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Narratives of suffering and an ambivalence of feeling in the photographs of Jeff Wall

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2017

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24485

Laurence, Emma-Jane Mary (2017) Narratives of suffering and an ambivalence of feeling in the photographs of Jeff Wall, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24485>

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Abstract

The role of youth in development in South Africa is of increasing concern to development practitioners. Figuring out how to maximise youth participation in a way that is meaningful is often difficult, particularly in national discourse around development. This is important because of the centrality of youth in demographic trends as well as the role of citizen participation in advancing democracy. Currently, the scope for meaningful youth participation in South Africa is limited because of access to opportunities for participation, and a perception of social status as a requirement for involvement in development; this, coupled by a lack of political will and the inability to adopt people-centred approaches to development mean that youth participation is often ignored in development processes.

Within these contexts, this paper looks to assess whether there is a developmental environment which is conducive to meaningful youth participation. Through an analysis of field data obtained through interviews with youth in Tembisa as well as National Planning Commissioners, this paper analyses the scope of youth participation as it related to the National Development Plan. This data draws conclusions about youth perceptions of development, the National Development Plan and their role in national development. It also draws conclusions about the ways the National Planning Commission envisions the role of youth in the implementation of the plan, as well as their role in creating an enabling environment for youth participation. These insights are grounded in a theory of a democratic developmental state and the Capabilities Approach, assessing which approach to development would best create an environment for meaningful youth participation.