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1 Introduction

One typically humid day in 2013, two friends, Wandile and David, sit together chatting in a primary school in Durban's Bluff suburb. This scene would have been unheard of four decades earlier because laws would have forced Wandile to attend an 'African' school and David a 'white' school.

An air of anticipation surrounds the two learners because they are in the final year of the school. Wandile's and David's families, both middle class, have recently sent off applications to a prestigious senior primary school located in the city's Berea suburb.

Yet David is called for an interview; Wandile is not. When it becomes clear that this pattern is repeated across the classroom, black parents begin to talk. Wandile's mother, Mrs Ngcobo, phones the school to complain. 'I said it straight that I have a feeling that you prefer whites,' she recalls, 'I think that is why they all of a sudden became soft and . . . it got me an interview and got me a space.' However, concerned about possible recriminations against her child, she eventually enrols her son into a private school in Berea.

From a different perspective, a similar story played out at a Bluff preschool attended by my then two-year-old daughter in 2010. Its parents had voted in the early 1990s to desegregate the school, and more than a dozen minibus taxis now brought black learners with the financial means from distant apartheid townships. The school's principal was angry, however, that one Berea school was aggressively 'poaching' white students from the Bluff. 'He fishes for white children,' she said of the male principal. 'He comes to the Bluff to wine and dine preschool principals to encourage them to direct whites to his primary school.' Whereas in 2003 this 'poaching' Berea school had twice as many black African as white students, by 2010 it had four times as many white students.[1]

These two vignettes help explain why education became so central to young people's growing impatience with life after apartheid. In its 1994 election manifesto, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) pledged to make education a priority in building a

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nonracial society. It would introduce a single free schooling system to replace the racially divided apartheid system and a new curriculum to promote humane ideals.[2]

However, in 2015, thousands of students took to the streets in what Achille Mbembe termed the country's 'Fanonian moment' – referring to Frantz Fanon's famous teachings on colonial racism.[3] The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements demanded free higher education, the decolonisation of curricula, and the removal of symbols of colonialism beginning with the statue of famous colonialist Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town. Protests were led by the 'born free' generation (those born after the fall of apartheid), 'increasingly disillusioned by and ... push[ing] back against the notion of the Rainbow Nation'.[4] Meanwhile, black high-school students remonstrated against teachers' censuring of Afro-textured hair and derision of African languages.[5]

Yet if the racist actions of the two Berea schools with which I opened fit squarely with students' recent dissent, we must also note some puzzles. While both schools showed bias towards enrolling white students, they did recruit some better-off black students and also attracted a considerable number of Afrikaans-speaking learners who left Afrikaans schools that had much whiter student bodies. Moreover, the principal of the English-medium school my daughter attended remembers being shocked when parents in one of the city's most politically conservative suburbs voted so strongly in favour of desegregation. How do we understand the importance of race to educational events but also its explanatory limits?

Follow the children

This book adds to existing research exposing continued inequalities in South Africa's education facilities and exam results. However, it rethinks South Africa's political transition by revealing how the prestige of whiteness, or what it calls 'white tone', became reformulated in the everyday workings of a marketised education system. It shows how 'white' phenotypic traits retain value in society even if some better-off 'black' people can now buy prestigious cultural dispositions.

This approach allows it to shed new light on questions that refuse to go away in South Africa: does society remain fundamentally structured by race, or is the country moving towards a kind of class apartheid? South Africa has long been a laboratory for these discussions because of its sizeable mining and manufacturing economy and extreme system of institutionalised racial segregation. The 'race–class debate' that simmered in the 1970s and 1980s questioned whether apartheid was driven by racist ideologies or by capitalists' need for cheap labour. Some

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scholars sought to theorise how race and class 'articulated' with each other, but limited empirical work undergirded this approach, especially in relation to education and gender.[6] Labour, and particularly male labour, has been the traditional home of race–class debates around the world.[7]

In the political realm, South Africa's race–class debates fed into the 'two-stage theory': the belief that the anti-apartheid movement should achieve first national liberation then socialism. The first stage, Nelson Mandela's dramatic move from prisoner to president and the ending of minority white rule in 1994, was decisive. The second demanded an improvement in the economic lives of the black majority.

In the post-apartheid period, like magnets that could not be switched off, race and class continued to pull explanations towards one of two poles. Some on the left argued that privilege had merely become deracialised. Neoliberal policies, it was said, drove a shift from race to 'class apartheid'.[8] Others, however, insisted that the emphasis on reconciliation and nation building meant that racial fault lines – for instance on land ownership – were never adequately addressed.

This book refuses to separate race and class and also insists on the necessity of foregrounding gender. It builds on David Goldberg's analysis of 'racial neoliberalism' that locates South Africa, once again, as a paradigmatic case.[9] Crucially, this approach conceives of race as *formative* of what came to be called neoliberalism – broadly, the belief that the market and not the state should play the fundamental role in driving the economy. This contrasts with David Harvey's influential analysis of neoliberalism as a class project, as well as Wendy Brown's recent account of neoliberalism as a governing rationality 'extending a specific formulation of economic values . . . to every dimension of human life'.[10]

Race for Education considers these questions through a gendered and schooling-focused window. It takes a journey through macho rugby matches, single-sex schooling culture, and family obligations now labelled as the 'black tax'. If political economists like to 'follow the money' to understand the economic structure of society, this ethnography 'follows the children' to show the 'routine and insidious' actions at work.[11] I show how schooling *marketisation* – a concept I prefer to 'neoliberalism' – does not flatten racialised meanings and practices but is reworking them. By marketisation, I follow Tikly and Mabogoane's description: children's increased daily movement for schools, public schools' charging of fees, schools' increased competition for desirable students, and the moderate growth in private schools.[12] Today, public schools can charge fees of up to 50,000 rand a year (US$4,500 or £3,500), and one Johannesburg study found that only 18 per cent of schoolchildren attend their local school.[13]

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The arguments

This book rejects the view that apartheid simply transmuted into 'class apartheid' or 'racial neoliberalism' by describing and analysing changing spatio-temporal processes in the city of Durban. The arc of the study begins in the 1950s, when apartheid's social engineers established one of the most – perhaps *the* most – racially and spatially planned education systems in the world. The vision of apartheid planners was of local schools for local populations in racially (but, for whites, also class) defined suburbs. I follow scholars in labelling this period of segregation one of *racial modernism*.[14]

However, in the 1970s, class divisions increased in society, and, from 1976, white private schools began to admit a tiny number of black students. I use the term *marketised assimilation* to draw attention to what I consider to be the first period of schooling desegregation (roughly from 1976 to the late 1990s). During this time, a limited number of better-off black children with an 'ability to be assimilated' (in the words of one school) were admitted into white (and later Coloured and Indian) schools. Contrary to the belief that the ending of apartheid represented a rupture from what came before it, I stress continuities between early desegregation from the 1970s and the desegregation of white public schools in the 1990s.

This analysis of the initial desegregation period allows me to show that, from the late 1990s and 2000s, competition among schools and among parents intensified and resulted in what I call the *racialised market*. Cultural signals of whiteness – a school's victory on the rugby field, its rejection of 'black hair', its success at imparting a 'white accent' – became key grounds on which formerly white schools fought to retain prestige, justify high fees, and equip learners for the labour market.

Thus, this book shows that marketisation does not just advantage better-off families; it reconstitutes and works through racialised and gendered differences. A central aim of this book is to show how the marketised schooling system feeds from and reconstitutes the valuing of certain phenotypic traits and racial-cultural attributes.

The title of this book, *Race for Education*, signals its attention to race, specifically the question of why race has not diminished in significance when the South African constitution actively promotes nonracialism. Of course, nonracialism is itself a contested term, some people equating it to colour-blindness, others seeing its realisation in multiculturalism (hence the *Rainbow* Nation), and others viewing it as inseparable from anti-racism.[15]

While this book considers the remaking of 'race', it is, of course, by no means a comprehensive account. For instance, I don't consider how apartheid's four racial categories are kept alive in laws that seek to redress

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past injustices.[16] I don't unpack race's deployment in the public sphere, for instance when one government minister denounced Mmusi Maimane, the first black leader of the Democratic Alliance party, as 'using a black face to protect the interests of the white minority'.[17] Acts of racial violence in society are also not studied. In 2016, a Facebook post by white realtor Penny Sparrow went viral when she compared black South African beachgoers to 'monkeys'; later that year a video circulated showing two white farmers pushing a black man into a coffin and threatening to bury him alive.[18] My primary focus is on the hidden logics at work in the education system.

A second meaning of the 'race for education' is the '*rush* for education'. A different shade of the following question resonates in many settings across the world: what does mass education mean when large numbers of people are struggling to find work? In South Africa, a huge rise in post-primary education from the 1970s was accompanied not by economic growth (as predicted by theorists of 'human capital') but by unemployment: the current jobless rate remains above 40 per cent.[19] Public education is a vital road to social equity but its benefits are limited if some learners buy their way into the best schools and go on to secure scarce work.

Focusing on another implied meaning of the term 'race' – *movement* – also helps us consider in new light another key paradox: why have government interventions to redistribute educational expenditure not, apparently, improved the quality of the education system? While the enrolment rate for grades 1–7 increased to an impressive 98 per cent, the government itself noted in 2011 that: 'Apart from a small minority of black children who attend former white schools and a small minority of schools performing well in largely black areas, the quality of public education remains poor.'[20] In spite of education spending being around 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), South African schools were ranked bottom in maths and science tests out of 50 countries, and the country remains one of the (or perhaps *the*) most unequal in the world.[21]

By following the movement of children, I show a musical chairs-like process, whereby better-off children tend to travel to more prestigious schools and leave empty desks that need to be filled by other learners. Despite, and indeed because of, the state's efforts to create free schools for the poor, families' resources are drawn up the system – ending up ironically in formerly white schools in particular. Thus, post-apartheid reforms have led to the partial deracialisation of privilege but not to a fundamental reduction in inequality and not to the fundamental 'de-whitening' of the grammar of privilege. In short, the state's redirection of money towards poorer schools has been simply too little.

This study, as should now be clear, considers *material* and *symbolic* inequalities in relation to one another. And no book pioneered

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this approach better in the colonial world than Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.[22] Written in 1961, the study is a damning critique not only of colonialism but of the 'national bourgeoisies' who overthrew colonial rule but upheld capitalism through preserving the prestige of whiteness.

Fanon's writings on the experiences of racism and the failings of postcolonial elites gained huge popularity in South Africa in the 2010s. But the details of how exactly whiteness is entrenched in the country's political economy has received less attention. *Race for Education* traces how racialised principles such as branding have infiltrated the very heart of public services and can be used to justify the 'poaching' of certain students. It shows how shack dwellers, whose numbers have grown after apartheid, are excluded from the best schools because they are both poor *and* black.

As well as families (introduced later) and schools, a third related institution this book considers – again from both material and symbolic perspectives – is the labour market. In 1994, whites formed only 11 per cent of the population but their average wages were more than five times higher than those of black Africans.[23] Today, unemployment rates are 40 per cent and 8 per cent among black Africans and whites respectively.[24] Yet it is also significant that numerically more black African than white people now work in high-skilled, high-income jobs.[25]

If the middle class is now predominantly black, this does not mean that race is no longer important in the world of work. Factory jobs have given way to service work, and many employers see English – especially 'white English' attained at a formerly white school – as both a 'skill' and a quality useful in screening multiple applicants. A school's former racial classification therefore indicates not just its facilities and exam results but its ability to bestow dispositions valued by employers.

Durban, the country's third largest city, is known for its subtropical climate, large port, beaches that attract tourists all year round, and, until quite recently, its large industrial economy. From 2009 to 2017 I collected archival documents, made ethnographic observations, undertook more than 500 interviews, and collected and analysed quantitative data on schools and residential areas. I studied schools in three areas of the city and families in the first two. To the south of the city is the township of **Umlazi**, built in the 1960s for black isiZulu-speaking Africans removed from central urban areas; Umlazi contains 84 public schools. The second research area is the 'rough and tough' **Bluff**, a formerly white suburb built for English and Afrikaans speakers close to the southern industrial basin; this contains ten public schools. And the third is the **upper-Berea ridge**, the heartland of 'traditional' white schools that modelled themselves on British private schools; this area is historically English-speaking and contains ten public schools. I pay

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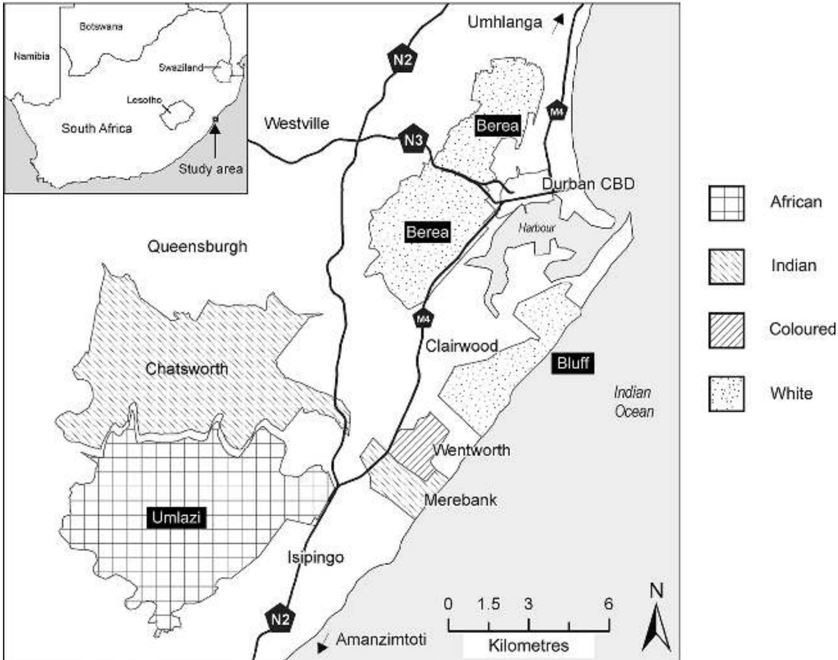

Map 1.1 Durban's racial zoned residential areas in the apartheid period.

specific attention to black children leaving Umlazi for outside schools and white Bluff residents moving into Berea's schools (see Map 1.1).

Thinking through race, class, and gender to understand schooling

This section starts with some general points and vignettes that illuminate the need to study the interaction of raced, classed, and gendered processes; makes some introductory arguments about schooling and the limits of qualifications; and then moves on to define the book's key term: 'white tone'.

Let us begin with the observation that analyses of post-apartheid South Africa too often separate the outcomes of class formation from the processes of class making. Regularly, for instance, commentators hold up the rapid growth of the 'black middle class' as evidence that class is now more important than race as an axis of inequality in society.

There are, of course, very good reasons to emphasise the deracialisation of privilege – the shift from race to class – after apartheid ended. In 1990, the year when white public schools first voted to open

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their doors to black children, funding for white learners was on average four times higher than for black African children (the ratio was nearly *18* times more in 1969–70).[26] However, today in Durban more black than white children attend formerly white schools. These institutions use their high fees to employ on average nine extra ('governing body') teachers in addition to the teachers funded by the state on the basis of student enrolment numbers. This creation of new class-based exclusions is foregrounded in landmark books titled *Elusive Equity* and *Changing Class*.[27]

But how do we explain schools' 'poaching' of white students? Is this evidence of a stubborn 'apartheid mindset', or something more? Addressing this question requires attention to whiteness, or what I call 'white tone'. This has gendered and classed components.

Revealing the significance of gender, formerly white boys' schools can now throw huge sums of money at sports scholarships or bursaries to attract desirable learners: compared with girls' schools, fees at boys' schools were 37 per cent higher in 2007 and 50 per cent higher in 2012.[28] Scholarships almost always promote 'white sports', but these do not benefit only white-identified people: Khule Nkosi, a star black rugby player from a small town in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, was given a package worth R100,000 a year to study at one formerly white school.

Schools' competition on and off the sports field also helps explain why many young white people have done quite well after apartheid ended: in Durban, the proportion of whites in high-skilled higher-income jobs increased from 60 per cent to 78 per cent from 2005 to 2014.[29] As well as offering generous sports bursaries, some prestigious Berea schools broke with the past by recruiting 'rough and tough' white students from the Bluff in order to give the school a whiter 'demographic'. Tellingly, one working-class father's first reaction to his son's 'traditional' Berea school was that it was a 'Harry Potter school' (that is, a school modelled on British private schools).

Symbolic power and schooling

The examples flagged above reveal that schools are not just institutions that bestow credentials or qualifications (terms used interchangeably in this book to denote the passing of examinations). Schools are also symbolic organisations: a learner benefits from and adds to a school's 'name'. In *The State Nobility*, Pierre Bourdieu details how elite French higher education institutions both compete for prestige and provide graduating students with dispositions and status that benefit them in the labour market.[30] This two-way process upholds what he calls 'symbolic power' – a concept that has similarities to what Antonio Gramsci calls 'hegemony'.[31]

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We consider differences in theoretical approaches later, but for now a working definition of symbolic power is that it 'actualizes and officializes visions of the world' and is 'an invisible power which can be exercised only with . . . complicity'.[32]

This attention to cultural/symbolic hierarchies helps decentre South Africa's much-studied annual matriculation ('matric') school-leaving certificate, which is taken at the end of grade 12 (the term 'matric' is still widely used, although the qualification is now called the National Senior Certificate). I show throughout the book how young people's schooling greatly affects their chances of attaining credentials. However, it is important to note that, until relatively recently (as was common in most of the industrial world), even privileged white students were not expected to pass the matriculation exam, let alone attend university; of the 860,000 white children in the schooling system in 1970, only 36,000 were in standard 10 (grade 12).[33]

Moreover, as unequal as schooling was, black people succeeded over time in gaining additional schooling qualifications. From 1967 to 1988, the number of black African children in standard 10 grew from 2,075 to over 190,000.[34] After apartheid, this expansion accelerated: more than 400,000 learners now pass the grade 12 matriculation exam every year, and the number of black university students increased from fewer than 100,000 in 1989 to nearly 700,000 in 2013.[35] Put simply, South Africa's post-1994 education system did partially open the 'doors of learning', to use the famous words of the liberation movement's Freedom Charter written in 1955.

Yet it should be remembered that the full sentence of the 1955 Freedom Charter was in fact that the 'doors of learning *and culture*' should be opened (my italics). As more people gained qualifications, and at higher levels, a matriculation pass certificate, a qualification that would have placed a person among the elite a few generations ago, became devalued to the extent that it might not even get a person an interview today. This phenomenon is sometimes put in terms of education being a 'positional good', or, in Max Weber's terms, as qualifications being akin to 'patents'.[36] Learners seek ever more qualifications to get ahead of the pack – an undergraduate degree after matriculation pass, master's after undergraduate degree, etc. A lot of ink has been spilled debating whether this credential inflation stimulates economic growth, or whether employers use educational qualifications mainly to screen numerous candidates.[37]

But, to return to questions of race, the point I wish to stress is that qualification inflation makes it more important for schools to provide distinction in other ways. What residents of Umlazi Township call 'multiracial schools' – formerly white, Indian, and Coloured schools – have not only better facilities but home-language English teachers.[38] And at the pinnacle of South Africa's public schooling system have long been,

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and remain, schools established for whites, which amount to only 7 per cent of the country's schools.[39] Most parents in a township will identify these schools as providing learners with what sociolinguists term 'white South African English', which retains high prestige in society.[40] Whereas the apartheid government succeeded in radically promoting the status of Afrikaans, English is by far the most prestigious of the country's now 11 official languages despite it being only the fifth most spoken home language (after IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, and Setswana).[41]

White tone

I develop the concept of 'white tone' in this book to provide an educational lens onto the making of racial-cultural hierarchies. The association between whiteness and positive characteristics – including civilisation, freedom, and modernity – was first highlighted by black writers including W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Steve Biko.[42] Although produced in complex ways, the prestige of whiteness has its roots in the slave trade (spanning the Indian and especially the Atlantic oceans) and European colonialism (spanning most of the world).[43] From the sixteenth century, European powers established social and geographical hierarchies based on perceived phenotypic differences including skin colour, facial features, and hair texture. Non-Europeans were positioned as inherently inferior but, increasingly over time, capable of being 'civilised'.[44]

David Goldberg defines whiteness as 'the relative privilege, profit, and power of those occupying the structural social positions of whites in a hierarchically ordered racial society'.[45] Integral to this definition is that whiteness is not identical to white people. Like the now more widely accepted term 'masculinities', the concept of whiteness aims to account for multiple 'configurations of practice' that are simultaneously embodied and institutionalised.[46] A large volume of scholarship denaturalises whiteness, for instance by showing how immigrant groups such as the Irish became 'whiter' over time.[47]

Education is intricately woven into the history of whiteness. Schools were 'one of Britain's most successful exports to the Empire', and elite institutions modelled on British private schools can be found scattered across Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia.[48] In the African continent, hundreds of churches and schools were built by foreign missionaries. These, in the words of Steve Biko, equated 'all that was valuable with whiteness'.[49]

Yet schooling is also entangled with movements for racial liberation. In the American South, W. E. B. Du Bois documents black leaders' fight to establish schools, noting that in the early nineteenth century it could be unlawful to teach a free person of colour to read and write.[50] In the 1950s and 1960s, many leaders of newly independent countries had been educated at mission schools; they helped to establish tens of thousands of new schools in postcolonial settings.

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