

https://dspace.org/

What are some white people's perceptions of racial transformation in South Africa's higher education sector?: a decolonial examination

Mabasa, Akhona

2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33478

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

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*.