

Abstract

Despite slow pace of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa's corporate sector, the department of labour recently showcased some Johannesburg Stock Exchange listed corporations for executing effective diversity strategies. The strategies and discourses of diversity in these appraised corporations had not been studied scholarly, particularly from a critical perspective.

This inquiry adopted a multiple case study design and the framework of critical diversity literacy to study the nature, texture, and the depth of strategies and discourses of diversity in three of these appraised corporations in the financial, retail, and private healthcare sectors. Research entailed analysis of 35 published documents to examine conceptual framing of diversity; indepth semi-structured interviews with 6 transformation managers to explore prevailing organisational diversity culture and the designed strategies to transform such dynamics; and focus groups with 32 employees from dominant and subordinated groups to gauge the efficacy of executed strategies in promoting equality and social justice.

The findings suggest that appraised corporations mainly complied with prescripts of employment equity law and executed managerial instrumentalism oriented diversity initiatives. Diversity conceptual frameworks regarded inequality, oppression and dominance as historical legacies, rather than present day phenomena that are tied to coloniality of power and being and reproduced through neoliberalism. Diversity initiatives were minimalistic and impelled identity siloism, race and gender blindness, medicalization and hyper-individualisation of disability, nurturing of white fragility, and reproduction of gender binaries. Blacks, women, queer persons and persons with disabilities were barely visible in positions of power, strategic influence and high income. These subjugated groups constantly performed whiteness, normative masculinity, able-bodiedness and heteronormativity in order to fit in. This performance is systematised under the guise of merit without recognising its dehumanising effects. The findings suggest the inadequacy of employment equity legislation driven reform to produce real equality as this law is a product of ILO's neoliberal "Decent Work" rhetoric. The study contributes to the closure of lacunae concerning paucity of agentic critical diversity studies that examine effective organisational diversity discourses. The study accentuates

the importance of situating effective diversity discourses being evaluated in the broader context of contemporary global system of power and related hegemonic ideologies that re-produce inequality. By so doing scholars will be able to analyse the studied diversity discourses holistically and make informed decisions on their efficacy to yield social justice for the marginalised across various intersections of power, inequality and identity differences.