

The discursive construction of blackness on WhatsApp status posts in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper unpacks the discursive construction of black Zimbabwean identities through multimodal WhatsApp status update posts by Zimbabweans on the WhatsApp social media platform. Cognisant that WhatsApp constitutes part of the public sphere where public discourses are generated and shaped, it explores and interrogates how status update content provoke and inspire identity discourses that perpetuate unequal racial relations that we argue are rooted in colonialism and its legacies. It deploys netnography to collect data through online participant observation over a one-year period. Theoretically, the data analysis deploys Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and Coloniality to demonstrate that the analysed posts generate meaning through interactions across multiple modes and that racial stereotypes articulated in the data texts are rooted in notions of Western colonial hegemony. The paper argues that the WhatsApp status posts constitute semiotic modes that articulate and disseminate ideological value-positions that ridicule blackness and extol white racial supremacy. It is concluded that hidden in the status posts are white racial hegemony and negative attitudes against black racial identity, widely consumed and which, if left unchallenged, undercut what anti-colonial struggles sought to correct.