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Research Report

Topic:

What Are Some White People's Perceptions of Racial Transformation in South Africa's Higher Education Sector? A Decolonial Examination

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At

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Abstract

The present study deploys Decoloniality as a theoretical and philosophical framework to examine some white people's perceptions of the calls for decolonization and transformation in the South African higher education sector. Qualitative methodology is employed to examine the articles on decolonization and transformation in The Rational Standard magazine and some Facebook posts on the same subject. The study notes that South Africa remains a country that is burdened by its history of colonialism and apartheid. This is especially true for the country's institutions of higher education which continue to perpetuate colonial-like practices which marginalize African knowledge along with the lived experiences of African students. The student protest movements that began in 2015 with Rhodes Must Fall and later Fees Must Fall, were the culmination of years of the discrimination, dehumanization and subjugation of black people in South Africa's higher education sector. The failure of the transformation of higher education project after 1994 resulted in a growing need amongst marginalized black students for the decolonization of higher education that would result in the liberation of South African universities from European and Western epistemologies, systems and structures of power. These calls for an end to white supremacy and white privilege in South African universities are unsettling to some white people who struggle with the reality of having to relinquish the power that their whiteness affords them. Through thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, this study shows that some white people view decolonization as a fabrication, as a plot to erase European and Western knowledge, as reverse racism, and as a violent project designed to wipe out all traces of whiteness. The study illustrates how these sense-makings are consistent with a colonial worldview that informs white people's lack of courage to interrogate evidence of coloniality meaningfully for fear of being held accountable to benefitting from coloniality itself. The study concludes by observing the need by white and black people of South Africa for 'frank conversations' on decolonization of higher education as part of the completion of the liberation project in South Africa.

Key Words: *Some White People, Decolonization, Transformation, Decoloniality, Coloniality, Perceptions, Privilege, Power, White Fragility*.

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Chapter One
Background and Context of the Study

1.1 Introduction

The present study has deployed Decoloniality as a theoretical and philosophical framework to examine some white people's perceptions of decolonization and transformation in the South Africa higher education landscape. It is noteworthy that the demands for racial transformation and decolonization in South Africa in general and the higher education sector in particular has made some white people perceive the Republic as a "strange place" (Vice, 2010, p. 323). It is strange because it is full of black rage for freedom and equality, and white fear of black revenge for the crimes of apartheid. The fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994 brought with it a widespread sense of unity that was dubbed The Rainbow Nation (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007; Baines, 1998). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is said to have instilled a sense of faith in the black majority that apartheid's injustices would be re-written and to have calmed down white people's fear of the wrath of the black majority through retributive justice (Green et al., 2007). The TRC is also said to have alleviated white people's "social insecurity" and fear of having to account for the injustices of the past (Green et al., 2007). However, with structural inequalities still in place and narratives of there being a war against white people proliferating (Steyn & Foster, 2008), it is clear that there are greater tensions and anxieties that are brewing beneath the façade of unity and national pride. It is true to the observations of philosophers and theorists of Decoloniality, some of them cited in this study, that long after political independence and democratization of such countries as South Africa, colonial and racist mindsets, systems and structures of power and privilege, remain in force.

Most interesting is the tension and angst that exists amongst white people who have had to renegotiate their subjectivities in the unfamiliar territory that is post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn, 2001; Steyn & Foster, 2008, Vice, 2010), and navigate their way through society as beneficiaries of apartheid amidst "visible poverty, crime, child beggars, [and] the de facto segregation of living spaces…" (Vice, 2010). South Africa, according to Vice (2010, p. 323), "is a strange and morally tangled place to live in" for

white people. It is for this reason that Vice asks: how can/should white South Africans "be and live" a country with such a horrendous legacy of social injustice at the hands of white people themselves? For a white person in South Africa to think seriously and positively about decolonization and transformation, observes Rian Malan (1990:2), demands a "traitor's heart" that is able to look at its unjust and unearned power and privilege in the eye, and join black people in struggling for true and full liberation from the legacies and residues of apartheid. Thinking like a traitor to one's tribe, race and social class in order to participate actively in social justice and liberation thought and work demands a lot of emotional and political courage, it seems.

This question points to a crisis that is faced by white people who do not know how to live as privileged beneficiaries of apartheid amidst visible social injustices, many of which exist as a direct result of apartheid. Moreover, the question points to where (if at all) white South Africans perceive themselves to be located within calls for racial transformation and decolonization in post-apartheid South Africa and in higher education institutions in particular. The question also points to the implications that white people perceive racial transformation and decolonization to have for their livelihood in light of the privilege that their whiteness affords them (Steyn, 2001; Vice, 2010). It is in light of this predicament that this study has used a decolonial lens to examine the perceptions of some white people towards decolonization in South Africa's higher education institutions.

Research into racial transformation and decolonization needs to go further than covering the "material conditions of inequality" by looking into "the positions and discourses of privilege and dominance that stem from an ideology of white superiority and hegemony" (Sefa-Dei, 1996 as cited in Green et al., 2007). In other words, the project of racial transformation and decolonization is incomplete without a thorough examination of the sense-makings and discourses of white people who are beneficiaries of the racial injustices enshrined by apartheid and colonialism. Giroux (1997) argues that foregrounding whiteness in conversations regarding anti-racism, racial transformation and decolonization reveals how white identities are molded by the culture of racism itself, and highlights that work is required on the part of white people too if we are to address racism and coloniality adequately. We need to have an understanding of white people's perceptions towards racial transformation and

decolonization in order to understand and intervene in the often invisible ways in which coloniality continues to permeate South Africa's institutions of higher education and its society at large. Emphasizing whiteness in this way challenges the pervasive nature of whiteness that renders it invisible and normative (Giroux, 1997; Steyn, 2001). Part of upholding white hegemony is keeping whiteness as an entity that exists in the background and so requires no critical assessment. If research into racial transformation and decolonization is to be rigorous in its approach, it needs to move whiteness to the forefront so that we can understand whether or not, as well as in what ways whiteness rejects or accepts calls for racial transformation and decolonization in higher education in particular.

It is true that decolonization in higher education in South Africa's higher education sector needs to reflect the voices of those that are on the receiving end of racism and the injustices of coloniality. However, the voices of the beneficiaries of structural inequalities within this sector need to be highlighted in order to get a sense of how whiteness operates to either resist, support or resist and support decolonization in South Africa's higher education sector. Research has been done on how decolonization is the solution for the racially divided, still colonial and unequal space that is the South African higher education sector (Heleta, 2016; Luckett, 2010; Swartz et al., 2018). However, there remains little research on how white people are reacting or responding to calls for decolonization within the South African higher education sector. This study has attempted to contribute to the filling of this gap in literature and scholarship by uncovering what some white people think of this process in light of them being beneficiaries, incidentally and accidentally, of the injustices that this process seeks to dismantle. It can be noted here that, perhaps in its limited way, this study has not paid sufficient attention to what some white people, except some scholars cited in this study, have thought and done for the struggle against coloniality and the racism that accompanies it in the South African higher education landscape. Further studies, or this study if one day allowed to be expanded and deepened, may do that work.

This study has conducted its examination of white people's perceptions of racial transformation and decolonization in South Africa's higher education sector through a decolonial lens. It has done this using a qualitative approach, making use of articles from The Rational Standard which is an alternative online commentary and news

platform. The data included in this study also consists of Facebook comments on the topic decolonization in higher education, specifically the Rhodes Must Fall movement. The data was analyzed thematically as well as through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis as an interpretive and analytical tool. After this introductory section of the present chapter, objectives and research questions of the study are stated, followed by an outline of the chapter of the study.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

The purpose of this study has been to identify and understand some white South Africans' sense-making of racial transformation and decolonization in higher education. More specifically, the study has aimed to join the dots between some white people's new subjective positions in post-apartheid South Africa and how they perceive racial transformation and decolonization in order to understand whether they oppose or accept this process. Further, the study has tried to understand what these perceptions tell us about how some white South Africans negotiate their whiteness amidst calls for racial transformation and decolonization in higher education and in society at large. The study also serves the purpose of suggesting the implications that some white South Africans' perceptions of racial transformation may have for the process of decolonization itself.

In achieving its research objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do white people negotiate their whiteness in relation to calls for racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector?
- What discourses are invoked by white people in order to make sense of racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector?
- What implications do white people think that the process of racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector has for them in light of their positionality in post-democratic South Africa?

1.3 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: This chapter has opened the canvas of the study by presenting the background and context of the study, the research objectives and questions, and the present outline of chapters of the study.

Chapter Two: A theoretical and conceptual framework of the study is presented. This chapter defines key decolonial concepts, discusses the usefulness of decoloniality as a theoretical and philosophical tool, and it explains the relevance of the Coloniality of Knowledge to the study.

Chapter Three: The qualitative methodology of the study is presented with reference to the study's design, data sources and method of analysis.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents a literature review which is centered on the topics of transformation and decoloniality, the racial contract, whiteness and white fragility.

Chapter Five: What is presented in this chapter is a discussion and interpretation of the statements from some white people that express their perception of decolonization and transformation in South Africa's higher education sector.

Chapter Six: In this final chapter of the study, the conclusions that were are made and details of some propositions for further research are presented.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates Decoloniality as the theoretical and conceptual framework of the present study. As explained in the introductory chapter, this study uses Decoloniality to examine some white people's perceptions of racial transformation (decolonization) in the South African higher education landscape. To achieve its objectives, as noted before, the study examines some articles that were published by some white commentators on the Rational Standard online media platform. These commentators, as the title of the publication claims, purported to defend rationality, quality and standards of higher education against calls to decolonize higher education which they judged to be irrational and a threat to quality and standards especially during the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests of 2015 and 2016. The present chapter begins with a definition of key theoretical concepts, Coloniality and Decoloniality followed by a discussion of the Colonial Matrix of Power. This is followed by an elucidation of the rationale behind having used Decoloniality as a theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. In conclusion, the chapter hones into the Coloniality of Knowledge as an important feature of coloniality that is especially relevant to this study. This is done after the chapter has clarified the way Critical Diversity Studies is a potent Decolonial theoretical and philosophical tool that aims to unmask as well as challenge coloniality.

2.2 Definitions of Key Theoretical Concepts

This section of the chapter delves into definitions of key terms and concepts that are central to this study. This is important in so far as the definitions lay a foundation for the study by clarifying key terms and concepts in advance.

Coloniality

Later in this study it is observed and argued that the Rational Standard commentators were furthering Coloniality when they suggest that the call by students for decolonization of higher education are irrational and a threat to the quality and standards of higher education. What is understood to be coloniality today can be traced back to a specific form of domination that Quijano (2007) describes as Eurocentric colonialism. Eurocentric colonialism refers to the relation of overt "political, social and cultural" sovereignty that was created by Europeans in their pursuit of conquest over the rest of the world (Quijano, 2007, p.168). Eurocentric colonialism can also be understood as the official system of political sovereignty that Western European societies exerted over the rest of the world's societies (Quijano, 2007). This form of domination is deemed in present times as an issue of the past that has been replaced by other social, political and economic systems of domination such as Western imperialism for example (Quijano, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2016). It is for this reason that Maldonado-Torres (2016) distinguishes colonialism from coloniality by arguing that what we now see after the formal abolition of colonialism is more of a "logic, metaphysics, ontology and matrix of power" that is a product of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.11). This is what we may refer to as coloniality which is visible all around us in the post-colonial era, according to Maldonado-Torres (2016).

As the world continues to advance through the processes of civilization and Western modernity, coloniality remains vividly visible because it is in fact the basis of civilization and Western modernity. Coloniality is visible in so-called "development policies, nation-state building practices, widespread forms of policing, surveillance, and profiling, various forms of extractivism", extensive prejudice, social inequality as well as in the "liberal initiatives of inclusion- among other forms of social, economic and political control" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 1).The notion of coloniality captures the fact that even years after the attainment of independence from colonial rule, the unequal power relations between colonizers and their former colonies continue to prevail. Coloniality refers to the colonial occurrences that presently unfold despite the removal of formal systems of political colonialism. These colonial occurrences include:

> The cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate

> racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220).

The essence of coloniality is found in understanding its distinction from colonialism. Colonialism is specifically limited to “a political and economic relation” wherein the autonomy of a state relies on the autonomy of another state thereby making such a state an “empire” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.243). In contrast, coloniality denotes the prevailing forces of power that stem from colonialism. These forces of power continue to prescribe “culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production” despite the removal of the formal political systems of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.243). Coloniality exists with or without colonialism. It is a powerful force which Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.243) describes as continuously thriving in “books, in criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience”. Coloniality is laced in the everyday experiences of all modern subjects such that “we breathe coloniality all the time” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.243). This study, in particular, is interested in Coloniality in the sphere of knowledge production in the South African higher education landscape where some privileged commentators claimed to be the custodians of quality and standards, and dismissed mainly black student protesters as proponents of knowledges that were not up to their standards and quality.

It is worth emphasizing that coloniality manifests in subtle ways such as in what is deemed to be common sense and rational knowledge (Quijano, 2007). The notion of common sense makes the implicit assumption that there exists an agreed-upon and normal form of sense-making that is shared amongst most people. Therefore, any other form of sense-making is uncommon and exists amongst people who are in the margins. Privileged European philosophers such as Jergun Habermas (1970) have argued for higher education and university training that must create what he called a ‘rational society.’ Similarly, inherent in the notion of rational knowledge is the implicit suggestion that there exists amongst some people knowledge that is irrational. Common sense and rational knowledge are informed by the European paradigm of modern/rational thinking which forms a part of the project of colonial supremacy over other inferior parts of the world (Quijano, 2007). It is evident that coloniality is still in operation in the

educational, political, economic and social structures of the post-colonial era. It also remains intact in the manner in which people perceive and make sense of the world. It is with this in mind that this study has sought to tap into the perceptions of white South Africans towards racial transformation in higher education. The study has sought out to uncover and understand the extent to which coloniality plays a role in the perceptions of these white South Africans.

Decoloniality

Since coloniality refers to the pervasive and multi-layered forces of power that have survived colonialism, decoloniality refers to the resistance against these colonialism-inspired forces. It seeks to address, contest and expose the pervasive powers of colonialism that manifest in different ways during these post-colonial times. Decoloniality challenges colonialism as a "historical and contemporary process" and contests "the cultural and epistemological Eurocentrism that underwrites it" (De Lissovoy, 2010, p.280). It also aims to oppose Western modernity along with its hegemonic institutions and hegemonic narratives (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, Mignolo, 2007). Nldovu-Gatsheni (2015) explains that decoloniality forms a part of an ongoing struggle by people whose subjectivities are marginalized and outranked. This struggle lobbies for the attainment of a newly-organized world that is more tolerant and non-exclusionary (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). It comes as no surprise then that decolonial theory is made use of by movements that are in opposition to "racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia" as well as the "liberal and neoliberal politics" that are seen in our present era (Maldonado-Torres, 2016. p.1). The work of decoloniality is seen in efforts to create a more humane world with no hierarchies of difference that strip people of their humanity and destroy the environment. Decoloniality also works to dismantle hegemonic and colonial discourses, knowledge and creative arts (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). In short, decoloniality seeks to dismantle present-day coloniality in order to create fertile ground for alternative forms of being in the world that are not underwritten by a Eurocentric worldview.

While it is important to recognize that "political, economic, and epistemological" forms of decoloniality are tied together, there is a need to acknowledge that the order of these forms of decoloniality is influenced by the perspective of historical decolonial struggles

which prioritized “political sovereignty” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a, p.18). As decoloniality becomes re-imagined in present times, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018a, p.18) stresses that epistemic freedom should be foregrounded in the decolonial fight because “it deals with the fundamental issues of critical-consciousness building which are prerequisites for political and economic freedom”. In other words, epistemic freedom is the foundation upon which other forms of decoloniality are built, thus a greater emphasis ought to be placed on it. As the cornerstone of decoloniality, epistemic freedom is “the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop [ones] own methodologies and write from where one is located” without the constraints of Eurocentrism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a, p.17). Epistemic freedom is concerned with “cognitive justice” and separating reasoning from coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a, p.17). It is also a direct challenge to the epistemic line (an extension of the racial colour line) which deems some people as subordinate and therefore unable to produce legitimate knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a).

Grosfoguel (2007) elucidates epistemic freedom in much more depth by locating it within Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s concept of the “Decolonial Turn” to create what he calls the epistemic decolonial turn. The epistemic decolonial turn stems from the separation of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. One of the reasons why this group split is because of a difference in opinion regarding the reading of subalternity. On the one hand, people interpreted subalternity as “a postmodern critique” that reflects “a Eurocentric critique of eurocentrism” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.211). On the other hand, there were people who interpreted subalternity as “a decolonial critique” that reflects “a critique of eurocentrism from subalternized and silenced knowledges” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.211). Grosfoguel (2007) explains that for those who endorsed the decolonial critique as he did, it became greatly important to challenge the privileging of Western knowledge by decolonizing the Western canonical thinking and epistemology. In other words, it became apparent to Grosfoguel and others that the goal of producing subaltern studies needed to be approached from a non-Eurocentric and non-Western knowledge production space that only consists of subaltern and marginalized knowledges.

The epistemic decolonial turn is a viewpoint that critiques “Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism” (Grosfoguel, 2007). The basis of all of

these fundamentalisms is the view that there exists only one epistemic stance from which “Truth and Universality” can be obtained (Grosfoguel, 2007). It is noteworthy that Decoloniality does not only challenge the Coloniality of Eurocentrism but also negates any fundamentalism and parochialism that might be advanced by those that claim to fight Eurocentrism and its coloniality.

The epistemic decolonial turn rejects this notion of a single, universal truth which can only be derived from one epistemic stand-point. It argues for a wider “canon of thought than simply the Western canon”; that a true decolonial universal perspective must include “a critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as opposed to a universal world”; and that the decolonization of knowledge must prioritize the “epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights” of people from the Global South who are producing knowledge “from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.213). The epistemic decolonial turn involves questioning, thinking, critiquing what is taken to be universal knowledge or common-sense (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.25). As a direct resistance to a colonized process of knowledge production that privileges voices from the Global North, the epistemic decolonial turn calls for an end to epistemic hegemony that is characterized by the notion of there being one *knowledge* that is true and universal, instead of there being many *knowledges* that are subjective and pluriversal (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018a).

In essence, the epistemic decolonial turn encourages the generation of questions and critiques that oppose the colonial imposition of one form of knowledge on the rest of the world. Questioning, critiquing, rethinking and even replacing existing colonial systems of *knowledge* with silenced *knowledges* is fundamental to decoloniality. These processes make room for the notion of a singular, true and universal knowledge to be deconstructed and critiqued in ways that reveal the unequal power dynamics that underlie it. Epistemic decoloniality’s pursuit of unmasking the hidden powers that underlie coloniality’s insistence on a singular knowledge that is true and universal, involves recognizing and emphasizing that the “ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location” from which a subject speaks affects the knowledge that they produce (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213). At the core of the epistemic decolonial turn is the fundamental principle that “who we are and from where we speak " is significant for the

type of knowledge we create (Moya, 2011, p.79). Coloniality has continued to thrive by negating this fundamental principle through the "delinking" of people's identities and positionalities from the type of knowledge they produce (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). The result of which has been the creation of a ranking of subordinate and dominant knowledge and, therefore, subordinate and dominant people (Grosfoguel, 2007). Hamid Dabashi (2013) for instance, asked the question "do non-Europeans think?" with reference to how in the scheme of Eurocentrism people that are not white and not Europeans are standardly not considered thinkers that possess rationality. In reference to the same question, Walter Mignolo (2013) exclaims "yes we can" in defense of the truth that non-Europeans that include South African blacks do have rationality and thought.

By prioritizing epistemic freedom in decoloniality, one is able to uncover the colonial undertones of knowledge systems that are founded on the premise of there being one kind of truthful and universal knowledge. Decoloniality illustrates that the foundation of assumptions that are based on the colonial notion of a single truthful, universal knowledge involve conquest, arrogance and a God-likeness way of thinking (Grosfoguel, 2007). Thus, it becomes understandable why Mignolo (2007) describes decoloniality as disconnecting from the entire structure of knowledge in order to re-create new systems of knowledge, languages and ways of existing in the world that have since been rejected by coloniality. As a theoretical framework, decoloniality acknowledges and emphasizes that there exists "other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 453). Hence, decoloniality permits the researcher to not only ask "how do white South Africans make sense of racial transformation in higher education"; but also, to ask "are there traces of coloniality in white South Africans' sense-making of racial transformation in higher education"?

2.3 The Colonial Matrix of Power

An understanding of decoloniality would be incomplete without an elucidation of the exact mechanism through which coloniality operates which is The Colonial Matrix of

Power. The Colonial Matrix of Power functions in four areas of life which are closely tied to each other. Within each of these areas there exists “conflicts over control and domination” wherein a colonial world order is forced upon an “existing pre-colonial order” in a supremacist, destructive and marginalizing manner (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, p. 134). The Colonial Matrix of Power operates through the following four systems of control:

> **Control over the economy** in the form of the appropriation of land, natural resources and the exploitation of labour.
>
> **Control of authority** through constructing political organizations; different forms of governmental, financial and legal systems; or the installation of military bases.
>
> **Control over the public sphere** through the nuclear family (Christian or bourgeois), and the enforcing of normative [heterosexual] sexuality and the naturalization of gender roles in relation to the system of authority and principles regulating economic practices. It is based on sexual normativity and dual “natural” gender relations.
>
> **Control of knowledge and subjectivity** through education and colonizing the existing knowledges, which is the key and fundamental sphere of control that makes domination possible.
> (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, p. 134)

By recognizing the Colonial Matrix of Power as the instrument through which coloniality continues to thrive, this study has used it as a tool to identify and scrutinize the aspects of some white South Africans’ perceptions of racial transformation in higher education which reflect some of the mechanisms of The Colonial Matrix of Power. In other words, the Colonial Matrix of Power has been used in this study as a way of examining if and in what ways white South Africans’ perceptions of racial transformation in higher education are colonial in nature. Decoloniality permits the use of the Colonial Matrix of Power as a means of exposing subtle and pervasive forms of coloniality that may be operating in white South Africans’ way of making sense of the world. In essence, the

study has examined these perceptions according to the basic argument that is made by the Colonial Matrix of Power which is that, despite the formal end of political colonialism, the legacy of its power remains embedded in fundamental societal structures.

2.4 Rationale of Decoloniality as a Theoretical Framework

This section of the chapter aims to provide a rationale or justification of Decoloniality as a theoretical framework of this study. Better than other possible theories, Decoloniality is most suitable in Critical Diversity Studies in the way it unmasks the hidden interests and agendas of such voices as those of commentators of the Rational Standard that used the excuse of quality, standards and rationality to resists decolonization in the South African higher education setting.

The myth of a postcolonial world

The logic behind undertaking decoloniality as a theoretical framework for this study is that the removal of formal, political colonial administration does not mean that colonial powers are no longer present today. Decoloniality is a relevant theoretical framework because of the fact that colonial power continues to permeate society in present times. Grosfoguel (2007, p.219) explains this point quite eloquently by stating that we cannot possibly reduce global coloniality to “the presence or absence of a colonial administration”. In other words, the reach of global coloniality is much further than countries’ attainment of independence. Decoloniality is the most relevant response to the existence of colonial power despite the removal of the colonizer’s power at the level of the nation-state. According to Grosfoguel (2007, p.219), “the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world” was one of the most potent misconceptions of the previous century. It is this misconception that led to a further fallacy that is the existence of a postcolonial world.

Decoloniality is a useful and relevant theoretical framework because the world has not yet completely overcome coloniality. We can still understand issues such as white South Africans’ perceptions of racial transformation in higher education in relation to coloniality because coloniality continues to thrive in current times. If the decolonial

agenda is to succeed in creating a more tolerant and non-exclusionary world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015), then theoretical frameworks such as decoloniality are critical when trying to understand how people make sense of the world (especially white South Africans given the country's colonial and apartheid history). Decoloniality helps to emphasize the "continuities between the colonial past and the current global/racial hierarchies" in order to make visible the fact that coloniality is thriving in the present-day (Grosfoguel, 2007, p.220).

Decoloniality complements Critical Diversity Literacy

This study is a Critical Diversity Studies project and so the study would have been incomplete had it not made use of Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) as decolonial tool. CDL allows for the analysis of social relations with the recognition that "opportunities are opened up and closed down" for people who are located in different positions within the "unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381). CDL permits the interrogation of how and why people perceive the world in the way that they do. Further, CDL permits the examination of how people's perceptions of the world relate to broader issues of privilege and disadvantage. Similarly, decoloniality permits the critical examination of social phenomena in such a way that exposes the colonial undertones that may exist within these social phenomena. Decoloniality is able to unveil hidden forms of coloniality that may exist in people's perceptions of the world. It is clear that both CDL and decoloniality have the ability to uncover the hidden workings of power and coloniality thus making them suitable for the current study which has sought to do just that in relation to white South Africans' perceptions of racial transformation in higher education. Decoloniality and CDL complement each other because they both provide a way of relating white South Africans' perceptions of racial transformation in higher education to broader issues of power that are connected to South Africa's colonial history as well as the country's history of apartheid. The use of CDL as a decolonial tool has allowed the researcher to make important connections between the perceptions held by white South Africans towards racial transformation in higher education and their new social positioning under the new dispensation of post-apartheid South Africa. White South Africans have had to re-negotiate their subjectivities under the new dispensation and this process has resulted in them experiencing a shift in the privilege that they previously enjoyed under apartheid.

Decoloniality and CDL are helpful in uncovering and analyzing the contestations and underlying power dynamics that are involved white South Africans' perceptions of a 'racially transformed' South Africa.

Decoloniality complements CDL because CDL allows one to "critique and not to just understand or explain society" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381) which is exactly what the decolonial agenda is all about. CDL makes a fitting 'decolonial tool' in that it allows the researcher to locate the perceptions that are under study within broader issues such as white privilege, for instance. Since CDL places primacy on "unequal power relations, social inequalities and fundamental contestations of situated interests in society" (Steyn, 2015, p. 381), it allowed the researcher to see how power and privilege operate within an unequal society and, most importantly, to see how a shift in the possession of power and privilege is perceived by white South Africans for which power and privilege was previously exclusively reserved. What CDL allows for falls within the decolonial agenda, thus making decoloniality a fitting theoretical framework for this study which is a Critical Diversity Studies project.

2.5 The Coloniality of Knowledge

In the important book, Epistemologies of the South, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) argues that part of 'cognitive justice' in the world is to enable knowledges of the people outside Europe and the West at large to be part of the world conversation. It is cognitive injustice and coloniality of knowledge to marginalize the thoughts, histories and knowledges of Africans and blacks in the university landscape of Africa and South Africa in particular. This section of the chapter provides a detailed description of the Coloniality of Knowledge that this study observes to be represented in the Rational Standard.

What is the coloniality of knowledge?

This study understands the coloniality of knowledge to be "an epistemic hierarchy" that regards Western knowledge as superior and non-Western knowledge as inferior (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 217). Not only does the coloniality of knowledge render Western knowledge superior over non-Western knowledge, but it also renders Western knowledge as the only knowledge that is rational and universally true (Mignolo, 2007;

Quijano, 2007). Mungwini (2019) provides a useful conceptualization of the coloniality of knowledge from a Philosophical background in a paper that is titled *The Quest for Epistemic Liberation: What Can Be Done to be True to Both Philosophy and to Humanity?* Given that epistemic liberation challenges the coloniality of knowledge, Mungwini (2019) provides several characteristics of the coloniality of knowledge in this paper. The coloniality of knowledge is based primarily on "assumptions of what counts as knowledge" as well as on wariness regarding "our parity as human beings" (Mungwini, 2019, p. 70). The questions of who is human and what counts as being human are central to the coloniality of knowledge because they have shaped the age-old colonial scheme that has equated the origin of knowledge "with a particular geographical place and segment of humanity" (Mungwini, 2019, p. 70). This geographical place being the West and this specific segment of humanity being the white racial population. The coloniality of knowledge is an "epistemic injustice" which invalidates non-Western thinking while at the same time granting Western thinking a god-like status (Mungwini, 2019, pp. 70-71). Mungwini (2019) discusses several ways in which the coloniality of knowledge functions to subvert non-Western knowledge. One way is through robbing non-Western thinkers of their right to reason. This is achieved through what Mungwini (2019, p.72) calls *epistemicide* which is the "systematic destruction of indigenous forms of knowledge" which has led to the "ideology of universalism". The coloniality of knowledge also involves the imposition of Eurocentric "worldviews and conceptual frameworks" over non-Western thinkers. In essence, robbing non-Western thinkers of their right to reason involved an ideology that European ways of thinking were of a better quality than those of non-European thinkers thus disqualifying non-European/non-Western reasoning.

Another way in which the coloniality of knowledge functions is by creating a lack of self-apprehension amongst non-western thinkers. Mungwini (2019, p.73) explains a lack of self-apprehension as a lack of "understanding one's own world". Using African philosophy as an example, Mungwini (2019, p.73) argues that African philosophers have forsaken their "oral traditions" in terms of their knowledge production as well as found themselves in "linguistic prisons" which prevent them from being able to produce their knowledge in their indigenous languages. In sum, the coloniality of knowledge also functions through the self-defeating behaviors of non-European/non-Western thinkers which has resulted from the imposition of a Eurocentric worldview. The coloniality of knowledge is the domination of ways of being and knowing such that

European/Western ways of being and knowing are rendered superior. The product of the coloniality of knowledge thus becomes colonial ways of thinking that continue to prevail in present times.

How does the coloniality of knowledge manifest itself in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa?

It goes without saying that post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa is still marred by both overt and covert racial tension. An interesting aspect of this racial tension is that which exists amongst white South Africans who find themselves having to make sense of their new subjectivities in the unusual environment that is post-apartheid South Africa (Steyn,2001; Steyn & Foster, 2008; Vice, 2010). White South Africans find themselves in the awkward position of living as beneficiaries of the apartheid regime amidst social, economic and political inequality that exists as a part of the legacy of apartheid (Vice, 2010). This poses a moral and existential crisis for white South Africans (Vice, 2010). In an effort to make sense of this unusual situation, some white South Africans tend to exhibit colonial ways of thinking that can be traced back to the coloniality of knowledge.

DiAngelo (2018) demonstrates some manifestations of the coloniality of knowledge (colonial ways of thinking and being) in her book titled *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism.* DiAngelo provides a thorough explication of the concept of white fragility which presents itself in ways that are indicative of the coloniality of knowledge. Despite DiAngelo (2018)'s book being based on white fragility within the context of the United States as well as the general Western parts of the world, she argues that the same patterns of white fragility "have also been observed in white people in other white settler societies such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa" (p. xi). Thus, it makes sense to apply DiAngelo's conceptualization of white fragility to the South African context to understand how colonial ways of thinking and being might look in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa.

Before providing a definition of white fragility, it is important to understand that DiAngelo (2018)'s arguments are grounded in the premise that after benefitting from racism and from colonialism for hundreds of years, most white people do not want race to be spoken about. White people protect themselves from "racial stress" while

simultaneously feeling “entitled to and deserving of [their] advantage” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.1). White people do not have the ability to grapple with race and racism because of a socially-ingrained “sense of superiority” that they are either unaware of or cannot admit to themselves (DiAngelo, 2018, p.2). This sense of superiority is what makes white people very fragile when they have to talk about race. DiAngelo (2018, p.2) conceptualizes white fragility as such:

> We consider a challenge to our racial worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people. Thus, we perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable- the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy (DiAngelo, 2018, p.2)

The process of white fragility as it is explained above illustrates the coloniality of knowledge because it is rooted in white people’s sense of superiority over what can be spoken about and what cannot be spoken about. Their dismissive attitudes and behaviors when it comes to talking about issues of race and racism are indicative of a colonial way of thinking where white people’s sense of superiority makes them feel entitled to deciding what is worth talking about and what is not worth talking about based on their level of comfort/discomfort about a particular topic. Elements of the control of knowledge are clearly evident within this line of thinking.

White South Africans remain beneficiaries of the Population Registration Act of 1950, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 to name but a few apartheid laws that entrenched inequality based on race (“A History of Apartheid in South Africa", 2016). Given that the legacy of apartheid continues in post-apartheid South Africa, it is important to acknowledge that white South Africans continue to reap the benefits of this unjust system. It is challenging for

some white South Africans to acknowledge and live comfortably with the reality that they are beneficiaries of the gross human violations of the apartheid regime. White South Africans find it difficult to admit that racism forms a part of their subjectivities as white people even though they may not necessarily commit racist acts in their everyday lives.

As a result of their inability to grapple with the racist heritage that their whiteness carries, some White South Africans have resorted to adopting an epistemology of ignorance when it comes to racism in South Africa (Steyn, 2012). An epistemology of ignorance is the intentional hiding of matters related to race and racism that are not comfortable enough to be spoken about by white people (Steyn, 2012). Here, ignorance is not referring to a lack of knowledge, rather ignorance refers to an inverted form of knowledge where someone denies that they have knowledge on a particular topic. In post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, white people often adopt this epistemology of ignorance in order to evade the responsibility that comes with being a white South African whose historical identity is so heavily shaped by racism (Steyn, 2012). White South Africans buy into an ignorance contract that protects them from having to suffer the emotional trauma and guilt that is attached to admitting that they are beneficiaries of a racist system (Steyn, 2012). The ignorance contract is an example of white fragility which is rooted in the coloniality of knowledge because it maintains white supremacy through the control of what can and cannot be known about white people in post-apartheid South Africa. The fact that white South Africans think that they can choose what should and should not be known to be a part of their history illustrates not only white fragility, but most importantly the coloniality of knowledge. In that way, the Rational Standard is contracted to ignorance in the way its commentators sought to ignore that black African students that were protesting and demanding decolonization in higher education also represent rationality and another standard of epistemology in the South.

DiAngelo (2018) provides other examples of white fragility that can be linked to the coloniality of knowledge. One such example is that some white people see themselves as “objective and unique” (p.9) and thus unaffected by racial socialization. Individualism states that people are unique and that they exist separately from each other, even people who belong to the same social group (DiAngelo, 2018). This means that some

white people do not believe that they can be socialized into particular racial behaviors. Objectivity states that it is possible for a person to be devoid of all bias (DiAngelo, 2018). In other words, some people are able to exist without prejudice. These are two Western and European ideologies (or rather colonial ways of thinking) that make it difficult for some white people to be able to see that their "perceptions and experiences" are made sense of through their "cultural lens" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 9).

Taking an objective and individualist stance to issues of race and racism, for instance, allows white people to see themselves as existing outside of issues related to race and racism. It allows them to distance themselves from something that they are inevitably a part of and that influences their cultural lens. Objectivity and individualism allows for some white people to argue that race is a non-factor that does not necessarily have an impact on a person's life when we know for fact that race just like class, gender and other positionalities shape a person's life chances in a significant way (DiAngelo, 2018). Ideologies such as individualism and objectivity are a type of coloniality of knowledge because they give those who adopt them the sense that they can control which social forces affect them and which social forces do not affect them. Another example of how white fragility plays out which illustrates the coloniality of knowledge is some white people's tendency to claim that that race and racism are not the most salient issues which affect inequality because "the real oppression is class [or gender or anything other than race]" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.118). Again, it is the colonial assumption that they can decide what counts as oppression and what does not count as oppression that is at play here.

The perceptions that have been examined in this study were sourced from the alternative online media platform that calls itself the *Rational Standard.* By positioning itself as the Rational Standard, this media platform is making the implicit suggestion that what is published on this media platform is rational knowledge. There is also the implicit suggestion that there is content that is produced by other media platforms that is less rational. These implied claims are in line with a European and Western paradigm of rational knowledge which forms a part of colonial supremacy over other parts of the world (Quijano, 2007). Claiming to be the standard of rationality is based on a line of thinking that submits to "the control of knowledge and subjectivity" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, p. 135). Claiming to be the standard of rationality is to say that the

knowledge that you produce trumps other knowledges that are much lower on some supposed hierarchy of rationality. Analyzing the title of the Rational Standard alone provides a solid example of the coloniality of knowledge in action.

Challenging the Coloniality of Knowledge

Epistemic decolonization can be understood as a fight for freedom. It is “the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in a relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1986, p.87 as cited in Mungwini, 2019, p.71). Mungwini (2019, p.73) goes on to describe epistemic liberation as striving towards reclaiming “the universal right to reason in terms of being able to theorize our own reality as a people”. In addition to this, epistemic liberation also involves a rejection of the “the northbound gaze in the form of blind submission to a hegemonic and parochial universalism” (Mungwini, 2019, p.73). Mamdani (1998)’s critical review of a core course titled *Introduction to Africa* that was introduced to social sciences students at the University of Cape Town is an excellent example of a challenge to the coloniality of knowledge. In his critique of the initial course readings, Mamdani (1998, p.11) argues that, given that the course readings were drawn from one text which was intended for North American students in 1976, the course lacked important debates that “took place in the equatorial African academy in the same period and that critically influenced the study of Africa” around that time.

He goes on to argue that a course on an introduction to Africa must be incomplete if it does not have the following key debates. These debates highlight that it is possible to examine the social history of Africa prior to European colonialism and that and that the “social history of gender in Africa is not a replay of its history in Europe” (Mamdani, 1998, p.11). These debates illustrate how vital it is for a course on Africa to be studied outside of the of Eurocentric confines (Mamdani, 1998). This is just one example of an attempt to oppose the understanding of knowledge through a solely Eurocentric and colonial perspective. It is in this way that Decoloniality is what Enrique Dussel (1985) has called the ‘philosophy of liberation’ that is opposed to the marginalization, oppression and exclusion of one by the other at a world scale. In this study, Decoloniality is used to unmask and challenge coloniality in the way one people pretend

to have a monopoly of rationality, quality and standards while reducing others to ignoramuses that must be told what to think and how to be in the world.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined decoloniality as the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. Definitions of coloniality and decoloniality as key theoretical concepts have been provided to lay the foundation of what it means to conduct a decolonial examination. The Colonial Matrix of Power has been fleshed out as it is the key mechanism through which coloniality functions. Hence, one can only decolonize once an understanding of this matrix of power is reached. The thinking behind using decoloniality as a theoretical and conceptual framework is then discussed. This discussion highlights that it is a myth that we live in a world in which coloniality has stopped and so it is important to analyze the world through a decolonial lens. This discussion also highlights that a decolonial examination complements the fact that this study is rooted in Critical Diversity Literacy. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the coloniality of knowledge highlighting what it is, how it plays out in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, as well as how we might go about challenging the coloniality of knowledge.

Chapter Three
Methodology

3.1 Introduction to Methodology

The present chapter aims to flesh out the qualitative and interpretive methodology of this study. As noted by John Mouton (2010) the methodology of a study represents it as academic and scientific work that can be relied upon as credible and repeatable. As a study that deploys decoloniality as a theoretical framework this study takes seriously the key argument that Linda Tuhiwai Smith puts forward in her book that is titled Decolonizing Methodologies. She argues in this book that the word “research” is a “dirty word” (Smith, 1999:1) because the activity of researching has been weaponised for coloniality and domination against indigenous people such as black people in South Africa. In this argument, Smith (1999) challenges our conceptualization of research by stating that doing research entails more than a benign search for knowledge. This is because “the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). In its methodological approach to examining white South Africans’ perceptions of racial transformation and decolonization in higher education, this study seeks not to further entrench imperial and colonial modes of conducting research which center Eurocentric ways of making sense of the world by deeming them to be most rational, most accurate and universal. The study has sought to examine these perceptions with the understanding that they form part of one way of making sense of transformation and decolonization in higher education; they are not the only and most accurate way of making sense of transformation and decolonization in higher education.

This study is also aware that research is often conducted in manner that involves “undressing other people so as to see them naked” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p.186). In other words, researchers often fall into the colonial habit of being invasive, intrusive and exploitative in the studying of their subject matter. This colonial kind of research is in a strong way part of the civilisation and modernisation imperial mission which holds it to be true that education was brought down as gift by colonial conquerors to the black African natives. In an attempt to avoid reproducing this colonial method of inquiry, this study’s examination of white South Africans’ perceptions of racial transformation and

decolonization in higher education is not done in an objectifying or uncritically scrutinizing manner. The study does not seek to discredit what some white South Africans think about racial transformation in higher education. Rather, it seeks to analyze these perceptions in a manner that is revealing of the colonial worldview that underpins them.

The perceptions that are under study are examined through a decolonial lens which does not "reduce people to the level of a microorganism: putting them under a magnifying glass to peep into their private lives, secrets, taboos, thinking and their sacred lives" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p.186). In doing so, the perceptions are studied with the goal of unmasking the hidden powers that underscore them rather than forcefully imposing a one-sided and pathologizing explanation for these perceptions in order to completely discredit the feelings that are held by some white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. This qualitative study is aware of "the relationship between methodology and power" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p.186) and so it has been conducted with careful attention not to reinforce a colonial agenda in its methodology and design. The perceptions under study are critically examined and deconstructed to offer one way of understanding some white South Africans' perceptions of decolonization in higher education in a manner which does not result in the complete character assassination of white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. The study does not exploit these perceptions so as to invalidate them and those who hold them.

A decolonial methodology has also allowed this study to question and critique the notion that non-Europeans (including black South Africans) cannot think as Europeans do and therefore do not meet the standard of rationality according to a Eurocentric perspective which includes a white South African perspective. With the backing of Hamid Dabashi (2013) and Walter Mignolo (2013)'s arguments, this study examines the perceptions of white contributors from the Rational Standard, an online publication, towards racial transformation in higher education in a way that challenges the colonial notion that rational thinking is exclusive to Europeans and thereby white South Africans. These perceptions are assessed with in a way that critiques the colonial notion of there being a single standard of rationality that exists in the world that is European. In using a decolonial methodology, the study seeks not to entirely dismiss the perceptions that are held by white people about decolonization in higher education on the Rational

Standard by suggesting that only perceptions that are held by black South Africans towards decolonization in higher education are valid. The study rather seeks to employ an approach that fosters a conversation between the two perspectives, given that decoloniality calls for all perspectives (both European and non-European) to be considered as equally valid and legitimate. The underlying suggestion in the title of the Rational Standard alone mirrors the colonial belief of "Europe as the teacher and Africa as the pupil" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p.19). Employing a decolonial methodology has allowed this suggestion to be critiqued and for the coloniality that underlies this suggestion to be exposed. What is chiefly exposed is a colonial and racist perception and attitude that the education of black Africans in African postcolonies such as South Africa is part of the colonial and imperial 'white man's burden' of civilising backward natives of 'dark continent' of Africa.

3.2 Rationale of employing a Decolonial Methodological Approach

This study is justified in employing a decolonial methodological approach for two reasons. Firstly, this study has a strong social justice imperative to uncover the implications that white South Africans' perceptions of racial transformation and decolonization in higher education may have for the broader process of racial transformation and decolonization in the Republic of South Africa as a whole. Although the sample size of this study is small, it allowed for the more general observations to be made in relation to white South Africans because the perceptions that formed part of the sample are representative of a larger discourse that exists in post-apartheid South Africa. This larger discourse is characterized by the inability to grapple with the dispossession of privilege and superiority that was inflicted upon white people in post-apartheid South Africa. The perceptions in the sample size are a small representation of a larger discourse that prevails amongst some white South Africans. A decolonial methodological approach allows for these perceptions to be examined in a way that reveals how some white South Africans grapple with the privilege that is afforded to them by their whiteness in a country that is increasingly calling for the destruction of white privilege and white superiority. This is because, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017, p.186) argues, decolonization does not simply mean one mode of knowledge production but also an opening up of space for other 'cosmologies of knowledge'

besides the European and white one. Decolonization is also an “ethical, ontological and political exercise” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, p.186). In order to achieve a more socially just Republic, we ought to pursue a critical examination and understanding of not only the perspective of the victims of coloniality but also the perspective of the beneficiaries of coloniality as well. It is through a decolonial methodological focus that this study achieves this.

Secondly, as stated in the previous chapter, the data sources for this study are derived from the alternative online media platform that calls itself the Rational Standard. Implicit in the Rational Standard’s title and content is the suggestion that there is knowledge that is produced elsewhere that is irrational and, by implication, invalid or untrue. In addition, the commentators on the Rational Standard argue that calls for decolonization in higher education are irrational in that they threaten the rationality, quality and standards of higher education. Through its commentary and even through its title itself, The Rational Standard mimics the “modern epistemological disputes between scientific and nonscientific forms of truth” which render some forms of knowledge as visible and other forms as invisible (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 47). The Rational Standard’s implicit assertion is that their commentary is accurate and logical thereby suggesting that commentary that opposes theirs is irrational and illogical.

De Sousa Santos (2014, p. 47) describes this kind of distinction as an “abyssal invisible line” that separates sensible, well-grounded knowledge from lucid, groundless knowledge. This is a colonial line of thinking in that it deems some opinions to be inferior to others and therefore some knowledges to be inferior to others (Grosfoguel, 2007). Arguing that calls for decolonization in higher education pose a threat to the high standards of higher education follows the colonial paradigm that invalidates and discredits proponents of non-Western ideology. This argument, together with the assertion that its commentary represents the gold-standard of rationality indicates that the Rational Standard’s commentary is embedded in the logic of coloniality which illegitimates non-Western knowledge by championing a specific Eurocentric modernity/rationality (Mignolo, 2007; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2009). Thus, in examining data sources from this platform, this study is justified in making use of a decolonial methodological approach because it has allowed the study to critically examine the opinions from the Rational Standard with the understanding that there is no universal

standard of rational knowledge and, most importantly, there is no universal knowledge. In the view of decoloniality there are multiple and plural knowledges that come from different and diverse people, not just one European province of the world that now pretends to be the centre of the world if not the world itself. Knowledge from one European province of the world that is pretended to be a knowledge of the world seeks to create a monologue instead of a dialogue of knowledges and different peoples of the world.

It is through a decolonial methodology that this study has been able to question and critique what the Rational Standard argues is common knowledge in order to expose the hidden agenda behind it. The study has employed this approach in order to show how the colonial agenda behind some of the commentary on the Rational Standard operates to distort the validity and necessity of calls for decolonization in higher education. A decolonial methodological approach has sensitized this study to the fact that discourses of rationality and of the need to maintain the so-called high standards in higher education are laden with hidden colonial underpinnings. This study seeks to reveal these colonial underpinnings through a critical examination of commentary from the Rational Standard. The concepts of quality and standards in higher education in South Africa have easily become code-words for racial prejudices and privileges that are inclined to such beliefs as that black bodies are not associated with quality and high standards of thought and education.

3.3 A Qualitative Research Approach and Interpretive Design

As stated in the previous chapters, this study is interested in studying the perceptions that some white people have towards the decolonization of higher education in South Africa. Perceptions are intangible and cannot be measured or counted. They are very closely tied to how a person feels towards a certain topic hence it was required of me to make use of a research design that allowed me to uncover and comprehend some white people's emotional investment towards the topic of decolonization in higher education. What people deem to be negative or positive; helpful or destructive; appropriate or inappropriate is shaped by where these people are located within the flow of feelings that surround them (Steyn, 2015). The perceptions that I sought to uncover and examine in my study are shaped by where the white people in my sample

are located within the flow of feelings that exists around the topic of decolonization in higher education. Given that the perceptions that are under study exist within such an intangible and unquantifiable terrain, a qualitative approach was best suited for this particular study. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.11) state that, qualitative research is research that comes from results that do not involve “statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. They further state that qualitative research focuses on, amongst other things, people’s “lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.11).

A qualitative research design is thorough enough for the researcher to capture depth, detail and nuance (Paton, 2002). It is also useful in capturing the features of power and privilege that cannot necessarily be pointed to (Pascale, 2010) statistically. Some white people’s perceptions of racial transformation within South Africa’s higher education sector belong to the category of features of power and privilege that cannot necessarily be pointed to. Qualitative research is committed to providing complex depictions of the social world, as well as to the pursuit of meaning and understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Elliot, Fisher & Rennie, 1999; Stevenson & Cooper, 1997). It also allows a researcher to use smaller samples while still being able to collect in-depth and intimate data (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995) and make inferences, references and interpretations on it.

Qualitative research foregrounds meaning-making and understanding (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). It is also interested in how people “construct their worlds” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14) and in how people understand themselves through their social environments. In this sense, qualitative research becomes very useful to this study given that the study has sought to understand how some white South Africans make-sense of decolonization in higher education. A qualitative approach has allowed for an understanding of what some white South Africans’ understand to be the implications of decolonization in higher education in relation to where they see themselves to be located in post-democratic South Africa.

The study has adopted an interpretive research design in its application of a qualitative research approach. The study has been valuing some white people’s subjective perceptions of racial transformation in higher education (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). An interpretive design allows for inferences to be made about a wider population based

on a handful of some white people's perceptions of racial transformation in higher education (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). An interpretive design allows for the researcher to make meaning out of a single experience and understand it within a broader societal context. In the case of this study, an interpretive design has allowed the researcher to understand the perceptions under study within the context of white fragility in post-apartheid South Africa. Of course, this study is not trying to make blanket statements about all white people or even speak on their behalf. The study is merely interested in what we can learn from what some white people perceive the process of decolonization in higher education to be. An interpretive paradigm is paramount in achieving a goal such as this one because it allows the researcher to gain a deep insight into the complexities of a single phenomenon in its unique context (Cresswell, 2007).

Interpretivism underscores that there are several ways of understanding one phenomenon which is useful to a decolonial study such as this this one which is interested on uncovering hidden traces of coloniality. The advantage of employing this particular design is that the perceptions that are under study can be understood for more than what is evident at face-value. It is through an interpretivist approach that this study can examine white people's perceptions of decolonization in higher education with the awareness that there are a multitude of ways of making sense of the world (Hammersley, 2013). These are all influences by context, culture, positionality. In other words, what Mignolo (2011) calls 'locus of enunciation' is the epistemic, social and political location from where individuals think, perceive and articulate themselves. Being a white person that is opposed to decolonization in South Africa is a specific locus of enunciation that such studies as the present can examine.

3.4 Data Sources

The data from this study is generated from a sample of 10 articles from the alternative online commentary and news platform called The Rational Standard. The Rational Standard positions itself as an alternative to mainstream media platforms in that it emphasises individual freedom and freedom of expression (The Rational Standard, 2019). The articles that are published by it can be taken as sources of true, uncensored opinions that would otherwise be considered as overtly derogatory or prejudiced if they

were published by mainstream media platforms. Using this online publication as a data source as opposed to in-depth interviews or focus groups, for example, has eliminated the risk of participant bias which occurs when participants tweak their responses to please the researcher. This would likely have occurred if a black, female researcher like myself were to conduct face-to-face interviews with a white, male contributor to the Rational Standard. I was specifically aware of this possibility when I decided to make use of secondary data in this study because a black researcher talking to white participants about racial transformation lends itself to issues such as participant bias.

The decision to do a “desktop” kind of research is informed by my awareness of my positionality as a black, female researcher who is writing from “the margin” as Kilomba (2013, p. 25) puts it, about white people who are located at “the centre”. Because race is so central to this study, I have to account for the inverted power dynamics that are at play when a black researcher seeks to study white participants which may result in the generation of distorted evidence. Here there is the potential that I (as a black woman) could unwittingly silence the true perceptions that white people hold with regards to racial transformation by virtue of my blackness alone.

The articles have been selected using the following criteria. First, I have made sure that they were indeed written and published on the Rational Standard by a white person. This I have guaranteed by researching the author’s details to confirm their race. Second, I have taken special attention in reviewing the content of the source to ensure that it is related specifically to the topic of transformation and decolonization within South Africa’s higher education sector. Here, I have included content related to student protests such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall because these student protests are embedded calls for the decolonization of higher education in South Africa.

The Rational Standard is a platform on which mostly intellectuals contribute their articles. In order to balance this out, I will have included as a secondary data source comments and posts from white people during a Facebook discussion on the topic of racial transformation in South Africa’s higher education sector. I am doing this to bring the data that is generated back to the ground, that is, back to ordinary people who may not necessarily be coming from an intellectual space. Moya (2011) explains that identities are dependent on the context that one finds themselves in and that they transform based on the experiences that one encounters during the course of their

lives. Combining both my primary and secondary data sources will ensure that I am accounting for the perceptions of voices of authority and voices of people on the ground.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

The method of sampling that this study has made use of is purposive, convenience sampling because I have specifically chosen the articles from the Rational Standard as well as the comments on the Facebook discussion based on whether or not they will help me answer the research questions of the proposed study (Laher & Botha, 2012). Qualitative research investigations are not prescriptive when it comes to the sizes of samples (Laher and Botha, 2012). Sample sizes are usually small because qualitative studies are rich and deep in nature (Laher and Botha, 2012). Sample sizes are decided upon by the researcher based on the method of collecting data (Laher and Botha, 2012). In this study, I have chosen to analyze 10 articles from the Rational Standard and 10 Facebook comments because the goal here is to offer a quality, in-depth analysis of each data source rather than a broad overview of what is evident at face-value. An in-depth study of a small selection of sources allows for the underlying patterns of thinking behind the perceptions to be uncovered thereby revealing the commonalities in each of the contributors' perceptions. Key to this study is not just reporting on a couple of opinions that are held by white people, but rather fleshing out the arguments being made in these opinions as they relate to decolonization in higher education.

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

The objective of this study is to investigate the common perceptions amongst white South Africans of racial transformation within higher education. In light of this, the study has made use of an instrument of analysis that captures commonalities in white people's perceptions because that is what allows for one to report on and make inferences about. I chose to use Braun and Clarke (2006)'s Thematic Analysis (TA) as the method of analysis for this study. Thematic analysis is an analysis tool that is used for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). TA categorizes and describes the data thoroughly and it allows the researcher to interpret the data in a comprehensive manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA has allowed me to search across the different articles as well as the Facebook comments and posts in order to find repetitive patterns of meaning that will satisfy the study's objective (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is flexible and is not dependent on theory and epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using TA gives a researcher theoretical freedom but it still allows the researcher to extract a robust, in-depth account of the data that is also complex and rigorous (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theoretical thematic analysis has been conducted in this study because the method of analysis is driven by my "analytic interest" within the field of transformation in South Africa's higher education sector (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). Theoretical thematic analysis has allowed me to gather in-depth descriptions of specific details of the data rather than merely obtaining generalised descriptions of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Making use of themes during the process of data analysis has allowed me to identify the words or phrases that encapsulate a central piece of information in the data set that is related to the research questions of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are five steps that I have adhered to very closely when conducting my analysis:

Step One (Familiarizing myself with the data): I have conducted a review of the chosen articles with the guidance of my supervisor who has provided me with an objective opinion of whether or not the content of the articles is relevant to the objectives of the study. I have not merely scanned over the articles passively, rather I have read the articles in detail while taking note of the patterns and meanings that come up repeatedly across them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial themes from the preliminary patterns and ideas that came up during this process have been noted. These themes are the blueprint for the coding process.

Step Two (Generating initial codes): Different codes have been given to important parts of the data and each preliminary theme has been clearly defined and labelled (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I have extracted quotations from each of the articles and Facebook posts. These have been grouped into categories based on how similar they are to each other. Using a computer program called Atlas.ti, the categories have been translated into codes which represent similar ideas across all of the data.

Step Three (Searching for actual themes): The codes have been examined to see if they can be summarized by an overarching word or phrase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The quotations that were grouped together in step two have been examined again to check if any other information was left behind in the articles during the selection of the important parts of the text. This was followed by checking if the groups themselves were still appropriate and related to the research questions.

Step Four (Reviewing the themes): This stage involves the separating of larger themes that need to be broken down into different, smaller sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, I had been using a "dual criterion" examining method which ensures that the information within each theme works well together but also that the themes themselves are still distinct (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The headings under each theme have been examined to ensure that they have coherent information that fits into the overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step Five (Definitive naming of themes): At this stage, I have identified the essential element in each of the themes that describes what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to identify which part of the data "each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I have then labeled and defined permanent themes and sub-themes while making sure that the headings are still appropriate for the data that they represent (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process outlined above has obviously been repeated for the analysis of the data from my secondary data source (Facebook comments/posts). Now that I have fleshed out the patterns within my data, I took my analysis to a deeper level by using an instrument that will tell me how the themes relate to power, privilege and the dominant discourses around whiteness and racial transformation in South Africa.

3.7 Data Interpretation Technique

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is most effective in achieving a deeper level of analysis because it emphasizes the relationship between language and power (Litvin, 2006). CDA analyses how "concepts, objects, and subject positions are constituted through language" as well as how (unequal) power relations manifest in the sharing of discourses (Litvin, 2006, p. 79). Discourses function to uphold power relations in

society. The purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unveil the “discursively constructed armour of normality and inevitability” that upholds inequality and disadvantage in society (Litvin, 2006, p. 79). CDA is a tool that has assisted me to make the connection between everyday texts such as the articles and Facebook comments and posts and the broader social forces that shape and influence those texts. Social justice is a key feature within CDA because the project of practitioners of CDA, as Litvin (2006, p. 79) argues, is to “catalyze social change”.

CDA has helped me to take the results of my thematic analysis even further by uncovering the power relations that underpin them. It has also been integral in revealing the discourses within these themes that speak to issues of power and privilege. CDA has allowed me to locate white people’s perceptions within the contested and tense arena that is post-apartheid South Africa.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Critical Discourse Analysis

As an analytical tool Critical Discourse Analysis is fitting for theories like decoloniality and Critical Diversity Literacy that seek to unmask and also question power. But every analytical tool has its limitations and gaps. In order for a study to be rigorous, reliable and reputable, it is required that it becomes aware of its inadequacies and strengths (Mouton, 2010). Below are the merits and shortcomings of employing Critical Discourse Analysis according to Aydin-Düzgit and Rumelili (2018) and Herzog (2016).

Advantages	Disadvantages
CDA offers linguistic methods that make it possible to empirically analyze the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains.	CDA too easily allows for a researcher to uncover the findings that he or she expects or wants to find
CDA offers a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge	CDA is often argued as not being methodologically rigorous
CDA allows the examining of the role of social interaction in the construction of the world	CDA researchers can too often find themselves unwittingly making normative

	critiques that reproduce often white, male, middle class norms.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As noted earlier on in this chapter, research can be ‘dirty’ as well as violent and harmful to the people that are researched upon, whose thoughts and lives are probed. Research can also invade people’s privacies and violate the confidentiality of participants. The present research does not have participants that are interviewed and probed or organisations whose company secrets and confidentiality stand to be exposed. The study collects and analyses published articles and Facebook posts that are already in the public domain and that are publicised voluntarily by those that made them. Over and above that this study takes all the care to avoid ethical dilemmas and violations. Decolonial research should be research that is liberating to the researcher and the researched.

Chapter Four
Literature Review

4.1 Introduction

In the important assertion that “race matters” Cornel West (1994:1-159) meant that long after slavery and administrative colonialism the world still has to confront problems of racial thinking and racist actions. Race as a subject matter and a problem to be dealt with still looms large; it guides perceptions of white people and impacts on experiences and conditions of black people. It is for that reason that Otegha Uwagba (2020) in the book; Whites: On Race and other Falsehoods, writes that to ignore influences of race and racism in the perceptions, thoughts and actions of white people that have not only perpetrated (some of them) but even those that have benefited from slavery, colonialism and apartheid may be to try and escape the hard truths about our world. Racism is based on “falsehoods” about the superiority of one people and the inferiority of others, but as an ideology and a practice, it has true benefits to perpetrators and real punishments for the victims. In this chapter of the present study I explore the literature on the perceptions of whiteness and some white perceptions of transformation and decolonization regarding the higher education landscape in South Africa.

Notably, racial issues remain pertinent worldwide with racism even being termed “the social cancer of our time” (UNESCO, 1960). Uwagba (2020) wrote her book about the ‘falsehoods’ that drive the reality of racism, its perceptions and actions, during the spectacle of the #BlackLives Matter movement that was sparked by the way racism had infiltrated the United States’ policing and justice system, just as it has infiltrated and shaped education systems and cultural landscapes of the whole world. Grosfoguel (2016, p.10) describes racism as a social and political order that exists worldwide and is characterized by “superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the “capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system”. According Grosfoguel (2016, p.10)’s description of race, the people that exist above the line of the human are considered to be human beings in society and, as a result, they are afforded “human rights, civil rights, women

rights and/or labor rights" as well as "material resources, and social recognition to their subjectivities, identities, epistemologies and spiritualities". There are also people who exist below the line of human and these people are not considered to be human beings at all in society. They do not meet the requirements of humanity and, as a result, are deemed as "sub-human or non-human" (Grosfoguel, 2016. p.10). It is of interest to this study to observe the racial distribution of who is human and who is not in the South African post-apartheid higher education scene that needs to be transformed and decolonized as it is still punctuated by legacies of apartheid, colonialism and racism. It is important to note which bodies, knowledges and sensibilities are valorised and marginalised in the South African higher education landscape.

There are several indicators of racism across the world and throughout history. The one that has been most prominent since the beginning of colonial times is racism based on the colour of one's skin. In addition to skin colour, racism is also constructed and indicated through ethnicity, religious/spiritual identity and the possession of indigenous versus colonial history (Grosfoguel, 2016). This hierarchy of superiority that has existed for centuries has manifested in historic events such as the Atlantic, transatlantic and Euro-American slave trade; the genocide of European Jews during World War II; the persistent tides of Islamophobia in Europe and America; as well as the brutal conflict between Israel and Palestine militant groups in Gaza. These are but a few instances around the world in which racism operates to literally exterminate people who are considered to be below the line of human by those who have placed themselves above the line of human for some or other reason that is argued to "justify" their superiority. The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMust Fall movements of students in South African universities, from 2015 onwards, were a call for the undoing of racism in the curricular and administrative systems of the westernised university model and system in South Africa. This study takes interest in the perceptions of some white people that reacted mainly in opposition and contempt to these movements for the transformation and decolonization of the university.

South Africa's apartheid regime was yet another instance of the construction of a hierarchy of superiority in which some people were regarded as human beings and others regraded as sub-human. In this case, being either white or non-white (Black, Indian or Coloured) was used as the indicator of superiority/inferiority. The legacy of

this violent racial system still hold a grip in some white imaginations and perceptions, and still has defenders that see calls for transformation and decolonization as backward, primitive and un called for. The apartheid regime in South Africa is defined as the systematized racial segregation and discrimination of Black, Indian and Coloured people by the then ruling National Party who sought to maintain white supremacy over other races through social, political and economic subjugation (Mhlauli, Salani & Mokotedi, 2019; Ellis, 2019; Dubow, 2014). The institutionalization of racial subjugation in South Africa did not, however, only begin in 1948 when the Nationalist Party commenced its rule. In fact, it dates as far backward as the period of colonial power during which Dutch settlers established themselves at the Cape (Worden, 1994 as cited in Mhlauli et al., 2019). During this colonial period, the indigenous people of the Cape regions such as the San and the Khoi began to experience the beginning of racial subjugation in South Africa by being dispossessed of their land and livestock as well as by being deprived of "water resources" by the armed settler forces (Mhlauli et al., 2019, p.204). Apartheid in South Africa should therefore be understood as being embedded in the country's colonial history. And those, amongst South Africans, that benefit from the legacy of that system and that are privileged by it, perceptively and actively, defend and or rationalize the system whose victims, represented in the various students' movements, are yearning for transformation and decolonization.

Having inherited the colonial history of white minority domination over the black majority, the Nationalist Party embarked on a mission to further entrench the racial discrimination of non-white people through apartheid legislature which legalized white supremacy over all other races. Some of the laws that were passed include the Immorality Act of 1950, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Clark & Worger, 2013; Dubow, 2014). These laws were passed to ensure that blacks and whites resided in separate areas and that there would be no inter-racial families and communities. The Population Registration Act of 1950 was passed to further segregate people by way of placing them into formal categories of White, Bantu (Black African), Coloured or Other at birth (Clark & Worger, 2013; Dubow, 2014). In addition, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 went on to instill the use of separate public amenities such as shops and transportation while the Bantu Education Act of 1953 instilled the segregation of "schooling and curriculum on the basis of race" (Mhlauli et al., 2019, p.205). In all of the above acts, the message of

white superiority over all other races was made clear in that the quality of life of people who were not white was disproportionately lower than that of white people. Apartheid legislature was engineered to not only segregate but also to systematically deprive non-white people the rights enjoyed by white people. This study specifically zeros onto perceptions of some white people of black aspirations and activisms for the removal of legacies of segregation and inferiorisation of non-white people in the higher education sector and university system at large.

As noted earlier, of most importance to this study is the impact that the apartheid regime had on the South African Education system. Mhlauli et al. (2019, p.207) state that the Bantu Education curriculum was intended to "retard the Black people and other marginalized people in order to continue the legacy of imperialist domination and white supremacy" by preparing black and other students from marginalized groups for informal labour that required no academic qualifications. Bantu Education also brought about issues related to the language used for instruction in schools. One example is that black and other marginalized students were not taught any English beyond grade four (Mhlauli et al., 2019). This resulted in these students being unable to comprehend the academic jargon that was used in higher grades to explain concepts because it was in English. A lack of funding, a lack of qualified teachers as well as poor resource provision for non-white schools resulted in extreme drop-out rates among black and other marginalized students during apartheid (Mhlauli et al., 2019). The state of black education during this era was appalling and it continued to ensure that white people developed and succeeded as a disproportionately higher rate compared to black people and others from marginalized groups. This was over and above the fact that the South African apartheid economy ensured that it is white people that had more access to economic opportunities and resources than black people; hence they could afford expensive educational facilities and intellectual resources. The legacy of such a system is what present calls for transformation and decolonization are confronting in South Africa.

It is against this backdrop that racism and coloniality in South Africa's higher education system continues to permeate despite the fall of apartheid. Institutions of higher education in South Africa were founded in an era where black people were not regarded as human beings, let alone intellectual beings whose knowledge was important to

society. Black people were not seen as contributors to scholarship and so they were stripped of their capacity to be knowledgeable beings with ideas that could have a meaningful impact in society. It comes as no surprise that that traces of this racist and colonial thinking are still embedded in the fabric of Institutions of higher education in South Africa. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018b) writes of the need for “epistemic freedom” because systematically and structurally, in South Africa and the world over, black people are not free to access empowering knowledge, or knowledge freedom. There are racist attitudes against black people as thinkers and knowers which stem from South Africa’s history of colonialism and apartheid (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b). Steve Biko (1987) echoes Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018b)’s argument when he likens the black man to an empty shell and a shadow of himself. Here, Biko (1987) is emphasizing the extent of the cognitive dispossession that black people face as a result of the racist view that black people lack the capacity to be knowers and thinkers.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018b) argues that the title of Biko’s seminal piece, I Write What I Like, is a protest against the colonial and racist view that black people cannot know and cannot think. By asserting that he writes what he likes Biko is reclaiming the knowledge freedom that was denied to him. His challenge is that he can produce knowledge from his own perspective as a black intellectual is an objection to the “exiling of indigenous people from their languages, histories and cultures, and even from themselves” that occurs as a result of coloniality and racism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018b, p.5). Biko’s contestation is central to present-day calls for the decolonization of higher education in South Africa which challenge the fact that African institutions of higher education often serve as “extensions of colonial outposts to serve the interest of the former colonizers” (Makalela, 2018, p.1).

Movements such as #FeesMust Fall and #RhodesMustFall were not only about the need for fees and the statue of Cecil John Rhodes to be removed, to fall, but also for the removal of colonial language policies in higher education, colonial modes of academic assessment in higher education as well as the removal of the fixation on Western/European knowledge (Naidoo, Trahar, Lucas, Muhoro & Wisker, 2020). In addition, these movements are about solidifying the place of African epistemology at the center of academic knowledge (Naidoo et al., 2020). South Africa’s higher education landscape has its roots so deeply embedded in coloniality and apartheid that

it has failed to serve the needs of black students in the so-called liberated post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa. Calls for decolonization in higher education are about addressing this issue through the removal of all barriers that politically and socially prevent transformation to occur. This chapter will use key topics in literature to illustrate how racial perceptions and attitudes of some white people are formed, shaped and how white people express themselves especially in relation to calls for decolonization and transformation. The chapter will show how white perceptions are constituted through the discussion of the following subsections: decoloniality and transformation, the racial contract, the problem of whiteness as well as white fragility.

4.2 Decoloniality and Transformation

Decoloniality as elucidated in the theoretical framework of the present study mainly refers to the thoughts and acts of undoing colonial and apartheid legacies of coloniality that still haunt the economies and polities of the Global South. As understood and deployed in South Africa, transformation refers to change to the colonial and apartheid order of things to a more liberated era that is inclusive and not anymore racist and discriminatory. This section of this chapter delves into a further elucidation of Decoloniality and Transformation as gestures of positive change. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the issue of racism in South Africa's education system is rooted in both the country's apartheid history as well as its history of colonialism. Similarly, the "eurocentrism, racism, segregation and epistemic violence" that exists in South African institutions of higher education is rooted in both apartheid and colonialism through the founding of universities in the country by British settlers (Heleta, 2016, p. 2). A key tenet of colonialism is the suppression of indigenous knowledge and the centering of European knowledge in order to ensure that "everything that is advanced, good and civilized is defined and measured in European terms" (Kelley, 2000, p.27; Heleta, 2016). Through colonialism and apartheid, South African institutions of higher education experienced the imposition of a European and Western way of thinking and the erasing of indigenous ways of thinking.

Both colonialism and apartheid resulted in the erasure of African and non-Western history, culture and intellect in South African universities in order to maintain white supremacy in the country. Pietsh (2013) as cited in Heleta (2016) argues that South

African universities were established by colonialists who used them to enforce their power symbolically over the colonized people as well as to inculcate European modernity/civilization amongst the colonized people. During apartheid, universities that used English as a medium of instruction positioned themselves as anti-apartheid and anti-racist, however they were still “islands of white privilege that benefitted from apartheid’s policies even if not openly supporting the government” (Heleta, 2016, p.3). Eurocentrism, racism and epistemic violence in universities did not fall along with the apartheid regime. Instead, these and other issues continued to brew in post-apartheid South Africa culminating in the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall student protest movements that erupted in South Africa between the years 2015 and 2016.

The Rhodes Must Fall movement began in March of 2015 when a student from the University of Cape Town (UCT) protested against a statue of the previous Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil John Rhodes. The student demonstrated near the statue while chanting ““Where are our heroes and ancestors?” and then proceeded to throw human waste at the statue as part of his demonstration (Maylam, 2020; Nielson, 2021; Ntloedibe, 2019). He was later joined by a continuously growing number of students under the “Rhodes Must Fall” slogan resulting in the statue of Rhodes being defaced with paint and black dustbin bags (Nielson, 2021). At the peak of the protest movement, both students and staff members alike had united to see the statue of Cecil John Rhodes fall. The UCT management gave in less than four weeks after the protest began and the statue of the colonial icon and canonical figure of white supremacy was removed (Maylam, 2020; Nielson, 2021; Ntloedibe, 2019). The aim of this protest was not only to see the Rhodes statue fall, the protest was a broader critique against colonial universities’ “‘heroification’ of white leaders” and erasure of black leaders like “Makana, Hintsa, Moshoeshoe and Shaka” (Ntloedibe, 2019, p.65).

A couple of months after the Rhodes Must Fall movement, another student protest movement ensued with a similar agenda of removing the existing forms of coloniality in institutions of higher education. Drawing strength from Rhodes Must Fall, the Fees Must Fall protest movement began in October of 2015 and escalated into a national student protest that lasted well into the following year. These country-wide protests occurred at almost all universities in the country resulting in what is known today as “Fallism”, South Africa’s “largest cohesive protest movement since the end of

apartheid" (Heffernan, 2018, p.434). The Fees Must Fall protests brought to the fore the issues of the increase of fees in South African universities. In addition, protesters were calling for the decolonization of education, the removal of racism in universities, the removal of gender injustices in the employment of staff and they were calling for an end to the outsourcing of ground-staff (Langa, 2017). Just like Rhodes Must Fall, Fees Must Fall was a radical confrontation of "racism, patriarchy, sexism, Eurocentrism and capitalist logics of exploitation" that are embedded in colonial universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.14).

It is important to understand what decolonization and transformation means in practical terms for the above-mentioned student protest movements. For these movements, decolonization is concerned with re-imagining and re-structuring university curriculum in a way that re-centers South African history as African history at large (Ntloedibe, 2019, Odeyemi, 2021). The demand being made here is to place South Africa and Africa as a whole at the center of "teaching, learning and research" (Ntloedibe, 2019, p.65). To decolonize higher education also includes the "decommissioning of colonial/apartheid iconographies", "the restoration of African indigenous languages", the removal of "alienating institutional cultures that bred patriarchy, sexism, racism, elitism and other forms of exclusion and discrimination" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 14). These protest movements also recognized the need for contract workers that were employed by the university to be employed on a permanent basis. The demands made by the Fallism student protests echo the ideas of epistemic freedom and cognitive justice as understood by scholars such as Grosfoguel (2007), Mignolo (2013) and Nldovu-Gatsheni (2018a) among others. These scholars emphasize that all human beings, black people included, can produce valid and authentic knowledge. According to the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements, this knowledge deserves to be reflected in higher education through the university being "responsive to African aspirations"; through the university "renaming and taking into account African realities and histories"; through "the use of African languages" in teaching and learning; and through the removal of the emphasis of European and Western ideas in syllabi and pedagogy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.14).

For student activists such as Mcebo Dlamini, to decolonize and transform the university was "a continuation of the fight for complete liberation of black people in Africa and in

the diaspora" (Ngcaweni & Ngcaweni, 2019, p.4 as cited in Maylam, 2020). Other activists argued that Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall were the first concerted effort to challenge the failed rainbow nation of post-apartheid South Africa where the hopes of a new democratic nation were set aside while inequality, poverty and systemic racism took center stage (Maylam, 2020). To transform and decolonize the university involved highlighting how institutions of higher education hold progressive ideas such as diversity and inclusion but, at the same time, still uphold imperial practices such as the financial exclusion of students who are historically disadvantaged based on race and class (Jansen, 2019). In addition, decolonization also involved highlighting the problem with universities' approaches to transformation that occurred after 1994. In an attempt to maintain colonial and white supremacist practices, these universities would implement superficial changes such as making additions to university curriculum in attempt to include African voices rather than rethinking and reconstructing the university curriculum in its entirety to place South African and African knowledge at its core (Heleta, 2016).

Decolonization and transformation for this study, is about creating a consciousness towards coloniality through the riddance of Eurocentric and Western ways of making sense of the world as well as Eurocentric culture as a whole. As Césaire (2000, p.89) puts it, "decolonization is about the consciousness and rejection of values, norms, customs and worldviews imposed by the colonizers". Decolonizing higher education is not about excluding white people from academia, it is rather about removing the fixation on European and Western knowledge as the only way of making sense of the world. Whiteness, as Heleta (2016, p.5) asserts, cannot be viewed "as the all-knowing and all-important canon upon which the human knowledge rests and through which white and Western domination is maintained".

A common misconception of calls for decolonization is that these are calls for revenge against white people by black people by subjecting white people to the same prejudice that black people faced during colonialism and apartheid. This is a myopic understanding of decolonization that fails to capture what is truly at the core of movements such Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall. What these movements are calling for is the removal of "dominant and hegemonic colonial and apartheid-era knowledges" that prevail in universities resulting in the dehumanization of back

students in particular who do not see their histories, cultures and knowledge reflected in their institutions of higher education (Heleta, 2018, p. 56). These movements are calling for the removal of Eurocentric understandings society, politics, economics and everyday life. Central to this task is what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) explains as "African people seeing themselves in a relationship with their surrounding and fellow Africans around the continent, as well as in relation to other cultures and peoples around the world" (Heleta, 2018, p.57). This process involves African people seeing their worldview as legitimate, relevant and not subordinate to that of European or Western worldviews.

Other critics of decolonization often misunderstand it as a process of regressing into the past, moving back into archaic times, shifting away from the rest of the global population and sharing knowledge that is only about South Africa and Africa and not about any other parts of the world (Heleta, 2018, p.57). This view is profoundly imprudent because it does not take into account a fundamental tenet of decolonization: that all knowledge has a place in the world and no knowledge is superior/inferior. To decolonize is not to erase European knowledge. Rather, it is to place Africa at the core of "epistemology, knowledge, teaching, learning, and research" in South African universities (Heleta, 2018, p.58). In so doing, decolonization of higher education seeks to awaken students' consciousness towards issues that are relevant to their African and South African communities.

4.3 The Racial Contract

Assumptions about the modern era are that societies, both in the West and in the South where South Africa is located are governed through a social contract of justice and fairness. Critical thinkers have been able to identify other unjust and unfair contracts that seem to run the modern world. Whiteness in the context of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history is rooted in what C. W Mills (1997) calls the Racial Contract. The Racial Contract describes "a set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements" between white people which classifies non-whites as subordinate and as having a lower "moral status" and "civil standing" (Mills, 1997, p. 11). This contract functions to disproportionately privilege whites at the expense of non-whites through "the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socio-economic opportunities to them" (Mills, 1997, p. 11). Every white person is a beneficiary

of this contract, even though not all white people co-sign it (Mills, 1997). The Racial Contract creates a “racial state and judicial system” that explicitly divides the status of whites and non-whites so as to perpetuate this racial hierarchy as well as to uphold the privileges and advantages of whites, and the subservience of non-whites (Mills, 1997, pp. 13-14). White people consent to the racial order of white supremacy that is endowed upon them by the Racial Contract either implicitly or explicitly. This unwritten racial contract rules people around the world including South Africa. It guides their hearts and minds and shapes their judgement of each other.

As a result of the powers of the racial contract, black people have to judge and see themselves through white standards and expectations. W. E. B Du Bois explains that black people are born into the world with a veil that prevents them from being truly conscious of themselves because they are made to only see themselves through white people’s construction of who they are (Du Bois, 1989). Black people, as Du Bois (1989) puts it, experience “double consciousness” which is the experience of only seeing oneself through the lens of white people and trying to fulfill the requirements of humanity that are set out by whiteness, only to fall short in the end. Du Bois describes the experience of black people as an existence that is not truly rooted in one’s own self but is rather rooted in what white people think of black people. For black people, the world is only ever experienced through white ideas about the world.

Biko (1987) also alludes to this notion of black people lacking consciousness when he describes black people as having being stripped of their black identity by colonialism and white supremacy. He asserts that “the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity” (Biko, 1987, p.29). Here, Biko argues that whiteness has rendered black people so far removed from themselves that they cannot even see themselves outside of their state of oppression by whiteness. Building on the notion of black people’s lack of self-consciousness, Biko argues that black people’s oppression by whiteness leaves them lacking black consciousness. He elaborates by stressing that black people lack a sense of pride in their identity; they have a negative perception of themselves as sold to them by colonialists; they do not value themselves; they do not believe that they are worthy of freedom and they lack the dignity that is necessary to emancipate their minds from white oppression. As a result of the

foundational racial contract that grants white people superiority over black people, black people themselves ability to think of themselves outside of being oppressed by whiteness.

4.4 The Problem of Whiteness

As noted above, such scholars as Otegha Uwagba (2020) have noted the problem of "whites" regarding the problem of "race and other falsehoods" that accompany it as a social and political construct that gives privilege to some and deploys disadvantage and misery to others. The existence of 'whites' as a privileged race entails the existence of other races that come under the receiving end, and the punitive side of racial thinking and action in the world. In order to secure the functions of the Racial Contract, white people adopt an epistemology of ignorance wherein they pretend as if they are unaware of the power and privilege granted to them by the racial contract (Mills, 1997; Steyn, 2012). White people also pretend to be unaware of black people's oppression in everyday life, including black oppression in higher education. This ignorance contract allows white people to consent to the laws of white supremacy, and reap the benefits thereof, while also denying that white people are privileged at the expense o injustice and exploitation towards black people (Steyn, 2012b). What keeps the racial contract in place is white people pretending to be ignorant to the fact that they belong to and buy into white supremacy and black inferiority. Hence white people remain socially, politically, economically and politically superior to black people. Whiteness is a condition and experience of power, privilege and prejudice over back people that white people enjoy and seek to preserve at all costs. This is why whiteness disguises itself behind ignorance and why white people deny the role that they play in black people's oppression.

The study of whiteness, which proliferated during the 1990s, seeks to examine the dominant positions and discourses that have been given to white people (Giroux, 1997; Green et al., 2007; Steyn, 2001). It descends from Critical Race Theory which emphasizes that race, much like other axes of difference, is socially constructed and that it is shaped by "systems of privilege and oppression" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Johnson, 1997, p. 22). Race is not a biological, static and inborn feature. Rather, it is created and shaped by the inter-relating forces of culture, politics as well the economy (Delgado & Stefancic; 2001; Johnson, 1997, p. 22). The study of whiteness has helped

to make whiteness (and white supremacy in particular) visible so that it can be "investigated, analysed, punctured, and probed" (Fishkin, 1995, p. 430 as cited in Steyn, 2001). Steyn (2001) points to the fact that most research has focused on the influence of race and ethnicity on those people who are not white, while neglecting the significant influence of race and ethnicity on white people's identities as well as on their everyday lives (Steyn, 2001). Whiteness studies speaks directly back to this by challenging the invisibility of whiteness along with its privileges and powers. In addition to this, it recognizes that whiteness has been normalized (Giroux, 1997, Steyn, 2001) to the extent that the privileges associated with whiteness go unnoticed. The result of this has been the adoption of epistemologies of ignorance by some white people as an attempt to remove themselves from the implications of being white (Steyn, 2015).

In South Africa in particular, epistemologies of ignorance uphold white privilege by preventing some white people from learning and accepting that they are beneficiaries of colonialism and apartheid (Steyn, 2012). Johnson (1997, p. 24) states that "the case of not being aware of privilege is an aspect of privilege itself". The normalization of whiteness has also caused the "racialness" of some white people's lives to be "edited out" (Steyn, 2001, p. xxvi). the above-mentioned aspects of the functioning of whiteness work together to create a system of dominance continues to grow because of its normative invisibility (Steyn, 2001).

In their review of whiteness, Green et al. (2007) make use of Frankenberg (1993, p. 236)'s definition which describes whiteness as "the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage". This definition highlights that whiteness ensures that white people remain in leading positions and it affords white people imbalanced privileges, while at the same time making sure that white people do not see the disproportionate privilege that they benefit from on a daily basis (Green et al., 2007). The implications of this blindness that whiteness creates can be seen in the belief that calls for racial transformation and decolonization are a form "reverse racism" that seeks to cripple white people rather than see to it that all people are equal (Steyn & Foster, 2008). White people's resistance to decolonization is an effort to maintain the privileges that were endowed to whites by colonialism and apartheid. Steyn & Foster (2008, p.26) argue this point aptly by stating that whiteness in the world and in post-apartheid South Africa

in particular is mainly concerned with “how to maintain its advantages in a situation in which black people have legally and legitimately achieved political power”.

Samantha Vice, a white South African philosopher, puts forward a deeply personal yet equally representative interpretation of living in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to suffering from “moral damage” (p. 326), she argues that white South Africans adopt an epistemic stance that makes them understand their world “whitely” (Vice, 2010, p. 324). Using Paul Taylor (2004, p. 229)’s definition, Vice (2010, p. 234) explains that “whiteliness” tends to involve a commitment to the centrality of white people in their perspectives”: “The way they [whites] see the world just is the way the world is, and the way they get around in the world just is the right way to get around”. Whiteliness is invisible, habitual, ingrained, normative and unearned (McKaiser, 2011, p. 453-454; Vice, 2010). Being a white South African comes with white privilege which is inescapable given that the basic social make-up of the racial category called white in South Africa is based on the white people’s superiority over people who are not white. The essence is whiteness is to be in a superior location to others. Vice (2010) focuses only on those white people who are aware of their whiteness and view themselves “as a problem” (p. 326) because they are aware of the privilege that their whiteness affords them. She argues that such white people admit that they are inextricably bound to “structures and oppression” (Vice, 2010, p. 326). It is how exactly white South Africans are supposed to survive with this knowledge amidst the noticeable horrific consequences of apartheid that Vice (2010) grapples with.

In order to live a decent life, white South Africans are said to have to adhere to moral duties. Vice (2010) argues that the most morally proper emotional response to white privilege is to feel shame. Unlike feeling guilty which is a reaction towards an action that one has done, the feeling of shame is “a response to having fallen below the standards one sets for oneself” (Vice, 2010, p. 454). It is argued that shame is the most morally proper emotional response because it focuses on who one is rather than on what one has done. This point is important to consider because it speaks directly back to the counter-argument that is made by some white people who “refuse to feel ashamed for being white” because they did nothing wrong (p. 328). Feeling shameful does not necessarily mean that one committed a wrongful act (Vice, 2010); it has to do with “an aspect of [ones] self – whiteness- [that] figures shamefully in an account of

injustice" (McKaiser, 2011, p. 455). Due to white South Africans being socially immersed within the legacy of apartheid, feelings of shame have more to do with the self than with anything else (Mckaiser, 2011; Vice, 2010).

Vice's argument is not about what one did/does but rather about who one is. Another challenge to Vice's claim is that an individual white person cannot be expected to feel shame just because they are white and that only white people who committed wrongful acts are to feel shame for racial injustice (McKaiser, 2011, p. 455). McKaisers' (2011) response to this is that Vice's claim still stands because no individual exists in isolation. Everyone is a part of a group of some sort and this is what "makes us susceptible to group based shame in appropriate circumstances where unique facts about that group are ethically indicted" (McKaiser, 2011, p. 456).

Vice (2010) argues that it is pivotal that white South Africans engage in an effort of working on their selves in order to live with their shame. She suggests that white people should exercise "humility and silence" because whites have possessed an influential voice in the public sphere for a long while and so the time has come for them to "step back [in a humble manner] from expressing their thoughts or managing others" (Vice, 2010, p. 335). Here, Vice is not suggesting that white people should be silent in the literal sense of the word. She is suggesting that they adopt a "political silence" which is an active process of making sure that they interact with other South Africans in such a way that their whiteliness does not give them "unearned dialogical power" (McKaiser, 2011, p. 457). McKaiser (2011, p. 458) prefers the notion of "being careful and living in reflective self-awareness" that white people still benefit from unearned privileges because of their whiteness. He also argues that political silence may have counter-productive consequences such as robbing both blacks and whites of a meaningful relationship with each other (McKaiser, 2011).

Linda Martin Alcoff asks "What Should White People Do?" in her exploration of white American people's attempts to overcome racism in a way that goes beyond self-flagellation. She references "anti-racism training" as one way in which white people have sought to transform whiteness (Alcoff, 1998, 12). This method, argues Alcoff (1998, p. 12), falls short in that it lacks "substantive reconstruction…a revision of historical narratives and cultural focuses". Alcoff (1998, p. 16) also notes that some people have turned to "white treason" in order to transform whiteness which involves

bluntly and overtly rebelling against racist ideology. There are still problems with this method, one serious problem is that a white person cannot renounce their whiteness. Even while committing white treason, whites cannot erase the privilege that goes hand-in-hand with being white (Alcoff, 1998, p. 17).

In another effort, the University of Mississippi introduced a compulsory course that was aimed at racial consciousness (Alcoff, 1998, p.23). Alcoff (1998, p. 23 argues that this method is more progressive than the former methods in that it is a good example of how white people can acknowledge their involvement in racism and of the need to create a “collective transformation toward a nonracist white identity”. Alcoff (1998, p. 25) concludes with the suggestion that white people should acknowledge that “white identity constructions” are embedded in “structures of inequality and exploitation”, as well as have a lasting memory of the reality of many “white traitors to white privilege”. Even though she offers examples from an American context, one could surely apply some of these attempts to deal with whiteness to the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

4.5 White Fragility

As this study continues to note, being white in the present world that includes post-apartheid South Africa, is a privileged positionality even as the racial superiority of whites is a social and political construct that is founded on falsehoods. In that way, as strong as some whites can be about being white, being better and superior, because their superiority is based on injustice and untruth whiteness is fragile and weak. It is the fragility of whiteness that it is so powerful in its domination of the world yet it is weak in its moral base and truth, cannot stand before the bar of reason, ethics and justice (Césaire, 2000). As discussed in chapter two, DiAngelo (2018) provides a compelling argument for why white people do not want to talk about race in her book titled White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism. She uses the concept of white fragility to explain that white people avoid engaging with the issue of race because they believe that talking about race and racism poses a challenge to their perception of themselves as morally upstanding people. They view topics of race and racism as an attack on their morality and so they try by all means to dissociate themselves with such topics. When white people are forced to engage issues of race and racism they react defensively with rage, hurt, anger, argumentativeness and

shame. These emotional and unreasonable responses to racial engagement make it impossible for white people to confront issues of race, racism, transformation and decolonization. The result of this is that white people's superiority becomes further entrenched because it is never engaged with in a productive manner that could actually bring about a change in the way that white people think. The perceptions and practices of privileged and powerful white people remain in place because white fragility poses various challenges to white people engaging issues relating to race including transformation and decolonization.

DiAngelo (2018) offers the following reasons for why it is difficult for white people to participate in the discourse of decolonization and transformation. The first is that white people do not see themselves "in racial terms" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.7). When people think of race it is always in relation to other people's race, not their own. Being viewed in racial terms is "a common trigger of white fragility" which is why white people do not think of themselves in racial terms. That is, they fail to label their race (DiAngelo, 2018, p.7). The second reason is that white people's opinions are rarely well-informed about the experiences of people of colour because there is no conscious effort amongst white people to educate themselves about racism. For example, white people might go through years of university reading literature written by black scholars but never discussing racism. White people offer narrow-minded definitions of racism that are not based on sound evidence. For instance, it is common for white people to say that they "were taught to treat everyone the same" and that "people just need to be taught to respect one another and that begins at home" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.9). These arguments shut down any opportunity to discuss and learn about racism in a meaningful manner.

A third reason that DiAngelo (2018) gives for why white people challenge the topic of racism and thereby decolonization and transformation, is that white people cannot admit that they are socialized into a collective white experience. White people often argue that it is unfair to generalize and associate all white people with white supremacy and racism. Some white people even go as far as saying that they are very different from other whites because they come from a particular background, live in a certain neighborhood and have endured a particular amount of struggle in their lives. DiAngelo (2018) also argues that white people have a very myopic understanding of racism that reduces racist people to simply being people who are immoral. White people often state

that they are good people and thus they cannot hold racist views because racist views are held by bad people. This, DiAngelo argues, is a way for white people to avoid dealing with the uncomfortable truth of racism and the need for decolonization. Rather than try and understand why decolonization is necessary and how racism functions, white people employ the strategies discussed above to “blame the messenger and disregard the message” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.14). Central to calls for decolonization and transformation is understanding of what racism is and how it functions. White fragility prevents this understanding from happening which makes white engagement with decolonization and transformation almost impossible.

In order for white people to engage meaningfully with issues of race and participate in decolonization and transformation, they have to betray whiteness and become traitors to the white status quo (Malan, 1990). White people have to turn against privilege and power in order to work against the strong prejudices and discriminatory acts of other white people. This involves a commitment to pay a heavy price as Malan (1990) argues. White people would have to pay a social, emotional and political price of relinquishing the privileges and powers that white supremacy grants them.

4.6 Conclusion

The discussion of relevant scholarly literature in this chapter has foregrounded the discussion of some perceptions of some white people concerning calls for Decolonization and Transformation in the South African higher education landscape. In summation to the present chapter it is noteworthy that Decoloniality and transformation are terms that describe the fight for the liberation of previously colonized people from global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Beyond being semantic slogans these two terms are signifiers of what Enrique Dussel (1985) calls a ‘philosophy of liberation’ that is not just academic philosophy but the philosophy of the praxis of liberation activism. What Paulo Freire (1974) called the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ is actually the education and social justice activism of the oppressed people of the Global South that yearn for positive change and the undoing of legacies of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. As this chapter has signified, South African students have in their own decoloniality and transformation activism advanced the terminologies and practices of

Decoloniality and transformation. Decolonization as the proceed of Decoloniality is an attempt to “ask new and correct questions about the human condition, going beyond Euro-American-centric epistemology” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p.492). This is also a process of “thinking, knowing, and doing” that involves some powerful white people journeying like pilgrims through the everyday lives of black people who are powerless and lack privilege (Lugones, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p.485). In so doing, they will be able to confront the ways in which whiteness and white supremacy in particular continue to suppress the freedoms of black people. Once this happens, calls for the re-centering of non-Western and non-European knowledge and ways of being in higher education and the world over will come in to fruition. The following chapter, that is the Discussion Chapter, will deal with the evidence and analysis of some white people’s perceptions of decolonization and transformation in South African Higher Education. The analysis and interpretations of the following chapter will pursuantly benefit from the present literature review, the methodology of this study and the theoretical framework.

Chapter Five
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into a discussion and interpretation of the statements of some white people that have, in *The Rational Standard* and on social media, expressed their perceptions of the calls for decolonization in the South African higher education sector. For a white person that has benefited from the power and privileges provided by colonialism and apartheid to self-introspect and observe colonial advantage to the self and disadvantage to the colonized is next to impossible. Rian Malan (1990:1), an anti-racist white South African, states that it took his "traitor's heart" to stand against the "madness in his country, his tribe and himself" to oppose racism and challenge apartheid in South Africa. The white South Africans that criticize and oppose the calls for decolonization in higher education, it seems, lack the courage to be traitors to an unjust system of racial violence and discrimination that has given them social privileges and political advantages in post-apartheid South Africa.

Linda Martin Alcoff (1998) in the essay: *What Should White People Do?* discusses the trouble, emotional and political, that white people should take to denounce and work against the system of racism and coloniality that has privileged them for generations in the world. White anti-decolonization activists in South Africa such as those engaged with in this chapter may be understood as those individuals that have not taken the trouble to question their own political privileges and social advantages that have been afforded them by the long history of apartheid and coloniality. To engage courageously with the need for decolonization and racial transformation in higher education in South Africa proves to be too taxing a political and psychological task and they conveniently and easily resort to criticism and opposition which are the handy tools of the powerful and privileged when faced with a challenge.

The analysis and discussion in this chapter draws from ten articles that were written by white commentators from the online media platform called *The Rational Standard*. In addition, ten Facebook comments (also written by white Facebook users) that have to

do with racial transformation and decolonization in higher education are also included in this analysis and discussion. Using thematic analysis as well as Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA), this data has been scrutinized to reveal how some white people make sense of racial transformation and decolonization in higher education within the South African context. These sense-makings are presented as themes which illustrate what some white people think and feel about racial transformation and decolonization in higher education. In addition, the discourses that occur across these themes are presented in order to reveal the deeper meaning that belies white people's perceptions about racial transformation and decolonization in higher education.

The questions that have shaped this analysis are: What discourses are invoked by white people in order to make sense of racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector? How do white people negotiate their whiteness in relation to calls for racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector? And what implications do white people think that the process of racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector has for them in light of their positionality in post-democratic South Africa? Using these questions as guidelines, the data was analyzed thematically to reveal white people's sense-making of racial transformation and decolonization in higher education. A further process of analysis (ACDA) was then conducted on the data to reveal how and why it may be that white people perceive racial transformation and decolonization in higher education in particular ways. The benefit of this two-fold analysis is that the researcher is able to identify and interpret significant elements of the data in a rigorous fashion as well as uncover what social relations underpin the language that is used in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2017; Janks, 1997). Given that the data is analyzed through a decolonial lens, the researcher is able to pay specific attention to instances in the data where colonial ways of making sense of the world are operating.

There are four main themes that emerged from the analysis. The first theme is named *Decolonization is Fictitious* which illustrates the perception that calls for decolonization are unsubstantiated, unrealistic and irrational. This theme sees the project of decolonization as a myth, a falsehood and a fabrication by its proponents. The second theme is named *Decolonization is the Eradication of Western/European Knowledge* which captures the perception that decolonization is aimed erasing Western and

European knowledge entirely in order to replace it with African knowledge. This theme argues that decolonization is being used to disguise the agenda of the removal of all Western/European epistemology in academia. The third theme is named *Decolonization is Reverse Racism* which describes the perception that decolonizing higher education is mainly about discriminating against white people. In other words, decolonization is an act of revenge that seeks to subject white people to the similar prejudice and discrimination that occurred against black people throughout colonialism and apartheid. The fourth theme is named *Decolonization is Violent and Unlawful* which represents the perception of decolonization as a thuggish movement that condones violence and lacks proper organization and humane protest method. Here, the merit of calls for decolonization are denounced due to the so-called violent methods used by decolonial movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall. The following discourses are apparent within the themes: the irrationality of calls for decolonization, the lack of African figures to replace Western/European canonical figures, white victimhood, and the uncivilized nature of decolonization. White guilt, fear and fragility, it seems, are exposed in the way some white people seek to police and prescribe what victims of apartheid and coloniality in the higher education sector in South Africa should think, say and do about their situation.

5.2 Decolonization is Fictitious

In Steyn (2012)'s explanation of epistemologies of ignorance, she argues that ignorance is a deliberate practice and socially constructed mechanism that is used to render what is known immaterial and non-existent. Ignorance is adopted by people so that what is known may be "no longer seen as valuable, important, or functional" (Tuana, 2004, p.195 as cited in Steyn, 2012, p.10). Ignorance is more than the absence of knowledge, it is the intentional devaluing of what is known in order to maintain power and control (Steyn, 2012). Despite calls for decolonization being embodied by movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall which undoubtedly brought universities across South Africa to a stand-still, some white people still perceive decolonization as mythical and absurd. According to them, they do not know decolonization to be a real phenomenon that exists in the world because there is no such thing as a pre-colonial world. One commentator from the Rational Standard argues that:

> The Nazis valorised a romanticised Holy Roman Empire. Mussolini idolised a romanticised Rome. The Japanese utilised a legendary and mythical image of the Samurai. Fallists propagate a view of a utopian and fictitious pre-colonial Africa, which they wish to return to. Fascists are history nerds who are sick of re-enactment. They fabricate a romanticised, and often fictitious, past. (Woode-Smith, 2016)

Woode-Smith (2016) is describing Fallists (a term used to describe proponents of all of the #Must Fall student protest movements) as believing in a non-existent utopia similar to the Holy Roman Empire of the Nazis, Mussolini's romanticized Rome, and the Japanese's mythical Samurai. For this white person, decolonization is not real because a pre-colonial era did not exist in the history of Africa. Thus, it does not make sense for Fallists to call for the decolonization of higher education because the era they wish to revert back to where there was no colonial rule in Africa never existed to begin with. It is a widely known fact that there was an Africa that existed prior to the slave trade; before the incorporation of Africa into "a Euro-North American-centric world culture" and "moral order dominated by Christian thought" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p.486). Colonialism in Africa began in the nineteenth century when Europeans used systemic violence against Africans to occupy their land; control their people; enslave their people in their own land; and erase Africa's "social bonding, indigenous beliefs, values, identities, and indigenous knowledge" (Bulhan, 2015, pp. 242-243). It is clear that Woode-Smith's perception of decolonization as fictitious employs an epistemology of ignorance so as to perhaps create the impression that calls for decolonization in higher education are an unattainable ideal. In the book: *The Lie of 1652: A Decolonized History of Land*, Patric Tariq Mellet (2020) explores such colonial and racist myths as that there is no precolonial Africa and that white colonialist invaders found empty lands when they arrived in what is now called South Africa in 1652. White opponents of decolonization and racial transformation in South Africa seem to habitually rehearse and repeat the 'lie of 1652' for their emotional comfort and political clear conscience.

In claiming that pre-colonial Africa is fictitious, this commentator could be trying to debase calls for the decolonization of higher education. Steyn (2012, p.10) offers an explanation for why this commentator may hold such a perception in her argument that

systematic ignorance can often be located in the knowledge that is created by people who are in “positions of power”. In this case, ignorance is used as a method of constructing and preserving “unequal positionalities in society” (Steyn, 2012, p.10). Woode-Smith (2016) could be employing ignorance to retaliate against the threat that calls for decolonization of higher education pose to white privilege and white superiority in South Africa. Rather than confront the reality that Africa’s history is one of violent conquest by Europeans and risk having to admit to being beneficiaries of colonialism, some white people adopt ignorance as a defense mechanism. In so doing, they avoid having to account for the role that whiteness plays in upholding colonial practices in Africa, particularly in African universities. If white people were to admit that they know about colonialism and the existing colonial-like forces in society, they risk losing the benefits of white privilege and white superiority. For Woode-Smith and other white people who agree with him, this would be too costly. They do not have the courageous ‘traitor’s heart’ such as that described by Malan and they would rather hide behind the ‘lie of 1952’ that Mellet critiques. Being white in South Africa, to be privileged and powerful, and also support decolonization and racial transformation is the work of courage and hard truths that go against many decades of cowardice and lies.

In addition to ignorance of the existence of a pre-colonial Africa, some white people argue that decolonization is fictitious because there is no sound evidence of coloniality in higher education institutions. Commentating on decolonization at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Professor Tim Crowe states that:

> Fallists, the Black Academic Caucus (BAC), and UCT’s Vice-Chancellor, DVCs and Executive Directors are determined to pursue Fallists’ evidence-free demands for her further “decolonization”, believing that it will reverse this trajectory. They maintain that decolonization is also essential because UCT remains institutionally racist and colonialist. This is in sharp contrast to the recollections of past VCs Saunders and Ramphele, and my history: Was/Is UCT an institutionally colonialist/sexist/racist institution? (Parts 1 and 2 on my blog site). These scholarly publications demonstrate that UCT became non-racial in principle from 1950 and, certainly from ~1980, has striven to eliminate any vestiges of institutional (or individual acts of) racism and dealt aggressively with alleged acts of colonialism and sexism. There is no documented, evidence-based Fallist history of

> UCT that supports the persistence of racism and/or colonialism at UCT, institutional of otherwise. (Crowe, 2018)

According to Crowe (2018), there is lack evidence that points to factual and documented occurrences of coloniality at UCT. Thus Crowe (2018) questions the necessity and truthfulness of calls for the decolonization of UCT. By describing the demands of decolonization as “evidence free”, Crowe (2018) is also suggesting that there are no facts to substantiate the existence of a decolonized university. Crowe (2018) goes on to provide an example of the lack of coloniality at UCT by stating that:

> The one high-profile case of alleged racism in the public domain involved a Sociology decolonist academic who accused colleagues of racism. His complaint was reviewed (with the approval of all concerned) by DVC (and NRF-A-rated professor of law) Danie Visser. Visser dismissed the case, found that the accuser had defamed the alleged racists and instructed him to apologize publicly for this defamation. He refused to comply. (Crowe, 2018)

Here Crowe is suggesting that this case of racism at UCT was found to be untrue to the extent that the alleged victim was ordered to make an apology. This study is not interested in the reliability of Crowe’s assertions, but rather in trying to explain the perspective from which these assertions are being made. The denial that racism and coloniality exists at UCT could be understood according to Mills (1997, p.19)’s argument that The Racial Contract also has an epistemological element where white people agree to “white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion and self-deception on matters related to race”. What is now in the public domain in South Africa as the ‘Mamdani Affair’ and the ‘Mafeje Affair’ are well publicised incidents in the history of the University of Cape Town where in different times two gifted black African intellectuals, Mahmmod Mamdani and Archie Mafeje, were racially discriminated and violated in the university, specifically for their opposition to racism and support for racial transformation and decolonization. Crowe (2018) is being intentionally and conveniently ignorant of a history that is in the public domain and that is well-documented. Crowe, and his like-minded, contract themselves to the ‘racial contract’ and seek comfort in colonial and racist untruths. The Racial Contract allows its subscribers to misconstrue the world that they live in by making the claims that there

are no facts that point to racism and coloniality. The Racial Contact bestows upon whites a set of “cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional)” which permit white people to claim that they don’t know of or see evidence of the colonial system that they are beneficiaries of (Mills, 1997, p.18).

White people are able to claim not to know of or see evidence of how universities perpetuate colonial and apartheid injustices such as: the financial exclusion of black students who are historically disadvantaged, the alienation of black students from university culture, exclusionary language policies, harassment and discrimination, as well as the marginalization of black student’s experiences in curricula and pedagogy (Metz, 2016; Swartz et al., 2018). One of the most prominent and tangible examples of coloniality in South African universities was the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT itself. This statue was a persistent symbol of black people’s inferior position in society as a result of racial discrimination, colonial exploitation and dispossession as well as apartheid’s systemic violence (Neilson, 2021; Schmahmann, 2016; Ntloedibe, 2019). Crowe (2018) and his supporter’s claim that there is no evidence of coloniality in higher education at all seems highly improbable. What could be at play in claims such as these is what Steyn (2012) calls The Ignorance Contract which functions to protect white people, white privilege and white superiority by preventing them from interrogating social injustices and discrimination against black people. It is difficult for white people to acknowledge that they are complicit in coloniality by virtue of being beneficiaries it. The Ignorance Contract acts as a buffer between white people and the reality of the need for decolonization in higher education institutions.

White ignorance on issues relating to coloniality and/or racism also forms a part of white solidarity which is the implicit arrangement between white people to preserve white supremacy and fellow whites “feel racial discomfort” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.57). It could be the case that white people who subscribe to the non-existence of evidence of coloniality are upholding their agreement to refrain from speaking openly about racism in order to preserve white privilege. DiAngelo (2018, p.58) explains that breaking white solidarity would be “to break rank” and threaten white superiority. Bearing this in mind, it becomes comprehendible why Crowe (2018) goes on to assert that:

> …What is missing in Fallist statements is a fact-filled, rational explication of what is "marginalized and excluded" and documented evidence of resolute pursuit of an obstructive *status quo*. What arguments they present refer to "subtle", nuanced, even "invisible" hegemonic Western influences and global thinking; "internalised 'white' superiority", "other exclusionary practices", "masked and cumulative and institutional racism"; and "also-invisible culturally-linked, symbolic, structural, epistemological and psychological violence". All of these ghost-like actions are unsupported by documented evidence. (Crowe, 2018)

Crowe is again emphasizing the fictitiousness of decolonization in higher education by arguing that there is no proof of the colonial injustices that black students claim to face. Crowe is suggesting that these lived experiences of black students are intangible and therefore cannot be taken as true. Through ignorance and white solidarity, Crowe dismisses decolonization as a myth and fabrication that does not exist in reality.

The perceptions that pre-colonial Africa never existed and that there are no facts that substantiate the existence of coloniality invoke the discourse of the irrationality of calls for decolonization in higher education. The impression given by these perceptions is that proponents of decolonization do not see the world for what it truly is and that the lived experiences of victims of coloniality in universities are invented. It is one thing to disagree with the demands of decolonial activists, but what white people such as Woode-Smith and Crowe are suggesting is that the entire notion of colonial forces operating in universities and in society as a whole is a figment of decolonialists' imagination. A Facebook comment on the topic of Rhodes Must Fall exemplifies the discourse of the irrationality of decolonization by arguing that:

> There's an irony in that the woke folk are actually those that need to be woken, as the world in which they choose to live is so far removed from reality, it must be some kind of awful dream they have chosen to live in (Smith, 2021)

This Facebook comment uses the term woke which was coined during the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Woke people are conscious of social injustices and remaining reflective of their own social privilege and complicities in prejudice and discrimination towards others. Smith (2021)'s assertion is that these people exist in a

fantasy world that is removed from reality. Penny (2015) echoes this assertion by suggesting that calls for decolonization are merely emotional outbursts that can justify almost everything, even things that are not true. Penny (2015) states that:

> Emotions can cause almost any reaction, and justify almost any cause. When you are so angered by your feeling of cultural exclusion from an institution, you can begin to hate it, to wish ill on it, and take your anger out towards it. It is without doubt that many UCT students felt such emotions towards, for example, the Rhodes statue, as it came to symbolise their detachment from where they felt they belonged, and captured the lack of direction and leadership in South Africa. (Penny, 2015)

That these commentators are themselves emotional and irrational to ignore the reality and truth of racial and colonial wounds of many decades.It is lost to them that their very words and actions against decolonization and racial transformation in higher education in South Africa are the evidence of racism and coloniality. Both Smith (2021) and Penny (2015) are appealing to the discourse of irrationality in order to dismiss the demands of decolonization as nonsensical. Describing decolonialists (who are also woke people) as being in a dream-like state and being emotional is to imply that they are acting out of irrationality. These suggestions relegate decolonization into the realm of falsehood and illogicality. Since these are assertions that are made by white people, they contain colonial undertones which reflect features of the coloniality of knowledge. These undertones include implying that proponents of decolonization of higher education possess knowledge that is inferior and that cannot count as true.

Questioning a person's rationality is deeply colonial because this rests on the belief that some people have knowledge that is more superior, more rational and more universally true as compared to other people's knowledge (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). For a white person to question the rationality of another person reflects the epistemic injustice that invalidates the knowledge produced by non-whites and glorifies the knowledge produced by white people (Mungwini, 2019). Also reflected is the belief that only white people have the capacity to think rationality since their cognitive faculties are intact unlike those of people who are not white (Mignolo, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The struggle for liberation in post-colonial Africa is at the same time, according

to Mogobe Ramose (2005:5), “the struggle for reason in Africa” in that Africans must continually remind others and prove that they are also rational, that they think and are producers of knowledge just like the whole world and the entirety of humanity. The calls for decolonization and racial transformation in South African higher education are still the struggle ‘for reason in Africa’ that African liberation movements and intellectual groupings have been fighting for decades.

To question the reasoning capabilities of proponents of decolonization would be described by Grosfoguel (2007) as an arrogant and God-like way of seeing the world that undermines the plight of decolonization by putting forward a hierarchy of knowledge that places white people at the top. The irony behind this discourse of the irrationality of decolonization is that it is exactly what decoloniality challenges in its calls for the recognition of the different ways of thinking that various people use to perceive the world and give meaning to their experiences (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The views of Smith (2021) and Penny (2015) are examples of why decolonizing higher education emphasizes epistemic freedom, that is, recognizing that all people have the right to think and see the world through their own interpretive horizons.

5.3 Decolonization is the Eradication of Western/European Knowledge

Student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall argued that there existed a “colonial and apartheid curriculum in South Africa” that “promoted white supremacy and dominance as well as [the] stereotyping of Africa” (Heleta, 2016, p.4). University curricula was described by activists of these movements as being “wholly un-African” and alienating for African students who fail to see themselves reflected in academic literature and content (Swartz et al., 2018, 48). University curriculum was described as being embedded in the colonial agenda of centering Western/European/white knowledge while as the same time marginalizing African knowledge. Mamdani (2016, p.70) describes these institutions aptly when he argues that “neither the institutional form nor the curricular content of the modern African university derived from precolonial institutions; their inspiration was the colonial modern”. This is why central to decolonizing South African universities are called to re-

imagine, re-position and re-structure the university curriculum in a way that makes it relevant and useful to African students.

Critics of decolonization, however, perceive these demands as completely wiping out all forms of Western/European/white knowledge in university curriculum. The following statements from Rational Standard commentator, Rutherford (2019), illustrate this viewpoint pertinently:

> Taking into account the repeated racist ravings and oft-rehashed hatred directed at white people articulated by Fallist figures over the last three years, it should have become abundantly clear that their real target is not really fees, although of course these parasitic moochers want those gone as well, but rather the erasure of any and all trace of Western (aka white) thought or influence in a standard university curriculum. This is at the heart of the decolonialist project, which essentially amounts to a complete evisceration of any whiff of the Western academic tradition or canon. Rutherford (2019)

> Decolonialism, like that other buzzword widely employed throughout South African society, transformation, essentially means make more black, the obvious corollary being make less white. Rutherford (2019)

This commentator's interpretation of decolonization is one of the removal of all traces of whiteness from the South African academy. This is a misinterpretation of what decolonialists argue is necessary in order to decolonize the curriculum. This process involves placing Africa at the center of knowledge production in order for African universities to be able provide solutions for African problems. At no point does decolonization call for white epistemic genocide because this would be going against the central tenet of decoloniality which is that there is space in the universe for *all knowledges*, not just one knowledge. In other words, no one knowledge is more superior or more universally true than another. Rutherford (2019) seems to be confusing decolonization's emphasis on knowledge that is relevant and meaningful to African students with the desire to eradicate non-African knowledge. The latter would actually be defeating the concept of decolonizing knowledge production in the university. The foundations and methods of decolonization are not the same as those of colonization. Marginalizing Western/European/white knowledge is not what decolonial activists mean when they call for the universities to reform the curriculum.

Heleta (2016, p.5) clarifies what decolonizing the university curriculum means by arguing that the process will not lead to the “localisation, isolation or only Africanisation of the curriculum”. She argues further that a “decolonized curriculum will not neglect other knowledge systems and global context” (Heleta, 2016, p.5). Decolonizing the curriculum is about removing the supremacy of European and Western ways of knowing which lead to African epistemicide and the degradation of African people.

DiAngelo (2018) offers one way of conceptualizing the perception that decolonization is the removal of Western/European knowledge. It is not uncommon for the opinions of some white people about issues related to racism and coloniality to be based on misinformation. DiAngelo (2018, p.7) explains that one of the challenges to talking to white people about racism or coloniality is that their opinions are “uninformed”. She argues that white people in any country that has a history of European/Western colonialism usually have robust opinions on racism or coloniality without intentionally devoting themselves to the persistent study of issues of race and coloniality (DiAngelo, 2018, p.8). She further states that, unless white people are willing to devote themselves to understanding the complex relations within race and coloniality, they ought to regard their opinions as “uninformed” and “ignorant” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.8).

Another way of understanding where Rutherford (2019) and other white people who agree with him are coming from is through Vice (2010)’s argument that post-apartheid South Africa is a strange place to live in for white people. White South Africans, as Vice (2010) puts it, are confronted with moral confusion and difficulty as they try to re-negotiate their whiteness in a country that is constantly calling for the removal of white privilege and white supremacy. Thus, it is understandable why some white people react defensively, misinterpreting the intentions of decolonization. When white people’s privilege and dominance is threatened, as is the case with decolonization, it is common for them to criticize decolonization’s methods. As Steyn & Foster (2008, p.43) puts it, “when one is protecting a hierarchical order, those discourses and people who promote social justice are the enemy”. In this case, decolonization is the enemy because it threatens the supremacy of European/Western world views within university curriculum.

In addition to the perception that decolonization seeks to eradicate Western/European knowledge, some white people also think that decolonizing university curriculum will lead to the destruction of the high standard and top quality of university education. In other words, foregrounding African knowledge in university curriculum will result in education that is below standard. This view is exemplified by this statement by Rutherford (2019):

> I have often suggested, only half-jokingly, that the surest way to decolonize higher education in South Africa is to blow up all universities. That would certainly make more sense than attempting to extirpate all traces of Western (aka white) knowledge, figures, and concepts from all fields of study, which would incidentally leave institutions following such an educational path bereft of anything substantive to teach. After all, universities in sub-Saharan Africa were only established by European settlers, a rather inconvenient fact that Fallists completely ignore, if they are even aware of this reality. (Rutherford, 2019)

Rutherford argues that without the Western/European canon being present in academic literature and content, universities will have nothing meaningful to teach students. In his view, the excellence of university curriculum as a whole relies on the prominence of Western/European knowledge. To suggest this is to say that African knowledge is not substantial enough to be taught to university students on its own, it has to be validated by Western/European knowledge. This echoes the rhetoric of the coloniality of knowledge that African people are not able to produce knowledge that is valid and of a high quality. Rutherford goes on to imply that the reality is that South African universities were established by European settlers and so it is highly improbable that universities can exist without the worldviews of its founding fathers. This is the epitome of epistemic violence which negates African people's humanity and refuses to "recognize their epistemic virtue" (Nldovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.6). The claim that the only way to decolonize universities is to demolish them shows just how instrumental the university is in entrenching white supremacy and Eurocentrism in society. The university itself was used as tool by coloniality to enshrine white superiority and black inferiority through a curriculum that views Westerm/European knowledge as valid, true, modern and superior while viewing African knowledge as unscientific, unsound and primitive (Heleta, 2018; Nldovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Knowledge is inextricably tied to power and so it is not surprising that some white people might challenge a decolonized university curriculum. Such a curriculum would result in white people having to relinquish the power that is afforded to them an education system that standardizes European/Western knowledge and marginalizes African knowledge.

Embedded within the perceptions discussed above is the discourse that there is a lack of African figures to replace Western/European canonical figures. As Rutherford (2019) invokes this discourse when he states that:

> As a practical matter, one wonders who, exactly, from the African continent, or indeed any non-Western culture, will be able to replace the likes of Plato, or Aristotle? How about Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Shakespeare, Newton, Kepler, Grotius, Kant, Adam Smith, Hume, Rousseau, Voltaire, Condorcet, Hegel, Alexander von Humboldt, Darwin, Ruskin, John Stuart Mill, Marx, Freud, Einstein, Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, Keynes, or Alan Turing, to name just a few Western heavyweights since the Renaissance? Imagine any of these figures arbitrarily excluded from any curriculum, let alone all of them discarded as a matter of ironclad doctrine. Suffice it to say, in order to avoid landing in too much hot water with the commissars and high priests of the Politically Correct Inquisition, that the envisioned replacement team is never going to be as good as the original one. (Rutherford, 2019)

As discussed earlier, this a misinterpretation of what decolonizing university curriculum actually involves. It is also a misunderstanding of the foundational principle of decoloniality which is that knowledges can exist in conversation with each other and not in competition with each other. Decoloniality does not see one knowledge as necessarily superior or inferior and thus it does not seek to find replacements for Western/European canonical figures to begin with. The central issue that decolonization seeks to address is that of Western/European dominance and superiority which has resulted in the marginalization of Africa. This discourse is a product of some white people's misunderstanding of decolonization as a project that

places knowledges up against each other. Contrary to this belief, decolonization recognizes all worldviews, theories and sense-makings as valid. This discourse misses the crux of the decolonial project in South African higher education institutions which is about creating an education system that is “grounded in deep appreciation of African histories, cultures, ideas and aspirations as well as a fundamental redefinition of the role of the university” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.9).

Nowhere in this endeavor is the indication that oneknowledge will be substituted for another or even than one knowledge is better than another. William Mpofu (2020) in the essay: *The Myth of Universalism in the Westernised University*, emphatically states that decoloniality as a philosophy of liberation demands a university that is ‘rooted in Africa but globally competitive, locally relevant and globally excellent.’ The white activists against decolonization and racial transformation deliberately ignore the scholarly views of decolonial scholars so as to concentrate on myths, fictions and other allegations against decolonization and racial transformation in South Africa.

5.4 Decolonization is Reverse Racism

White South Africans face a considerable amount of discomfort as a result of the threat that decolonization poses to the privileges they enjoy as a result of the legacy of coloniality and apartheid. Steyn (2001, p.69) describes a state of hysteria amongst white South Africans that exists as a result of “a new environment” that is “hostile and unfairly inimical to the interests of those most deserving of benefit”. This hysteria results in narratives such as white people losing their rights entirely; the white race being the now oppressed and discriminated race; the existence of an inverted racism in South Africa; as well whiteness being an endangered position (Steyn, 2001). These are common narratives amongst white people who argue that their experience of life in post-apartheid South Africa is one of reverse racism. The following statements from Rational Standard commentators express this perception:

> It is a signature trait of Fascists that they demonise particular groups, typically as scapegoats for other problems. The most salient example is the Holocaust. The Fallists, while not as drastic as this, are undeniably racist towards whites. Their rhetoric is littered with anti-

> white rhetoric; they exclude whites (even sympathisers) from their world vision, and they blame whites for all of their problems. (Woode-Smith, 2016)
>
> Another recent racism 'story' at UCT relates to the pioneer Fallist and decolonist who "reprehensively" defaced (without being held accountable) Rhodes' statue with human excrement. Subsequently, he was accused of psychologically and racially abusing a woman lecturer. During the incident, he is quoted saying: "it's time for all whites to go" and "whites have to be killed". That case remains unresolved, and the lecturer has had virtually no support from the UCT Management for more than a year. (Crowe, 2018)
>
> I would actually go so far as to suggest that free education is simply being used as a vehicle to legitimise far less virtuous ideologies, in particular the hyper-racialism. (Stuurman, 2016).

These commentators view decolonization as being an expression of violent discrimination against white people. They also believe that the decolonial project excludes white people, even those to sympathize with proponents of decolonization. Nelson, Hynes, Sharpe, Paradies & Dunn (2018) explain that discourses on reverse racism are widespread. Examples include the British National Party which emphasized the slogan "rights for whites" and the famous American slogan called "white backlash" (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 340). In Australia, some white people view themselves to be discriminated against due to the unfair privileges that are supposedly granted to indigenous people and asylum seekers (Hatchell, 2004 as cited in Nelson et al., 2018 In South Africa, the rhetoric of reverse racism manifests itself in white people's enduring "systematic, structural and economic advantage" (Steyn, 2001, p.71). White South Africans often argue that their generational success and wealth is due to their hard work and diligence and not due to historical white privileges (Steyn, 2001). Being replaced by black people in places of work and suffering financially at the hands of policies such as affirmative action are other reasons given by white people for why they are victims of reverse racism (Steyn, 2001). The emotional reaction displayed in the comments above by commentators of the Rational Standard are clear instances of white fragility in action. As DiAngelo (2018) explains, it is common for white people to react emotionally to calls for racial redress. Such a reaction occurs as a result of these feelings: anger, shame, being insulted, being attacked and being silenced

(DiAngelo, 2018, p.119). These feelings occur because confronting issues of race and coloniality poses a major threat to white superiority and privilege.

The argument of reverse racism can be understood according to DiAngelo (2018)'s argument that white fragility is a form of bullying. Arguments such as these are powerful because "they take advantage of historical and institutional power and control" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 112). White people thrust this power and control in any way that will protect their positions (DiAngelo, 2018). White fragility is a form of bullying because it gives white people the power to make raising issues around racism and coloniality a horrible experience for black people so that they hopefully give up and refrain from talking about the issue again. White fragility "keeps people of color in line and in their place" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.112). This is a powerful method of control that is utilized by white people to deflect attention away from the injustices imposed by racism and coloniality from which white people continue to benefit. Rather than engage on decolonization in higher education, the commentators above are making an effort to bully their way out of having to acknowledge themselves as beneficiaries of colonialism.

The perception of decolonization and reverse racism draws heavily on the discourses of white victimhood. White people invoke victimhood as an attempt to deny their privilege and superiority. This discourse of white victimhood misunderstands what the decolonization of higher education in South Africa demands. It is not the intention of decolonialists to inflict harm on white people because this will in no way address the prejudice and discrimination faced by students who are not white in universities. To fixate on revenge on white people would be doing exactly what decolonization seeks to change: the centering of whiteness. To assume that the decolonial project would consume itself with seeking revenge through reverse racism is to completely miss the point of what decolonization of higher education calls for. Making white people suffer does not feature anywhere in the following demands of decolonization: "shifting from Eurocentric scaffold of knowledge to African and other subjugated knowledges"; and "(re)placing Africa into the centre of knowledge and releasing it from marginality and peripherality" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.3).

5.5 Decolonization is Violent and Unlawful

The methods of protest that are made use of by movements such as Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall are criticized by some white people for using criminal activities like violence, assault and vandalism to further their cause. Included in this perception of decolonization is that the project's demands cannot be taken to heart because the means by which they ate sought perpetuate unlawfulness. The statements below from Facebook and the Rational Standard exemplify this perception:

> Consider the impression one would form about a political movement whose supporters destroyed precious artworks, burned cars and buses, repeatedly threw buckets of human excrement in various public buildings, attacked an elderly vice-chancellor, and entered lecture halls brandishing whips. It is safe to assume that under normal circumstances, and regardless of the identity of the perpetrators, most decent people would consider such behaviour thuggish, barbaric, and completely at odds with elementary standards of civilized conduct. (Rutherford, 2019)

> They are the ones doing more harm than good by far! (Jansen, 2021)

> Those holding these core beliefs, which animate and inspire the extreme levels of violence and incessant vituperative excesses directed against whites repeatedly evinced in protests under the FMF banner, are seemingly intent on not merely returning South Africa to the darkest chapter in its history, but potentially plunging the country into an even more destructive all-consuming race war that threatens to culminate in a Rwanda-style genocide. From ideas flow actions, and with ideas this toxically poisonous and venomously retrograde, nothing good can ever arise. (Rutherford, 2019)

These comments reflect perceptions of decolonial protests as being carried out by law-breakers who target innocent people, destroy educational infrastructure and disturb the education of fellow students. The words "thuggish" and "barbaric" for instance, suggest that these protests are carried out by criminals who are senseless and brutal. The implication of viewing decolonization in this way is that the attention is taken away from the demand of the cause and directed towards the harmfulness and lawlessness

of protests. The argument is even extended to how decolonial movements are a threat to the country because they mirror violence and brutality that occurred during the apartheid regime. Comparing decolonial protests to the Rwandan genocide is not just hyperbolic, it is an expression of just how far some white people are willing to go in order to discredit decolonization. This is not surprising because, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, white superiority is a powerful force that will fight hard to remain intact. Even if it means using exaggeration and falsehood. Freedom fighters that fought apartheid at home in South Africa and in exile were called terrorists that hated for being people who wanted to finish off white people in South Africa. The proponents of decolonization and racial transformation are also labelled in ways that project them as some kinds of terrorists and outlaws of the apartheid regime.

The perception of decolonization as violent and unlawful is not a new argument in the landscape of protests in South Africa, especially in higher education. This is owing to the fact that the very nature of protest in South Africa is violent (Oxlund, 2016). Resistance to the apartheid regime took the form of violent protests, the destruction of state property as well as assault and murder. Despite the new democracy being ushered in through a process of negotiation, the country was on the brink of civil war prior to 1994. Post-apartheid South Africa is also an era of violent protests. Examples include service delivery protests and xenophobic protests that result in the burning of tyers, looting of businesses and the physical assault of people. The Marikana massacre is a prominent example of how protest in South Africa cannot be divorced from violence (Oxlund, 2016). This is a reality that cannot be avoided in our particular context so it is surprising that some white people are shocked and horrified by decolonial protests utilizing violence as a means of protest. Even the precursor to decolonizing higher education, the 1979 June 16 protest, is embedded in violence. One cannot conceptualize protests in South Africa without considering how it is through varying forms of violence that the demands of protestors throughout the country's history were eventually achieved. What the activists against decolonization and racial transformation ignore is the systemic and structural violence of racism and apartheid that produced social and political inequalities that black people in the South African economy, polity and higher education sector continue to experience in many ways.

The discourse that is prominent in this perception is that of the uncivilized nature of decolonization. There is a strong rhetoric of protestors of decolonization behaving in a manner that is barbaric, uncivilized and backward. There are stark undertones of coloniality in this discourse. Describing decolonialists as uncivilized follows the colonial view that there is a standard of behavior that marks a human's level of civilization. It echoes colonial perceptions of Africa as a dark and barbaric continent that requires modernization and civilization. The irony behind this discourse is that the means by which colonialism achieved its objectives were brutal, violent and certainly uncivilized. Why is it that when decolonization seeks to employ not even a fraction of the violence that was used during colonialism and apartheid that it becomes suddenly described as uncivilized, is a question that can be asked. Frantz Fanon (1967) describes how the colonizer and the settler easily saw a beast and a monster in the black African guerillas and freedom fighters that deployed 'revolutionary violence' in the struggle against colonialism in Africa. What the settlers and colonizers did not see, Fanon argues, is their own non-revolutionary violence of conquest and colonial domination. To portray activists for racial transformation and decolonization in South African higher education as brutes is a continuing and strong colonial and even racist stereotype against fighters for liberation from coloniality and the racism that goes with it in post-apartheid South Africa. In the same way in which Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) says the West has been trying to teach the world for centuries and is failing to learn from other parts of the world, the activists against decolonization and racial transformation in South African higher education want to teach others and are not prepared to learn from others, they believe in colonial monologue and decolonial dialogue. The frank conversation about racism and coloniality in South Africa requires that there be dialogues and exchanges of views from people of different experiences and not hegemonic monologues of the privileged and the powerful.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed and interpreted some white people's perceptions of decolonization and racial transformation in the South African higher education setting. What has been noted is that the courage and strength by those that enjoy advantages and privileges bestowed on them by the history of colonialism, apartheid and racism, to engage with colonial injustices lacks. What they prevalently do is to seek refuge in

the same colonial myths and stereotypes that droved colonialism and apartheid in the first place. In their perceptions of calls for decolonization and racial transformation they elect to conveniently view decolonization as a myth that has no truthful foundation in history. The propaganda that decolonization is an attempt to eradicate western knowledge and European epistemologies in the university in South Africa is advanced as a truism when it is a convenient falsehood that ignores the decolonial calls for ecologies of knowledges from different peoples and different places of the world. In apparent construction and assumption of victimhood, some white people choose to perceive decolonization of higher education in South Africa as reverse racism when it is an attempt to undo the injustices of colonialism and racism. Much the same way settler colonialists viewed black African fighters against colonialism as violent terrorists and brutes some white activists against decolonization portray those who call for decolonization of higher education as violent outlaws. This chapter has concluded that the white people that enjoy racial political and economic privileges and power as a benefit from colonialism and apartheid need to gather the courage to engage in frank conversations with themselves first and with those that demand justice for colonial wounds and injustices. Just like the South African post-apartheid economy and polity that need to be decolonized and transformed, the higher education sector needs to be freed from systemic and structural coloniality and racism that have kept higher education, in form and in content, colonized.

Chapter Six
Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides as summations of the present study and indicates some recommendations and suggestions for further research. The study has observed that some white people in post-apartheid South Africa are faced with the challenge of rethinking and re-negotiating their new subjectivities in a strange territory that threatens their superiority and privilege. Increasing calls for decolonization, especially in higher education, have placed white people in a political and psychological dilemma wherein they are faced with confronting the privilege that apartheid and coloniality have afforded them in a context that is calling for the eradication of apartheid and colonial legacies. This dilemma has made it necessary to interrogate how white people negotiate their whiteness amidst calls for the decolonization of higher education; what discourses white people invoke when making sense of decolonization; and how white people think decoloniality will affect them in light of them being beneficiaries of coloniality. These are the questions that this study sought to provide answers to in its examination of the perceptions of some white people towards decolonization in South Africa's higher education sector.

Answering these questions has required an understanding that there are still colonial occurrences that prevail in South Africa, and in South African universities in particular, despite the removal of formal systems of colonialism. These occurrences are evident in the cultural, political, economic, spiritual, sexual and epistemic domination of European and Western ways of seeing the world especially in institutions of higher education (Grosfoguel, 2007). Coloniality is laced in what is taken to be rational knowledge, common sense quality and standards of knowledge that is a preserve of some people and not others. It also exists in knowledge production where European and Western knowledge is taken to be superior to the knowledge that is produced by non-European and non-Western people. This constitutes epistemic racism that accompanies other racisms that have been part of the conquest, colonisation and domination of the Global South that includes such countries as South Africa. Universities in South Africa are sites of the reproduction of colonial-like practices that

result in the marginalization of Africa in course content, institutional culture, pedagogy and research. In its limited way, this study has made observations, advanced arguments and made some conclusions on some white people's perceptions of decolonisation and transformation in the South African higher education landscape.

6.2 The Gesture of Decoloniality and Decolonization

Decoloniality as a philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 1985) actively demands decolonisation that eradicates coloniality as a collective of legacies of systems and structures of colonial domination that remain in force even long after such countries as South Africa have attained political independence and constitutional democracy. This study has noted how colonial attitudes and perceptions of black people by some white people remain at large even as South Africa has a celebrated democratic constitution and is considered a post-apartheid country. The demands by student activists and their movements for the decolonisation and transformation of higher education have been met with what can be observed to be colonial and racist perceptions and responses from some white people, his study has noted. As a response to the continual existence of colonial-like forces, decoloniality seeks to dismantle European and Western hegemony in all its manifestations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Through the epistemic decolonial turn, decoloniality challenges the colonial notion that European and Western knowledge is the only universally true form of knowledge. Decoloniality is a quest for the liberation of non-European and non-Western people from the control and domination of Eurocentrism. Decoloniality helps make visible the ways in which coloniality persists even in the so-called post-colonial era.

In South Africa, coloniality (and specifically the coloniality of knowledge) manifests itself in some white people finding it difficult to grapple with the reality of the unfair advantage that their whiteness affords them. White fragility becomes apparent in white people using coloniality to uphold their superiority and privilege. They do this by denying that they are socialized into racist behavior, by arguing that it is possible for people to exist without prejudice and by taking an objective and individualist stance to racism which allows them to view themselves as existing outside issues of race (DiAngelo, 2018). Using a decolonial lens has allowed this study to expose the

workings of coloniality and the coloniality of knowledge in the way that white people make sense of decolonization in higher education.

The perceptions under study were obtained from the Rational Standard and from Facebook. Both data sources were suitable for obtaining candid perspectives from white people on the topic of decolonization in higher education. These perceptions were analysed through a decolonial lens using thematic and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The analysis was conducted in a manner that did not seek to tarnish the image of the white people whose perceptions were studied. The study made sure to avoid perpetuating the colonial habit of invasiveness, intrusiveness and exploitation in its analysis. A decolonial methodology was used not to weigh in on whether the perceptions that are held by some white people towards decolonization are right or wrong, but rather to explain the world view that underpins them. A qualitative approach to research made it possible to achieve the study's objectives because it focuses on meaning-making and understanding.

Decolonization and transformation of higher education in South Africa can only be understood within the broader backdrop of the colonialism and apartheid. Colonial and apartheid legislature functioned to deprive black people including black university students of the privileges that were enjoyed by white people. Decolonization of higher education is aimed at trying to remove the legacies of the segregation and subjugation of non-white people in academia. The Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall movements had this aim in mind when they began. Theirs was a fight for the removal of colonial symbols in African universities, the removal of fee increases that resulted in the exclusion of poor black students, the removal of Eurocentrism and capitalistic practices such as outsourcing general workers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Central to calls to decolonize universities is the re-centering of Africa and Africans in teaching, learning and research. Decolonization seeks to create African universities that can provide solutions to African problems. There is a common misunderstanding amongst those that challenge decolonization which argues that decolonization is a plot of revenge against white people for the injustices of colonialism and apartheid. These arguments are misled because what decolonization actually calls for is the removal of the dominance of colonial and apartheid knowledges in universities that have resulted in the dehumanization and alienation of black students whose histories and lived

experiences are not reflected in their institutions of learning (Heleta, 2016). Decolonization is about liberating black students from being subjugated by European and Western ways of thinking. It is, as evidenced in the writings of decolonial philosophers and theorists, not about expelling white people from the universities in South Africa or banishing European epistemologies from the curricular and the syllabi. It is, at the end of the day, colonial and racist propaganda to reduce Decoloniality and its calls for decolonization to hate for white people and European epistemologies.

It is not surprising that some white South Africans should disagree with the project of decolonization given that they are signatories of the Racial Contract which grants white people privileges at the expense of disadvantaging non-white people (Mills, 1997). This unwritten contract functions to uphold white superiority and domination and so it not surprising that white people should reject a project that seeks to dismantle white hegemonic dominance. White people are also signatories of the Ignorance Contract which builds on the foundations of the racial contract, yet is more focused on how white people assume an epistemology of ignorance in order to distance themselves from being complicit in the injustices of apartheid and colonialism. White South Africans' rejection of decolonization could be understood as a reflection of their struggle to maintain white superiority in a context in which black people have legal and legitimate political power. Some white people find it difficult to engage with issues of race in a productive manner due to their reluctance to betray the racial contract and ignorance contract with the fear of having to lose the power and privilege that these unwritten agreements afford them.

As a result of the tense situation that some white South Africans find themselves in, they perceive decolonization in higher education specifically as fictitious and unworthy of being taken seriously. They argue that there never was a history of Africa without colonial rule and that there exists no evidence of coloniality so the demands made by decolonization activists are baseless. These perceptions rest on white people's intentional ignorance, white fragility and the perception of decolonialists as irrational beings whose claims have no value and no legitimacy. This echoes the colonial viewpoint that some people are worthy of rational thinking and others are not. In this case, it is the proponents of decolonization who do not possess rational, true, valuable and reasonable knowledge. Decolonization is also perceived as a plot to erase

European and Western knowledge in order to replace it with African knowledge. This perception rests on white victimhood, which is a strategy that is often employed by white people in order to misconstrue the efforts of decolonization. The argument that prevails in this perception is that the academy cannot function without European and Western canonical figures and so to decolonize higher education would be to destroy the high standards and quality of university education. Another perception of decolonization is that it is violent and unlawful and thus its demands cannot be taken to heart. Here, decolonization is viewed as genocidal and barbaric. This perception is embedded within the notion of Fallist protestors being uncivilized in their methods and therefore unworthy of being taken seriously.

These perceptions are so telling of the lack of interest to meaningfully engage with colonial legacies in higher education on the part of the white people whose commentary was included in this study. The perceptions that have been discussed in this study are clear strategies to avoid having to acknowledge that they benefit from the colonial system that continually disenfranchises black people and privileges white people. Acknowledging this truth would mean that these white people would have to risk losing the power and domination that their whiteness affords them. This is too costly for the white people whose perceptions were examined in this study, and also for those who share similar sentiments worldwide. Philosophers and theorists of decolonization and liberation, as cited in this study, from Paulo Freire to Frantz Fanon and others, observe that something has to die in the oppressors and their oppressed in order for true liberation of both to be set afoot. Some white people have to kill the durable remnants of coloniality inside them before they take an honest look at their unfair and unearned power and privilege in post-apartheid South Africa.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has not sought to assess the validity of white perceptions towards decolonization in higher education, rather, it has sought to understand the worldview these perceptions come from. The study was successful in this endeavor because it managed to paint a picture of the factors that shape white South Africans' sense-makings of decolonization of higher education. Future research should look into the strategies that activists could use beyond protest movements that could open up the

space for white South Africans to productively and meaningfully engage with coloniality and other issues related to race. Of course, this research should not center whiteness even further, but it should investigate ways in which conversations about racism, Eurocentrism, epistemic violence and coloniality can be explored by white people in ways encourages meaningful engagement and honest introspection. What Cornell West (1993:3) has called “frank conversations on race and racism” is required of both white and black people of South Africa in order for genuine motion towards decolonization and transformation of the economy, polity and the academy in South Africa.

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Appendix A: Data Source 1 (Articles from The Rational Standard)

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Appendix B: Data Source 2 (Facebook Comments)

