

## Race for Education

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the ANC government placed education at the centre of its plans to build a nonracial and more equitable society. Yet, by the 2010s a wave of student protests voiced demands for decolonised and affordable education. By following families and schools in Durban for nearly a decade, Mark Hunter sheds new light on South Africa's political transition and the global phenomenon of education marketisation. He rejects simple descriptions of the country's move from 'race to class apartheid' and reveals how 'white' phenotypic traits like skin colour retain value in the schooling system even as the multiracial middle class embraces prestigious linguistic and embodied practices the book calls 'white tone'. By illuminating the actions and choices of both white and black parents, Hunter provides a unique view on race, class, and gender in a country emerging from a notorious system of institutionalised racism.

MARK HUNTER is Associate Professor of Human Geography at the University of Toronto Scarborough. His research methods combine ethnographic, historical, and geographical techniques and his first book, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*, won the 2010 Amaury Talbot Prize and the 2010 C. Wright Mills Award.

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# Race for Education

*Gender, White Tone, and Schooling in  
South Africa*

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*and*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-48052-9 — Race for Education  
Mark Hunter  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108480529](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108480529)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781108635189

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First published 2019

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Hunter, Mark, 1971- author.

Title: Race for education : gender, white tone, and schooling in South Africa / Mark Hunter.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2019. | Series: International African library ; 60 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018040448 | ISBN 9781108480529 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781108727631 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Discrimination in education—South Africa. | Education—South Africa—History. | Educational equalization—South Africa.

Classification: LCC LC212.3.S6 H86 2019 | DDC 379.2/6096—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018040448>

ISBN 978-1-108-48052-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-72763-1 Paperback

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For Atiqa and Leila, again

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## Preface and acknowledgements

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*Race for Education* is based in Durban, a city in which I feel very much at home, although the book is influenced by politics that cross many settings. In 2009 when I began research, the media was full of stories criticising South Africa's dismal school-leaving ('matric') pass rate. In 2015, focus dramatically shifted, however, when #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall activists based at universities forcefully demanded affordable and decolonised education. Months later, 13-year-old Zulaikha Patel became a global icon of defiance when she challenged a formerly white school by refusing to cut her Afro-textured hair. As I wrapped up the book in 2017, the government announced a policy of free higher education for the poor – even though primary and secondary schools charged ever-rising fees.

My other lives in Canada and Morocco convinced me that forces shaping South Africa were not exceptional. At the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus, where I have taught for the past 12 years, student numbers have doubled, with many learners being children of first-generation immigrants to Canada. Faculty and students work hard, but rising fees mean that the majority of learners leave with large debts. Some graduates find high-paying jobs, whereas 'qualification inflation' devalues the degree for many others. Meanwhile, in 2015, aspects of Canada's colonial structuring of education were exposed when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report described the government's past policy of using residential schools to forcefully assimilate indigenous peoples as 'cultural genocide'.

The third place where I stay every year, Morocco, is a country where youth unemployment robs young people of a future, and where there has been a rapid rise of prestigious private French, and now increasingly English, schools for a middle class willing to pay to avoid public schooling.

Thus, if my privileged movements are in any way representative, the questions this book considers – an increased amount of education in the context of marketised systems and racially toned hierarchies of prestige – apply across the globe.

In researching these themes in South Africa, I need to start by thanking all the teachers and families who spoke with me, without whom there would be no book. I also owe a great debt to research assistants Sibongile Buthelezi, Lindiwe Cele, Margaret du Plessis, and Byron Louw. Michela du Sart and Jordan Raghunandan drew the maps, and Beyhan Farhadi assisted with the referencing.

In Durban, Jeff Guy's 2014 death was such a sad loss. His passion for painstaking empirical work and the region's history was unparalleled; he had an unconditional intolerance for the high-output, low-research trend in modern academia. In Durban circles, I have also long benefited from the support of David Szanton and former PhD supervisor Gillian Hart; from Glen Robbins' generosity in sharing ideas and sources; from overlapping curiosities with economist Dori Posel; and from friendships with Bill Freund and Vishnu Padayachee (since my master's degree days in Durban).

Extremely helpful readers of part or all of an early version of this book were Mike Ekers, Kira Erwin, Bill Freund, Atiqah Hachimi, Gillian Hart, Bridget Kenny, Tania Li, Thembisa Waetjen, and two anonymous readers for the press. Graduate students from my class on race and class put forward helpful suggestions, and I learned much from the collegiality of friends at Toronto's vibrant and critical Geography Departments. I am lucky to share the thriving Scarborough Department with Ahmed Allahwala, Glenn Brauen, Michelle Buckley, Sue Bunce, Mike Ekers, Steven Farber, Thembela Kepe, Ken MacDonald, John Miron, Sharlene Mollett, Rajyashree Reddy, and Andre Sorensen. Generous funding was provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.

Many South Africanists not already mentioned have invited me to present my work, commented on drafts, offered friendship, or simply talked about their own or their children's experiences of schooling. I would like to thank Richard Ballard, Debby Bonnin, Keith Breckenridge, Catherine Burns, Sharad Chari, Owen Crankshaw, Julia de Kadt, Edith Dempster, Sarah Emily Duff, Sibusisiwe Nombuso Dlamini, Marijka du Doit, Kira Erwin, Aslam Fataar, Andy Gibbs, Tim Gibbs, Meghan Healy-Clancy, Vashna Jagarnath, Peter Kallaway, Jill Kelly, Grace Khunou, Daniel Magaziner, Monique Marks, Achille Mbembe, Thenjiwe Meyiwa, Bheki ka Mncube, David Moore, Elena Moore, Rob Morrell, Nicoli Nattrass, Sarah Nuttall, Julie Parle, Sue Parnell, Richard Pithouse, Deborah Posel, Ben Roberts, Jenny Robinson, Melanie Samson, Dianne Scott, Jeremy Seekings, Nafisa Essop Sheik, Stephen Sparks, Cathy Sutherland, Lynn Thomas, Chris Webb, Samantha Willan, and Jochen Zeller.

I thank the Department of Education and DataFirst for providing access to schooling data. Archivists to acknowledge particularly are Neli Summers at Killie Campbell Africana Library, Zeeneth Ishmail at

Independent Newspapers, Rishi Singh and Unnay Narrine at the Durban Archives, and Eshara Singh at Bessie Head Library.

At the International African Institute, Stephanie Kitchen has been the consummate professional, a strong and wise supporter of African scholarship. Harri Englund provided helpful and positive feedback. At Cambridge University Press, I am grateful for the skilled presence of Maria Marsh, Cassi Roberts, and Abigail Walkington. Judith Forshaw copyedited the book with patience and great expertise. Based in Toronto, Celia Braves is a justly celebrated indexer. I thank artist Lexi Bella as well as Zulaikha Patel and her mother for permission to use the front cover image.

My wife, Atiqa Hachimi, an Arabic sociolinguist, has long educated me about language, a big theme in this book, and we also co-wrote an article on telephone call centres. Atiqa is my best friend and number one supporter, and her love took me through the tough times of research and writing. At the centre of my world too, and an accomplice in this journey through schooling, is Leila, our now ten-year-old daughter. In fact, since I started research on this book, she has studied in eight different schools in Canada, Morocco, and South Africa, always embracing them with a passion to learn and to make new friends. Leila, you know this: we love you and are proud of you.