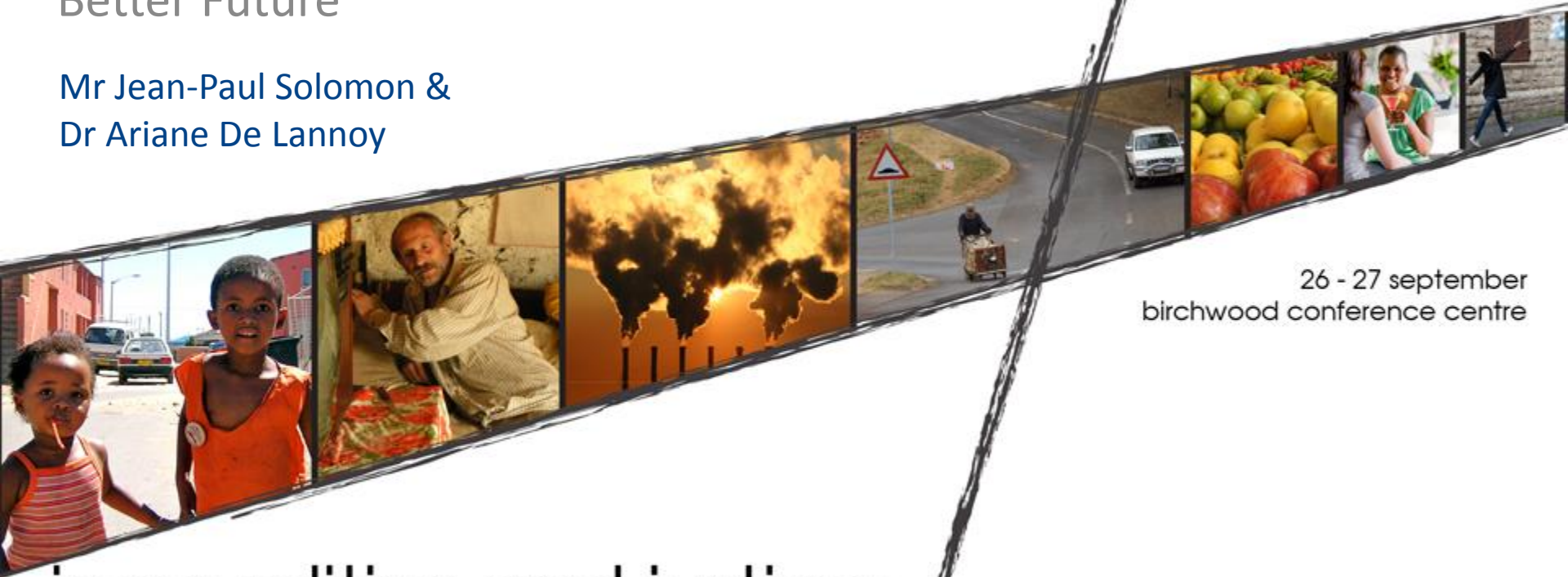


“I wanted a better life for myself”

Renegotiating Racial Identities in the Pursuit of a Better Future

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birchwood conference centre

inequalities and justice:

influences, effects, intersections and evidence



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- Rationale for Study
- Theoretical Background
- Methodology
- Findings & discussion
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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)

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS:

“... 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 outthere, **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