est dans un contexte où tu t'expliques toi-même…
Ophelie: Non, je ne suis pas à moitié belge, je suis 100% belge! Errmm, je suis 100% belge, mais je suis à moitié blanche, et moitié noir. Mais belge, je suis à 100% dans le sens où...non seulement dans mon sang, mais c'est ma carte d'identité, c'est ma vie.
Me: Donc c'est dans un sens ethnique que tu es à 100% belge
Ophelie: Et culturelle aussi. En fait c'est ca...c'est culturelle...mais fin...non...alors on va dire sur le papier je suis 100% belge...après bahh ma culture, je ne le suis pas à 100%...mais c'est vrai que j'ai plus de culture belge que congolais »

Appendix U: Quote 2 Ophelie

« C'est justement, si j'avais pas rencontré mes camarades au secondaire, je serais restée...voilà peut-être quelqu'un avec un parent noir et un parent blanc, mais sans poser plus de question par rapport à ca...et finalement c'est mon environnement qui m'a amené à réfléchir sur...bahh...pourquoi ca a tellement d'importance pour les autres en fait...que je sois métisse...car j'ai l'impression que ca pose plus de problèmes intellectuels aux gens que à moi on va dire »

Appendix V: Quote 2 Christopher

« Maintenant je me sens meilleure, dans le sens où...malgré ce que les gens disent…je sais qui je suis vraiment...alors qu'à l'adolescence, il y avait un passage comme ca où je me considérait plus comme étranger »

Appendix W: Quote 2 Bernard

« J'avoue que parfois, je me sens perdu...je ne sais pas comment les gens me considèrent »

Appendix X: Quote 3 Ophelie

« Maintenant…je dis dans la...revendication...je vais me dire je me définit comme je veux, ce n'est pas aux gens à me définir...errmm..étant métisse, étant, plus noir, plus blanc...il y a toujours des hauts et des bas autour du métissage des gens...et voilà...maintenant j'ai une revendication aux gens: fermez vos bouges,  je me définit moi-même, je me définit moi comme je veux, alors si je me définit étant 10% noir et 90% blanche, il n'y a aucun problème...et il n'y a pas de...les gens n'ont pas droit de définir mon identité en fait »