

Perspectives of white UCT students on Social Transformation Initiatives

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Abstract

In a post-apartheid South Africa, scholars across all disciplines have contributed to the study of transformation, race and 'rainbowism'. Although a substantial amount of this literature features the voices of the marginalised majority, there are only a handful of studies that are focused on privileged white South Africans. This research begins to address this gap, by investigating the understanding and constructs of social transformation initiatives amongst white undergraduate students at the University of Cape Town. Three focus groups, each consisting of six participants, were conducted. A thematic analysis demonstrates that white students understand transformation as accessibility, equality and opportunity for other racial groups to climb the ladder and be equivalent to whites. Furthermore, while some students understand challenges to white privilege as critical to social and racial transformation initiatives, others employ strategies to resist ideas that counter white privilege. The paper concludes by arguing that this tension provides an opportunity for further exploration around constructions of transformation initiatives amongst young white South Africans.

Keywords: accessibility; equality; opportunities; privileges; justice; transformation; education; language; apartheid; land; FeesMustFall

Introduction

In 2015, young black South African students stood in solidarity against injustices, inequalities and colonial images of the past calling for transformation, such as the #RhodesMustFall movement (Chaudhuri, 2016) which led to the #FeeMustFall campaign (Raju, 2017). These black students sound a call for a free decolonised education and a call to dismantle the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. On the other hand, the white privileged students distanced themselves from such movement and some labelled these movements as barbaric (Raju, 2017). Therefore, this study investigates the understandings of UCT white South African students in social transformation initiatives. Why white students? Someone may ask, and to answer that question it would be advised that an individual take some time and look at the studies that were conducted on this topic of transformation between 1994-2016. One will notice that most of the studies that were conducted focused on the perspectives of black marginalised individuals and those studies were conducted in black communities. To explore this, the researcher will go through some of the studies that were conducted amongst white South African students concerning matters of transformation and social change.

Problems & Understanding of Transformation amongst White South Africans

In South Africa, when we say “white” we refer to those who have European decedents, pale in skin tone, and are English or Afrikaners (Dutch) even though they have their unique predispositions towards each other (Steyn, 2004). In fact, we use ‘white’ in a categorical sense, in comparison to other racial groups (African, Coloured & Indian). Diving into the problems & understandings of transformation amongst white South Africans broadly it is worth noticing the work of Steyn (2004) where she discusses ‘whiteness’ in post-apartheid South Africa by analysing discourses (letters). Which were written by readers to the editor of a national Afrikaans Sunday paper known as Rapport newspaper. Steyn (2004) in her analyses of these

"white talks" she discovered that some of these Afrikaners were in opposition to social transformation because they perceived it as involving the loss of their privileged lives (Steyn, 2004). Here are some quotes from a few letters:

History has repeated itself like in the days of the Anglo-boer war, and we, the white Afrikaners, remain the victims of traitors. Marthinus van Schalkwyk has betrayed us, the third generation of Nationalist Party supporters. (Steyn, 2004, p. 156)

We are extremely worried about the feelings of alienation, powerlessness, lack of a future, and a second-class syndrome amongst Afrikaners... Through collective power and organization, we want to be a vehicle that can ensure that our people take their normal place as first-class citizens. (Steyn, 2004, p. 158)

Going through these discourses we can clearly see that issues of change and transformation were not accepted by these individuals, because they constructed transformation as a threat to their socio-economic status (class), resulting in a strong sense of victimhood. Some felt betrayed by the National Party, having benefitted materially from the apartheid system they were not willing to let go of those privileges. Steyn (2004) says some of the "ethnic anxiety within Afrikaner white talks, as writers from the community attempt to reconstruct a sense of selfhood and to find their place within the new South Africa while yet resisting re-placement of their power" (p. 162).

In particular, when it comes to affirmative action, some white South Africans regard it as a system that disadvantages their children, forgetting that other groups were marginalised for more than 300 years and under privileged. Indeed, Terreblanche (2002) dates the total period of black oppression from 1652 (Trekboere) till 1990 (dawn of democracy), and he articulates the pain of black oppression plainly throughout his work.

It should be noted that not all White South Africans were against social transformation initiatives. Denis Goldberg in his work advocates that there were white activists who pushed the transformation wheel for a better South Africa; to name the few, they include Helen Suzman, Joe Slovo and his wife Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Donald James Woods, Nadine Gordimer and many more others. (Goldberg, 2015). From this background it is clear that the understanding of transformation differed amongst white South Africans, the conservative group felt betrayed by the liberal group. The voice of the young white South Africans is hard to hear in South African literature. All most all the studies record the views of elderly white South Africans, with that being said it would be unfair to judge the youth based on the understandings of their parents.

Young White South Africans and Social Transformation

There are only a handful of studies in the literature that are focused on issues of social transformation amongst white university students, thus it is very hard to hear their voice and perspectives. Durrheim (2003) underlines that there was no research in South Africa that was conducted on this issue before, he had to draw from the work contributed by American scholars to do his study and in his conclusion, he discovered that “racial attitudes predict white opposition to policies, such as affirmative action, reconstruction and development and redistribution of wealth, which are designed to bring about transformation” (Durrheim, 2003, p 241).

In an earlier paper, Dolby (2001) discussed that whiteness in South Africa was particularly nervous and that may be the reason why most white people are not comfortable with the question of transformation. He continued and said “politically, if not economically destabilised, whiteness is still privileged, but in ways that are somewhat more constrained” (p. 14). In his study at Fernwood High School, which is one of the few studies that were conducted

amongst white schools. Dolby (2001) noticed that white students with a history of socio-political advantage felt ensnared and irritated by the enrolment of black learners at the same school, in fact they felt that they were being pushed out of “*their*” own school and responded to their new reality with rage. Integration as a tool to dismantle segregation in high school became offensive to white students.

An interesting shift of perspective can be noted in Woodrooffe’s (2011) research: she defines social cohesion as a preparedness of individuals within a society to collaborate with each other in order to survive and prosper, and she notes in particular that “Higher education can play a significant role in promoting and/or hindering social cohesion.” (p. 171). Her implication is that if institutions can be transformed, people will follow suit. Institutions in South Africa stand as symbols of segregation, racism and oppression (Ratele & Duncan, 2003).

Relations, Contradictions and Gaps in the literature

The literature relates because social transformation is such a broad topic, it encompasses issues of decolonization as Raju (2017). On the other hand, social transformation and issues of race are intertwined and must be dealt with to have a way forward in this country, Durrheim, Greener and Whitehead (2015) coin the term “Race Troubles” to refer to identity and race issues in a South African context. They also explain how self-esteems and attitude of each ethnic group plays a vital role in transformation (Adeyinka, 2010; Durrheim et al., 2015; Maree, & Meijer, 2010; Thomas, 2017). There are so many studies on social transformation but their focuses are different, for an example: Makino and Satō (2013) focus is public policies which they claim as big portion of social transformation, and education acts as a cornerstone (Hunter, 2016; Ismail, 2011; le Roux, 2014; Swartz, Arogundade, & Davis, 2014; Teeger, 2015). Others focus much on politics as a voice and propelling mechanism of social transformation (Ferreira, 2016; Klandermans, Werner, & Van Doorn, 2008).

Different scholars from different fields of study see social transformation from different perspectives as outlined above, and these perspectives relate to each other because their aim is transformation even though they stand from different fields of study. All in all, transformation cannot be confined into a particular field of study or worldview.

There are also contradictions in the literature of transformation, these contradictions are mainly different perspectives and they emerge from different fields of study. Each field view transformation initiatives from a different standpoint. In fact, these contradictions can be found within each field of study e.g. a Feminist Psychologist and a Neuro Psychologist may view transformation from different perspectives because of their areas of specialisation, even though they are in the same field. For the purpose of this study, these differences will not be emphasised because this study is strictly focusing on how young white South Africans understand social transformation initiatives from their own point of view.

There is a gap in literature, in terms of the perspectives of white students on Social Transformation Initiatives. Most of the literature that has to do with the participation of white students, focuses on issues of race and segregation, these studies over explore racism and prejudice in schools and they under-explore transformation initiatives (e.g. Francis, 2008). Durrheim (2003) admits that this area has not yet been explored, and he ended up using American literature for his paper as mentioned above. Every South African knows that, for the past few years we have been hearing the voices of young black South Africans while their white counterparts have been relatively quiet. For, Durrheim (2003) a possible reason is that whites fear being labelled as racist, which would disqualify them from being able to speak out freely. This study attempts to draw young white South Africans into an urgent national conversation about social transformation.

In conclusion, some of the recent studies (Durrheim et al., 2015; Fairbanks, 2013; Ferreira, 2016; Goldberg, 2015; Thomas, 2017) show that there's so much to be done in this country, necessitating us to put our differences aside and work together as a people. Terreblanche (2002) says "white South Africans ought to realise that they cannot be effectively addressed without a willingness to make substantial sacrifices materially and symbolically as part of an open commitment to the restoration of social justice." (p. 5).

Rationale for Research

It is widely known that South Africa has one of the best constitutions in the world; compared to where we were as a country, Mattes (2002) says "South Africa has risen from the shadow of conflict and civil war to create a common nation" (p. 23). This common nation affectionately known as the "rainbow nation" (Baines, 1998) seems to be breaking apart (Hendricks, 2004; Walker, 2005) after two decades of growing social unrest.

This study investigates the understanding and constructs of social transformation initiatives amongst white undergraduate students at the University of Cape Town. For the past few years we have been hearing the voices of young black South Africans while their white counterparts have been relatively quiet. For Durrheim (2003) a possible reason is that whites fear being labelled as racist, which would disqualify them from being able to speak out freely. This study attempts to draw young white South Africans into an urgent national conversation about social transformation. Bearing in mind the gaps identified in the literature which are: 1) a handful of studies that are focused on privileged white South Africans, 2) a handful of studies on Social Transformation initiatives and lastly, so much work in social sciences focuses on race, gender, education and policies.

Research Question

How do young white South Africans understand social transformation initiatives?

Aim

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the understanding of white South African students on social transformation initiatives, observing their different, shared and intersubjective understanding of social transformation initiatives. The in depth of the study will be to observe their constructs of social transformation initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

Burr (1995) says social constructionism developed “within the cultural and intellectual movement of postmodernism which rejected the idea that there can be an ultimate truth and that the world as we see it is the result of hidden structures.” (p.10). The roots of social constructionism can be drawn, from Ferdinand de Saussure, amongst others, who is a key figure in contemporary linguistics. Saussure made known an important difference between *langue* and *parole* (structure and use of language). All in all, constructionism is all about comprehensive forms of social connotation prearranged in linguistic. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) define constructionism as “The research approach that seeks to analyse how signs and images have powers to create particular representations of people and objects – representations that underlie our experience of these people and objects.” (p.278)

In the constructionist paradigm people are treated as if their perspectives and experiences are a result of structures of sense existing in a social level instead of looking at an individual’s dimension. Gergen (2001) argues that, the evaluation of social constructionists differs and have been ardent to wide-ranging topics such as “gender, aggression, mind, causality, person, transformation, child, motivation, emotion, morality, and so on” (p. 28). The main focus the use of language which saturate each society and the insinuations for other

varieties of social activity. Generally, put “social constructionism contends that knowledge is sustained by social processes and that knowledge and social action go together. It is less interested, or not at all interested, in the cognitive processes that accompany knowledge.” (Young & Collin, 2004, p.376)

Willig (2013) says “Social constructionism is used to understand the construction of human experience not through accurate reflections of environmental conditions but rather as specific readings of these conditions due to social constructions” (p.15). The word construction points toward the bringing together of several portions to bring about a whole. With all that being said, this theoretical framework is the most appropriate theory to answer the research question of this study.

Method and Design

Focus Groups

Focus groups method of collect data was used, because the main aim was to observe different, shared and intersubjective understandings of white students about social transformation initiatives. The focus group setting allows data to be collected in context and generates interaction amongst participants (Flick, 2006). The best thing about a focus group is the balance of power that is given to every participant to share their views on the conversation.

Robinson (1999) says “The prime objective is to obtain accurate data on a limited range of specific issues and within a social context where people consider their own views in relation to others” (p. 906). It is not necessary for participants to agree with each other or to disagree, all that mattered was their view and understanding of transformation initiatives. There are no right or wrong opinions, all views are of great value for the research. An audio-recording device must used to record everything discussed in each focus group because this is beneficial to the

researcher to record while participating and notes should be taken as Sim (1998) suggests that technology can encounter technical problems and to avoid losing data, notes should be taken. Each focus group should be detailed, with unrestricted group discussion for about an hour exploring the subject (Robinson, 1999).

Participants and Recruitment

A voluntary sample of UCT undergraduate white South African students was recruited through the SRPP program, specifically Psychology students. The age group of the students was between 18 - 30 years of age, and home language (English or Afrikaans) was not considered for the selection process but for the purpose of the study all participants were informed that they should be fluent in English as a medium of communication. Robinson (1999) suggests that “in order for a wide range of opinions to be provided, it is crucial to employ a sampling technique that will provide an accurate representation of the study population.” (p. 906). A convenience sampling was employed in this proposed study as proposed by Robinson.

The sample size was made up of 18 participants and they were grouped into 3 focus groups, each consisting of 6 participants. Kreuger (1994), suggests that each group should have 6 to 8 participants, this will allow the investigator to take part in detailed enquiry concerning specific questions.

Ethical Considerations

This study takes ethic very seriously, Parker, (2004) says it is very “important that radical qualitative research takes ethics seriously and finds a way of being all the more faithful to an alternative conception of ethics” (p. 30). As researchers, we be must ethical in conducting our researches, because we tend to exploit people and misuse our academic authority, even if

the researcher intends to help, the impact of the research is hard to anticipate and its publication can affect community residents in unpredictable ways (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009).

Harm to Subjects: Participants were ensured that there are no expected physical risks associated with this study; even though participants might feel some nervousness, embarrassment in sharing their views, or negative emotions as a result of answering the questions in this research study. If they do experience these, then they may decide not to answer the question and go for another one, or they may choose to pull out from the study, or else they may contact my supervisor, specifically if their discomforts continue or visit the Cape Mental health (see Appendix C).

Informed Consent: Each participating student was provided with a consent form informing them about the purpose of the research, details and matters of confidentiality. Furthermore, the researcher will confirm that each participating student fully understood everything concerning the study. Then alert each participating student are that they have a right not to take part in this study and if they decided to, they also have a right to withdraw at any point. Blanche, et al. (2006) emphasise that “informed consent has often been seen as the only determinant of the ethicality of research throughout history” (p. 72).

Violation of privacy and confidentiality: Participants were ensured that there will be no violation of privacy in this study because participants details will not be used in the final report instead pseudonyms will be used to protect participants and all recordings and notes will be kept confidential. In fact, they will be locked into the supervisor’s office in a safe then they will be destroyed after the study as Sales, and Folkman, (2000) suggest. This will be done to keep privacy and confidentiality of the participants, and to protect their image, dignity and personal views.

Deception of respondents: Everything was clearly presented to students before they participate, they were given chance to ask any questions concerning the research, everything was transparent and true and no deception or gimmicks were used against anyone. Participants were treated with respect (Easter, Davis, & Henderson, 2004).

Debriefing: Participants were asked if they have any questions and were provided with a debriefing form explaining the purpose of the study with contact details of the department and of Cape Mental Health for counselling just in case they feel some discomfort and anxieties.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis can be defined as a method requiring identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis will be used to analyse data in this study, because it focuses on the identifying themes in discussion. Secondly, thematic analysis is theoretically robust as a method of data analysis for focus groups. Thematic analysis data will be interpreted by finding common segments and themes between participants perspectives, which will be analysed as a whole and not disjointed. Themes are not a disjointed representation of data but whole representation of data in a thematical arrangement. This helps the researcher to make connections between the participants', groups and the larger societal factors influencing the understanding of transformation initiatives amongst white students.

Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that “Thematic analysis is widely used, but there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it” (p.79), they provide this step-by-step guide for doing a clear thematic analysis: “**1) Familiarizing yourself with your data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, and 6) Producing the report.**” (p.79). Clarke and Braun (2014) say “The task of the write-up of a thematic analysis, is to tell the complicated story of your data

in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (p. 23). In terms of the actual procedures that will be applied in analysing the focus group data. This study follows Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model for thematic analysis which is discussed above, because it links and summarises the earlier approaches clearly (e.g. Lane, McKenna, Ryan, & Fleming, 2001; Sim, 1998).

Clarke and Braun (2014) suggests that these themes must be in “a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes.” (p. 23). This suggestion will be followed in the writing of the findings, and they will provide enough evidence of the themes within the data without distorting the data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). That is known as inductive thematic approach, it identifies themes directly from the data. In this sense, “this form of thematic analysis is data-driven without paying attention to the themes that previous research on the topic might have identified” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.23). A researcher cannot seclude him/herself from the theoretical and epistemological commitment because is not coded in a vacuum.

Power and Reflexivity

In qualitative research the researcher is considered as an imperative part of the study, with their individual standards, beliefs and ideologies understood as playing a part in both the kind of study that is being undertaken as well as the outcomes of the study (Wilkinson, 1988). Cross-examination of this character is referred to as ‘personal reflexivity’, which Willig (2001) defines as “reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research” (p. 10). Reflections on this relate to the position of the researcher; that is, “the structurally constituted research subjectivity that has enabled some things to happen in the research and perhaps closed down other things” (Parker, 2004, p. 30). Wilkinson (1988) says “sources of

bias and obstacles to determining the facts” (p. 494), within qualitative research are inescapable from the researcher’s personal subjectivity, hence is it very importance to minimise them to the lowest and be aware of them (biases).

Firstly, my own identity as a black researcher facilitating focus groups of white students and asking them for their views on social transformation initiatives, is of a great concern. Social desirability bias may be in play, and students may feel pressured into providing views that they think I may find agreeable while suppressing their actual thoughts on the topic.

On the other hand, it is often the case that participants regard the researcher as enjoying superior knowledge of the topic of discussion. This may lead to participants being reluctant to answer questions, as they may feel embarrassed at not possessing what they think to be the correct answer. Correspondingly, participants may view me as being more knowledgeable because of my position as a researcher and struggle consequently to converse freely in the focus groups.

Reflexivity is inseparably connected to the limitations of a study (England, 1994). A possible strategy for addressing these problems was to use open-ended questions, I also worked with a white research assistant to close that gap of biases on my first focus group. But on the second and third he was not available. Looking at the transcript of focus group one as compared to others it is more into depth than others.

Findings

White UCT students perceived social transformation initiatives 1) as “social justice and change”, 2) as “dismantling of privileges”, 3) as “decolonization of education”, 4) as “a matter of an individual”, and 5) they gave a list of deterrents of transformation initiatives. All these perspectives will be explored in depth below.

Analysis and Discussion

In selecting themes, the researcher employed a latent approach which goes beyond the semantic approach (descriptive). Braun and Clarke (2006) define the latent thematic approach as “the development of the themes which involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized” (p.84). The analysis within this approach lean towards a constructionist paradigm which is the paradigm of this study. The data and coding led to a formation of six themes namely: Transformation as “*social justice and change*”, Transformation as “*dismantling of privileges*”, Transformation as “*decolonization of education*”, Transformation as “*a matter of an individual*”, and *Deterrents of Transformation initiatives*. All these themes are data driven, because the questions were open-ended, e.g. “*What do you understand about the term Transformation?*” was one of the main questions of this study.

Transformation as “*social justice and change*”

Adams and Bell (2016) define social justice as both a process and a goal of equal contribution between groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs.

Mon: Transformation is largely about social justice. South Africa comes from a past of deep inequality, and transformation is about changing social and economic opportunities for those who have been previously oppressed.

This participant understands transformation as social justice, in his understanding he contrasts South African history and social justice which is a vehicle of transformation. There are three important key words that are worth underlining here, “*inequality*”, “*changing*” and “*opportunities*”. With all that in mind the participant calls for a social and economic change for those who have been previously oppressed. This can be summed up as a call for accessibility and change. The interesting thing, the participants secludes himself “*for those*”, meaning that he understands his position as opposed to “*those*”.

Accessibility: This understanding of transformation as accessibility runs through the whole data, starting from the first focus group till the last one. Here are some perspectives from the participants:

Cri: The way I see it, a lot of it is about increasing accessibility. The reason things aren't transformed is because certain segments of the population have access to them. So, transformation entails making whatever it is you're talking about more accessible.

Ryu: [...] correct transformations need to take place each sector, you need to check where things can be corrected and where differences can be made; because people are hesitant to change, they like the norm and regularity. But change usually brings about benefits, and therefore with change is the transformation that people should be more open to.

Cri says “*transformation entails making whatever it is you're talking about more accessible*” this perspective of accessibility is very easy to say but hard to do because “*certain segments*” of the population owns almost everything and they are not willing to share. The use of language by this participant very interesting. Ryu says “*people are hesitant to change, they like the norm and regularity.*”, both participants point to accessibility and change as means of transformation. Yet, they highlight some form of resistance together with their understanding. This interplay of willingness and unwillingness is very interesting and it shall be explored as we go, because this has a long history as discussed by Terreblanche (2002).

Equality / Equity: Equity means fairness, but fairness is a two-edged word as discussed by Paquette, he says:

Being fair involves both giving to each according to the common lot (horizontal equity) and giving to each according to need and merit (vertical equity). Equity raises questions of redistribution, of reshaping the way in which resources are allocated, of tampering with the existing economic pie (Paquette, 1998, p.41)

Accessibility lead to equality and equity, because the question of redistribution is anchored in equity.

Dei: I feel like in South Africa transformation is a pointy where we can achieve equalities and so on and even though there was a massive transformation when we went out of apartheid, there's still a long way to go because there's a lot of things that stayed behind from that era (Apartheid) So South Africa continues to be a transformational society.

Joy: To become the society it should be, in terms of equal rights because that is something we literally didn't have. The only way we can do that is for equality to be in every single factor of society

Both participants understand transformation as a continuous process of social construction, social justice and development. Joy highlights the idea of equality as "*equal human Rights*", while equity raises the question of redistributions of resources. Such redistribution can frustrate white privileges, as Dei says "...*a lot of things that stayed behind from that era (Apartheid)*". White privilege is one of the things that leaped to post-apartheid South Africa without being confronted (Durrheim, 2003).

Transformation as "*dismantling of privileges*"

Adams and Bell (2016) explain how privilege works and they say, "Whites, for example, gain privilege as a dominant group because they benefit from access to social power and privilege, not equally available to people of colour." (p. 3). By that they mean, whites as a group, continue to receive wages and accrue more possessions than other groups, positions of control and power are held by them and they control institutions in our societies. This is an undeniable fact, especially in a South African context. The data paints a beautiful picture about similar and different understandings amongst participants:

Cri: Anyone who can recognize that we do come from a history of social injustice, can recognize the importance of transformation; and would be for it. I think the problem is that, that sort of mind set of: "I agree with this, I agree with transformation, I agree it's a good thing that should happen; BUT I'm not going to enact it in anyway because like...". I think this goes back to human nature, no one voluntarily gives up their advantage; which I think is the sad truth. Sure thing, I can recognize I come from a background of immense privilege but where does it get to the point where I actively sacrifice that. I don't think a lot of people can do that, or even come close to doing that.

Researcher: (Probing statement) Privilege, and sacrificing those privileges, it is not easy you mean?

Cri: Yeah, like it's hard, it doesn't happen. No one actively takes their advantages that they have and says...like over the holidays, I was going to work so I just asked my dad and he just spoke to his friend. Those are his networks, that he built up in Apartheid. So, that's me tapping directly into my privilege but I can't just be like it's wrong of me to get a job that way so I'm not going to do it

Li: I have a question, rather than an answer, that is a part of transformation; does it have to imply giving up privileges? (*ferocious face*)

Jez: It's more about acknowledging that you have those privileges.

Mon: So, with privilege transformation, and I think specifically white privilege: there does need to be policies that does this. I think some of the resistance comes in just with like what is giving up privilege and what is an equal playing field. So, for example, the admissions criteria for Masters in Clinical Psychology still stipulates that there should be 50% white and 50% black; which is termed "equality". However, white people are only 8% of the population. So, does that still, for example, still not privilege white people? and yet, there are already people who see this 50/50 and say that this will exclude people who are white, and who are above a certain category, who would be good psychologists. So, I think what dismantling privilege is, is again recognizing what the needs of the country actually are. So, in this context, do we really need more white psychologists acting in clinical capacity? when the field is majority white. So, dismantling privilege is quite difficult at an individual level. It does need to be done at a policy level. However, a lot of the resistance comes at an individual level even if it is done at a policy level.

Looking closely at the conversation between the participants, it is clear that they hold a theoretical view of dismantling privileges. For them dismantling privileges means either giving up some or acknowledging that you are privileged. Mon says "*dismantling privilege is quite difficult at an individual level. It does need to be done at a policy level.*". Privilege is not only limited to material things, it is deep in the construct of society where people of colour are hieratically lower than white (Durrheim, 2003). When Li asked the question about giving up privileges, her facial expression was not in good spirit but after the response of other

participants she cooled down. Mon's argument of 50/50 criteria labelled as equality is very interesting. He says "white people are only 8% of the population. So, does that still, not privilege white people?", if people of colour make up 90% of the population then a 50/50 is not equality at all meaning that whites still hold great privilege according to Mon's perspective.

Transformation as "decolonization"

As discussed in the introduction that in 2015, young black South African students stood in solidarity against injustices, inequalities and colonial images of the past calling for transformation, such as the #RhodesMustFall movement (Chaudhuri, 2016) which led to the #FeeMustFall campaign (Raju, 2017). These black students sound a call for a free decolonised education, below are some of the perspectives of the participants on this matter. Before we dive in, the focus group data was so in depth on this matter and that led into a formation of four sub themes; *Curriculum and Language*, and *Fees must fall movement*.

Curriculum and Language: Raju (2017) discusses in his paper that education, especially mathematics in the curriculum must be decolonised as means of transformation, because it is decorated with European terminologies. He continues and say, such images are a causal factor for African students to fail/ lose interest in mathematics, they do not relate to the literature. The construction of the colonial education system was meant to serve the white elite. The data relate with some of Raju's arguments.

Agy: Transformation brings to mind, this idea of a decolonized education. Where the curriculum that we are learning is actually Afro-centric, and to do with what the context is in South Africa; and not just trying to apply European-American principles where we are politically, economically, racially, socially and all those sorts of things. The other thing is, it goes further than university education: it's primary school education as well, specifically I was watching a documentary yesterday about the medium of instruction in South Africa. About how using English and Afrikaans in primary schools specifically is actually such a disadvantage for people who don't speak those languages as their first language. And it really made me think about how so many white people are like "Oh, but I'm not disadvantaged because my parents

worked really hard to get me where I am today" or "I had to work x amount of year to be able to afford university", and you kind of think: at the most basic level; when you went into grade 1 you understood what the teacher was saying. for me transformation would be that kind of thing, where we look at the processes and policies we have in place and we adjust them so that everybody has equal access.

Another participant said:

Jez: I'm definitely for it, but there is the issue of being realistic. we do not have enough information and evidence, and articles, research in south Africa to use purely South African literature and teach us purely south African literature to make it completely relevant. you have to look at first world countries, to know what not to do and what to do to make it relevant. You have to look internationally, at other third world countries as well. I don't know if it's a problem of not having enough research in south Africa, but I don't think it should be completely anti-European/American because they have the resources and we have to take advantage of that.

Language is the rudimentary instrument of constructionism. Discourses are constructed through language in order to epitomize a certain form of events or people (Burr, 1995). Raju's argument on curriculum cannot be detached from a medium of learning, "*English and Afrikaans in primary schools specifically is actually such a disadvantage for people who don't speak those languages as their first language.*" Analysing this one can see that South African society was and is still founded on the constructs of the past (Colonialism and Apartheid) it serves the white minority. In fact, English is the measuring rod of intelligence, "*when you went into grade 1 you understood what the teacher was saying.*" Jez says "*I'm definitely for it (Transformation), but there is the issue of being realistic.*" She then points out that Africa has few academic resources, "I don't think it should be completely anti-European/American because they have the resources" The fear of being detached from the global world is very visible in this argument. Decolonization does not mean rejecting global contribution of knowledge but it deals with images associated with education, hegemonic narratives and oppressive epistemologies (Raju, 2017).

Fees must fall:

Mon: On a free education, it shouldn't be free for everyone. if you can afford to go to private school or are able to pay for tertiary education - our tertiary education is already subsidised by the government, so perhaps if you go to primary school your education at tertiary level should not be subsidised, and that would make it possible for the government to sponsor a greater portion for those who need it. one of the challenges is that white people, as the minority, have the resources to be going to private school and to be affording higher education.

Another participant said:

Cey: I really respect what fees must fall and the Rhodes must fall movements have done towards changing my mind and everyone else's, I really appreciate that the hardest part about it was the shutting down of the university. The first time it was all good, second time not so good and people started resisting. I've always been for it but I think during that time there was a part of me which was selfish, thinking of my own path but also appreciating the change they brought to the university it was really revealed.

The first participant suggests that free education should only be applicable to those who cannot afford to pay, and he emphasizes that "*if you can afford to go to private school or are able to pay for tertiary education*" which make a lot of sense. This participant has an activist mentality throughout, and his understanding is well informed about SA context. Cey admits her selfishness, lack of understanding and resistances she may have had against the movement, it is understandable for her to resist such movement because it didn't resonate in her mind. In fact, she is not affected by fees because she affords to pay, in her mind this movement was jeopardising her goals "*there was a part of me which was selfish, thinking of my own path*".

Transformation as "a matter of an individual"

This theme was so vivid in the data, each focus group had this conversation about individualistic kind of transformation initiative. Where participants seclude themselves from society or racial group because they have lost hope in an integrated approach. Two sub themes

were found within the data, the mindset of the individual and the role of the individual in a community.

Mindset:

Aem: I made clear that I am for social transformation. I do know that it would be a very difficult process for a lot of people, myself included. No matter how open minded you are, change is always gonna be difficult.

Dei: I see where you coming from, and I understand and it sort of making me to change my mind. Now I understand that we need to have some awareness before we bring people to change...it starts with changing minds.

Can: Do people really want to change? How to do you then change people who don't want to change because that's what I really struggle with

(Overlapping dialogue "you don't change them" Oli)

Can: you don't? But then how do you make a change

(Overlapping dialogue "you just go on changing yourself" Oli)

Can: but then it like one person is left behind, what if that's the person who could make all the difference in the world

(Overlapping dialogue "That's their problem" Oli)

Can: it should be your problem as well.

(Overlapping dialogue "No, because am...no let me stop, let me not start my..." Oli)

Dei: I believe we need optimism and the need to change in order to start.

Oak: I still maintain that if you can't change someone then change yourself. It starts with you. Even if others don't come and join you, I think what matters is the difference you have done to one person and to yourself.

From this data it is evident that for some of the UCT white students, the idea of self-gratification can be linked to their understanding of transformation. *"I still maintain that if you can't change someone then change yourself. It starts with you"* and she continues to say what matters the difference you have made to a person and to yourself. Dei says *"we need optimism and the need to change in order to start"* the "we" is referring to other white individuals and

this is very striking because it implies that most of whites are not optimistic about transformations initiatives and if it is so, that would take us back to the work of Steyn (2004) of rehabilitating a Whiteness disgraced and unwillingness of some Afrikaners in being part of transformation initiatives.

Community Service:

Kya: It's quite difficult to figure out what you can do because there so much that needs to be done. I think I'd do community service when I can and continue to work in those environments even after graduating.

Agy: I would also do a bit of community service like I do like tutoring in Khayelitsha, In terms of transformation at UCT.

Researcher: (*Probing statement*) Is there a need to do something?

All: Yes (*All laugh*)

Majority of the participants when they were asked about their role, if any, in social transformation initiative they said "*community service*". Transformation initiative is understood as involvement in community wellbeing by these participants, especially the female students.

Deterrents of Transformation initiatives

There are many factors that are playing a huge role in delaying the progress of Transformations initiatives, and these factors can be categorised into three levels; the individuals level, the institutional (UCT) level and the national level.

Individuals level: The data shows that the individuals can be delayed by their *fears* and Durrheim (2003) argues that whites fear being labelled as racist, which would disqualify them from being able to speak out freely and stand up for something.

Dei: I feel like the reason for people not to participate in transformation is because there is this fear that other people won't do the same, just like in charity work you feel like you the only one doing this...and that makes people to give up on changing the world.

The feeling of being the only one doing the right things cause fear, anxiety and lead most white individuals into a reserved mode, where they only care for their own business. From this insight it is very easy to notice the reason most white individuals, give up on transformation initiatives. One of the participants when he was asked about transformation role he can play in society he said “*I gave up on that long time ago*”.

Institutional (UCT) level: *Inconsistency* is number one deterrent of transformation at UCT, the data shows that UCT is obsessed with transformation because it’s very liberal, considering the fact that the university is operating on a city like Cape Town and there are too many issues that are brought up and not really focused on because almost every month there’s a new issue that rises up.

Dei: I personally think because of what I said before that there are so many big issues that come up here in UCT. I find it so intimidating to take part of any transformation activities. With fear of many of us having different goals and motives. So, most of the time I keep quiet and learn. This participant says UCT transformation Initiatives are “*intimidating*” and have “*different goals and motives*”. In her understanding, UCT transformation initiatives should deal with one aspect. Otherwise, they are deterring the wheel of transformation instead of pushing it forward.

National level: according to the data this level is characterised by “*power dynamics*” in the political sphere, these dynamics are deterring transformation initiatives:

Dei: I feel like the major underlying problem to all the problems is the political issue and that’s something that we students and minorities cannot fix no matter how much we want to transform the country. I mean it’s very difficult for us to create any change in our positions especially if we have scattered minorities that are not coming together.

Oak: I feel to most people it’s all about power, so the actual foundation and purpose is wrong and is out of our control.

Oak: I think that so structural, but to change someone’s perceptions and prejudice is difficult. For a sustainability of south Africa, we need to change the foundation I think the government let me not speak about government, we need to get the structure right. Politicians don’t see us as a priority which is really bad, we want to get that foundation back together, once people are

in unemployment they are faced with prejudice am sorry I am not just speaking for black people am speaking for anyone, it's all relative but the government is just...

Participants understand this deterrent in a power dynamic framework, pointing out the core arenas as “*political issue*”, “*government*” and “*division & splits*” Participant Can says there are people that are thriving in this economy we are in at the moment through people getting split these individuals are gaining power from this. Whereas if we were together they would not. The need to change the government is so evident on the data, “*Politicians don't see us as a priority which is really bad, we want to get that foundation back together*” by foundation she refers to a solid governance. The implication here is that we have a failing government, a government that is delaying social transformation initiative. In sum, these students understand transformation as accessibly, change, opportunity, equality, equity and opportunities for all.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the understandings of UCT white undergraduates on social transformation initiatives and how they construct those understandings. UCT white undergraduate students understand transformation initiatives as “social justice” that which entails accessibility, equity and equality. They also understand and construct it as “dismantling of privileges”, as “decolonization of education” (fees, curriculum, selection criteria and language), and they understand it as “a matter of an individual” (changing ones’ mentality for the betterment of our societal lives). They also highlighted some of the troublesome deterrents of social transformation initiatives namely; fear, inconsistency and power dynamics. Their different, shared and intersubjective understandings of social transformation initiatives were analysed with a purpose of understanding not criticising. Every view was taken with seriously into consideration.

This understanding of accessibility, equality and opportunity is central to the understanding of these students, in fact it runs from the first theme till the last theme. Whether it is education, decolonization, community, governance and many more (accessibility, equality and opportunity remain central facets of transformation initiatives). Additionally, there are few other participants who employed strategies to resist ideas that counter white privilege. That shows that humans construct their world views differently, depending on their context. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to represent white student, but rather of a select group of UCT undergraduates. This study has contributed to the literature about white students and transformation which is very scarce at moment, especially in South Africa as Durrheim (2003) admitted above, that this area has not yet been explored, and he himself ended up using American literature for his paper.

For future studies on this topic of social transformation initiatives I suggest that a similar study be conducted amongst white UCT undergraduates but this time around the researcher should be a white person. So that we may compare the results then do a joint research consisting of both black and white students on the same research question. I believe that would open new perspectives and deep conversations because the racial tension and privilege tension provides an opportunity for further exploration around constructions of transformation initiatives amongst young South Africans.

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