“I wanted a better life for myself”

Renegotiating Racial Identities in the Pursuit of a Better Future

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inequalities and justice:
influences, effects, intersections and evidence

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CONTENTS:

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INTRODUCTION:

• Belief in possibility of a ‘better future’
• Masters dissertation – educational decision-making (EDM) of coloured first-generation tertiary students
• Focus:
  • Project: EDM & their transition into higher education
  • Paper: (Coloured) identity, aspirations and ‘possible selves’
RATIONALE FOR STUDY:

• SA remains extremely unequal
• Youth especially vulnerable (unemployment > 50%)
• Racialised trends in (un)employment & educational attainment
• Coloured youths’ hopes/aspirations as coping mechanisms amidst hardship
• Aspirations among Coloured youths contradict de facto norms
• In post-apartheid SA, race remains a salient issue
THEORETICAL CONCEPTS:

• Why do “working class kids [...] let themselves get working class jobs”? (Willis, 1977, p.1)

• Ethnicity can intersect with or mitigate the impact of class (MacLeod, 1986)

• EDM as part of processes of identity construction (De Lannoy, 2008)

• Social (class) transformation augmented by interpersonal strategies (Kaufman, 2003)

• ‘Possible selves’: “images of the self already in a future state” (Oyserman, 2007: 479)
... intergroup relations have become more complex and expressions of social identity more fluid. This has, on one hand, compounded the confusion and controversy that have dogged the [Coloured] identity in recent decades, but on the other hand, it has opened up opportunities for new ways of conceptualizing Colouredness and brought forth more varied and creative responses to questions about the nature of Coloured identity and its role in South African society.”

(Adhikari, 2005, p. 175)
METHODOLOGY:

• Sampling through various methods (incl. snowball sampling)
  • Tutorials/lectures; electronic notice-boards; passing conversations
  • Small cohort of eligible students
• Semi-structured in-depth interviews (up to 3 p.p.)
• Analysis: using Miles & Huberman (not purely grounded)
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION – COLOUREDNESS:

• Alexia, 18:
  • ... burdened by race and culture... what we are indoctrinated to believe, that like, we’re underdogs or we’re lazy in fact... We know there are better things out there, but those things are not for us, we’re okay with what we have... being a Coloured is being mediocre...

• Mandy, 19:
  • Like your next door neighbour will be like ‘I need a potato’ and you’ll give them a potato... everybody’s struggling so everybody knows what you’re going through... we’re all having a tough time, so we might as well do this together...
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION – NEW SELVES/IDENTITIES:

• Angelo, 18:
  • Because um, each time end of the month comes, all the money’s spent and suddenly nothing. And the rest of the month we suffer, you know, always in financial trouble. But um, through the way my family was with me and asking myself the question “do I want to be like my parents?” I said “no” and because of that... I wanted to be different; I wanted a better life for myself.
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION – NEW SELVES/IDENTITIES:

• Started with family/parents

• Carefully selected associations & concrete plans
  • Focus on connections with those who share their belief in positive possible selves

• Not complete associational distancing (as suggested by Kaufman)
  • Still established in social and family networks
  • Distancing themselves from those associated with negative possible selves
CONCLUSION:

• In agreement with Adhikari (2005, p. 175)
  • “creative responses to questions about the nature of Coloured identity and its role in South African society”
  • They are reimagining their own identities, as well as what it means to be Coloured

• Strongly influenced by this time in SA’s history
  • They are (mostly) born frees
  • Parents’ educational/aspirational aspirations constrained