

Successful, Rich or Poor, Three Key Notions for the Understanding of a Generation

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Based on an on-going ethnographic research, the paper will discuss how young people living in the township of Daveyton (Gauteng, South Africa) and aged 20 to 35 years old conceive of their future in South Africa. In a first moment it will examine what its mean to them to be “successful”? What does it mean to them to be “rich” or “poor”? Here are some of the key words they used in interviews and daily conversations amongst themselves. In most of the cases studied , they inform their choices and aspirations in post-apartheid South Africa, much more than racial paradigms or any kind of reference to the Struggle.

While examining the scope of those words in people’s minds and speeches, the paper will secondly argue that in order to get a sense of the varied positions and ideas adopted by those members of the post-apartheid generations it is essential to analyze their own words and the often renewed meanings they give to them- as opposed to using external concepts.

Specifying their subjectivities and notion of engagements requires not so much to compare current generations to previous ones but to get an inner understanding of what organizes current generations’ ways of thinking. In that respect, the three words above appear as key ones.

The paper will finally discuss if those key categories of thinking should be interpreted as a new form of “moral economy” ,as several scholars recently argue about youth in South Africa or as a move from a racial framework to an economic one. I will suggest an alternative explanation.