

## 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*



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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.

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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.