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Creating a mental health citizen: exploring mental health discourse and its contribution in defining blackness and community among young urban blacks post-Fees Must Fall

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Abstract

The #FeesMustFall protests of 2015-16 were critical in raising issues that have long affected students. They were especially important in shedding light on the struggles that black students have long faced in universities around South Africa. The post-#FeesMustFall moment is used here to interrogate the after-effects of the #FeesMustFall protests two years after they have taken place, but specifically with regards to a new relationship that this moment has created between the experiences of black university students and the discourse of mental health. Issues surrounding mental health are explored and interrogated through the concept of mental health citizenship. Through employing biological citizenship, I trace discrete practices of mental health as well as institutional interventions at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I suggest that my findings point to the issues of precarity that were primary issues during the Fees Must Fall protests and how they contribute to issues of mental health. I highlight how moments of the everyday intertwine with the bigger institutional structures to create what I have termed a mental health citizenry.