

## **Div Lit Week 9: Whiteness**

### **Discussion: "The Whiteness Debate"**

#### **1. Objectives of class:**

- Engage students in debates about white privilege in post-apartheid South Africa
- Consider the role of white people in transformation in post-apartheid South Africa

#### **2. Material:**

- **Eusebius Mckaiser "Confronting whiteness"**. Accessed at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-07-01-confronting-whiteness>
- **Paul C Taylor "Silence and the ethics of transformation"**. Accessed at <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-22-silence-and-the-ethics-of-transformation>
- **The Whiteness Debate Handout (see below)**
- Other useful resources:
  - Anything from The Mail & Guardian "The Whiteness Debate". Accessed at <http://mg.co.za/specialreport/on-whiteness>

**Note:** We do not use the prescribed reading for this session. You can, of course, do so if you feel it's useful.

#### **3. Method:**

- **Read**

Give students the attached handout and ask them to read.

- **Discuss**

Ask students to discuss the following questions (on handout):

1. How do white South Africans continue to benefit from past injustices?
2. In what ways has whiteness continued to shape South Africa?
3. What does the reaction to Samantha Vice's argument (mostly from white people) on the internet tell us about race matters in South Africa (particularly whiteness)?
4. What do you think white people's role is in post-apartheid South Africa?

## The Whiteness Debate

Samantha Vice (cited in *Eusebius McKaiser*) argues:

- White South Africans should feel shame and regret for the past and that whiteness still benefits them unjustly.
- States that whites should not participate in the public political process in the country.
- She states that the moral selves of whites are deeply stained by the unjust system they have benefited.
- Whiteness became the norm of society. Being white in all sectors of society was as advantageous as being male or being masculine in the corporate sector.

“Racism has this effect because it seeps into our habits, our reflexes, and our impulses. More to the point for Vice, white supremacist racism saturates white selves, and is apt to surface, given the right provocations and opportunities, whether one wills it or not. White people of good will don't (often) say that black people are incapable of self-government. More often they just attribute the struggles in black-governed states entirely to internal conditions, as if these states are not also products of history and geopolitics. White people don't typically tell themselves that blacks are mud people who can't represent their own interests. Sometimes they just create charity ad campaigns for African schools featuring mud-smeared white children. (This actually happened.) White people don't typically say that other people's interests are not as important as theirs. They just tend to invoke non-racial considerations like property rights when asked to address the lingering harm of white supremacist policies by redistributing resources.”

*Paul C Taylor*

***In light of Vice and Taylor's assertions above, consider the following questions:***

1. How do white South Africans continue to benefit from past injustices?
2. In what ways has whiteness continue to shape South Africa?
3. What does the reaction to Samantha Vice's argument (mostly from white people) on the internet tell us about race matters in South Africa (particularly whiteness)?
4. What do you think white people's role is in post-apartheid South Africa?