

**The Remaking of Social-Spatial Hierarchies: Educational Choice and a South
African City**

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Abstract

Infused by the turn to neoliberalism in the 1980s, many Western countries created a quasi-market in education driven by parents' greater ability to choose schools. The resultant literature on schooling choice has found that middle-class children are the main beneficiaries of these changes. To date, one feature of this scholarship, like much research on the geographies of education, is that it is almost wholly centered on the 'global North.' Yet the case of South Africa draws attention to the raced as well as classed politics of schoolchildren's mobility: its cities and schools were starkly divided by racial segregation, and race drastically shapes patterns of employment/unemployment and changes in family structure. Specifically, the article argues that desegregation in the 1990s unleashed a huge rise of mobility for schooling that conceptually must be situated at the intersection of three key processes: *guardian's spatial strategies*, *schooling hierarchicization*, and *displacement*. The paper draws on archival sources, life histories of guardians/parents and pupils, and interviews with schoolteachers, and argues that competition by parents for 'good' schools and between schools for 'good' students—that is the dialectic between the strategies of parents and the strategies of schools—is central to the remaking of urban areas and socio-spatial hierarchies.

Key Words: South Africa; postcolonial urban studies; education; class formation; family

The Remaking of Social-Spatial Hierarchies: Educational Choice and a South African City

1.1. Introduction

‘The colonial world is a compartmentalized world’ containing ‘schools for “natives” and schools for Europeans.’ Franz Fanon wrote this in 1961 [1963: 3] and famously warned of post-independence class divisions if a national bourgeoisie ‘mimics the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects...’ (153). In South Africa, the African continent’s last state to win democracy, I show how race, class, and geography are actively remaking, and being remade by, the enormous movement of children for schooling: every weekday morning, in every South African town, scores of taxis, buses, and cars, transport children, black and white, to attend non-local schools. I argue that this competition by guardians/parents for ‘good’ schools and between schools for ‘good’ students—that is the dialectic between the strategies of parents and the strategies of schools —is central to the remaking of urban areas and socio-spatial hierarchies.

There is now a rich literature detailing how from the 1980s ‘parental choice’ emerged as a central plank of public educational reforms (see Andre-Bechely 2007; Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1995; Butler and Hamnett 2007; Butler and Robson 2003; Butler and van Zanten 2007; Lipman 2011; Ravitch 2010; Reay 2008; Thrupp 2007). If neo-liberal ideology underpinned the belief that parents’ greater ability to choose schools would improve standards, the emphasis on accountability and tests appealed to both the left and right (Ravitch 2010; Reay 2008). One feature of this scholarship, like much work in the geographies of education sub-field, is that it is almost wholly centered on the ‘global North’ (see Holloway et. al. 2010; Holloway and Jöns 2012; for overviews of geography of education see Thiem 2009; Holloway and Jöns 2012).

While it is not possible to take South Africa, or for that matter any other country, as indicative of the ‘global South,’ decentering the ‘north’ as the normative site of the urban experience can enrich the educational choice literature (cf. Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Robinson 2006; Parnell and Robinson 2012). Themes considered here but not emphasized in the existing geographies of education literature include racial segregation rooted in colonialism, schooling expansion amid unemployment/underemployment, significant changes in family structure, and the strategies of schools as they navigate desegregation; conceptually these lead me to understand the massive rise of mobility for schooling in South Africa as situated at the intersection of three processes: *guardians’ spatial strategies, schooling hierarchicization, and displacement.*¹

In both the UK and US, countries at the knife-edge of neoliberal reforms, research found that a quasi-market in education most benefitted middle-class parents since they were better-able than working-class parents to utilize non-local schools (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1995; Lipman 2011; Ravitch 2010; Reay 2008). More recent work has emphasized that parents’ residence in a particular catchment area remains important to a child’s chance of admission to a local school (Hamnett and Butler 2011). South African parents with the means, like those elsewhere, developed sophisticated *spatial strategies* to place their children in ‘good’ schools but they did so in a very different context. Brutal laws enforcing racial segregation meant that ‘black’ people were forcibly located next to underfunded ‘black’ schools and ‘whites’ enjoyed well-resourced local schools.² When desegregation disturbed these racial-spatial hierarchies, parents faced dilemmas rooted in this history: What type of children are accessing *our* local schools? Should we move house to access better schools or try to get our child admitted to a non-local school?

Critical educational work has long argued that public schooling creates and maintains social hierarchies by enabling differentiated access to the labour market (e.g. Bourdieu and

Passeron 1977). The labour market is, of course, always changing and in London Butler and Robson (2003) found that the insecurity of modern capitalism intensified the middle-classes' jockeying over schooling. Whether or not this increased employment insecurity is an example of how the 'global north appears to be "evolving" southward,' as Comaroff and Comaroff (2011) recently suggest, it is certainly the case that the mismatch between rising education levels and limited employment is quite common in the 'global South': in South Africa 62% of the population now have more years of schooling than their parents (Girdwood and Leibbrandt 2009: 5) but more than 40% of the working-age population is unemployed (Seekings and Natrass 2005: 45). Showing graphically a similar development in India, Jeffrey's et. al. (2008) have captured the complex interaction between the agrarian economy, education, and the labor market in the world's most populous democracy. Here, educational qualifications are highly sought-after but sometimes insufficient gatekeepers to limited formal work: high unemployment/underemployment and at times corrupt hiring practices can result in 'degrees without freedom' (see also Jeffrey 2010).³

The household is an understudied sphere in educational geographies (Holloway et al. 2010) and urban studies (Buzar, Ogden, and Hall 2005), but is a final theme necessary to understand South African guardian's *spatial strategies* (for brevity I don't differentiate in detail between the family, household, and kinship). Probably the most influential writer on education in the last 30 years, Pierre Bourdieu, locates the family at the center of his theory of social reproduction. Bourdieu famously argued that nuclear families endow children with dispositions such as language skills and a sense of entitlement (in a 'habitus') that enable or disable them in navigating educational institutions (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984).⁴ There is now an abundant educational literature influenced by Bourdieu, including Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz's

(1995) landmark study on ‘circuits of schooling’ that became a focal point for discussions on schoolchildren’s mobility. Like other studies, however, Ball, Bowe, and Gerwitz separate families first by social class before exploring parents’ different strategies toward scholar mobility. Despite considerable changes in family structure across the world, it is rare to find educational studies that forefront the family’s dynamic and contested nature, for instance by considering the strategies of single-mothers (though see Reay 1998). One can note that the neglect of the household in social theory (with the exception of feminist theory) extends much wider: over the last thirty years, for instance, a vibrant literature on population and biopolitics, centered on the work of Michel Foucault, has had an enormous impact on the social sciences and yet has tended to avoid ‘direct engagement with the study of population size, structure, and rates of change, that is, with the materiality of population, and not only the discourses about it’ (Johnson-Hanks 2008: 308).

Yet South Africa, and the region, has witnessed seismic changes to the family, perhaps best summarised by the halving of marriage rates over the last fifty years among black ‘Africans’ (Hunter 2010a). And it is because of this that I show the absolute centrality of women (mothers, grandmothers, and aunts) to children’s mobility and schooling in Durban’s township of Umlazi. A literature centered on the global South has in fact long given priority to understanding the family’s/household’s complex spatialized forms. Indeed, as an ethnologist of Algeria, Bourdieu’s (1977) early work fronted kinship and gender (on schooling and the household in Lesotho see Ansell 2008; on urban kinship relations in Africa see Simone 2004). Yet, as indicated above, not only the changing structure of families but its starkly racialized nature helps to explain high levels of contemporary schoolchildren’s mobility. The legacy left by the apartheid state’s promotion of ‘ethnic’ African languages as the medium of instruction means that even the most

successful black business or political leaders cannot pass to their children a prestigious English accent; to access this important form of ‘symbolic power’ (Bourdieu 1991) usually requires that a child studies at a former-white school.

The spatial strategies of guardians, noted above, operate in a dialectical relationship with what I call processes of *schooling hierarcization* and, closely related, *displacement*. The world over, principals seek to improve the reputation of their schools. But democracy and desegregation in South Africa sparked intense new competition between schools that were given added power over admissions and the setting and administering of fees—in part as a way to end the over-subsidy of historically-white schools. South Africanists have demonstrated that high status former-white schools prefer to admit the children of higher-income black parents (Bray et al. 2010; Chisholm 2004; Dolby 2001; Lemon 2004; Soudien 2012). Yet other research shows that former white-schools have tended to discriminate against black students either at the point of admissions or by seeking to ‘assimilate’ them into a Euro-centric pedagogy (Battersby 2004; Soudien 2012). In contributing to this literature, my focus on both parents’ and schools’ strategies shows how they come together to drive scholar mobility and, in turn, work through and rework apartheid’s social-spatial hierarchies. There is a musical-chairs like movement of children today whereby if one child exits a school, another student can fill its place. And because schools themselves operate in a semi-privatized system they can compete intensely to move up (or not down) the schooling hierarchy by recruiting/excluding certain students in an effort to boost finances, exam results, and success in sports. This project’s research method, outlined below, is influenced by this effort to capture guardians’ and schools’ strategies and how they come together.

1.2. Method

The paper gives primary attention to three parts of Durban: Umlazi, a half million strong ‘African’ township in south Durban; the Bluff, a former ‘white’ suburb in south Durban that, although working/lower-middle class in South African terms, enjoyed extremely well-funded schools in the apartheid era; and, to a lesser extent, the Berea, a historically middle-class white neighborhood located near central Durban and hosting some of the city’s most prestigious schools. This paper draws on 151 interviews with parents in Umlazi, 79 with parents from the Bluff, and 94 with schools across Durban; some insights were also gained from the authors’ own child attending pre-schools in Durban for a total of 14 months (in the Bluff and Berea). The research unfolded in the following ways. For the first two research visits (2009, 2010) I undertook initial interviews with schools and parents that helped me to identify important patterns and themes; in the third year (2011) I interviewed workers and managers involved with telephone call centers because these new jobs capture well the importance of English-medium schooling to the modern service economy; in the fourth year (2012-13)—from which most of the data I discuss here derives—I stayed in Durban for 9 months, and undertook a survey, interviews, and ethnographic observations mainly in south Durban. It was clear from initial research that schools’ catchment areas had increased markedly and that specific ‘circuits of schooling’ (Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz 1995) had emerged in sub-regions of the city. I chose to focus on south Durban because it has excellent road and railway infrastructure that connects residents and allows easy access from this area to central Durban. I give attention to Umlazi because it is the second largest township in the country and contains some of the historically poorest funded schools in the city. I included the Bluff, a former-white suburb in south Durban, since former-white schools (though representing only a small minority of total schools) play a

key role in opening doors to the most desired and well-paid jobs. This is because of their generally excellent examination results and ability to bestow other advantages notably a prestigious ‘white’ English accent and advantageous social networks.

The household survey is not considered in detail in this paper, although it preceded and provided context for the qualitative interviews. It was undertaken with 152 households in Umlazi and 73 in the Bluff and gathering information on household composition, the educational histories of members, the contribution of family members to schooling costs, the subjective ranking of schools, and the willingness of a household member to be revisited for a more detailed qualitative interview. I conducted all of the 225 qualitative household interviews myself, accompanied by a Research Assistant in Umlazi (where a white man arriving alone might have led to suspicion) but not at the Bluff, a still predominantly white area. Interviews in Umlazi were conducted in *isiZulu*, recorded, and transcribed in *isiZulu* by a research assistant, but translated into English and interpreted by the author. In Umlazi we chose to concentrate research on an area close to where my research assistant lived. The familiarity of my research assistant (a married lady in her late 30s) with local residents, and the high unemployment rate, ensured that we had an almost 100% participation rate. Such a strategy also allowed me to spend a considerable amount of time in a single neighborhood (an area that my previous research suggests is fairly typical to Umlazi) and learn informally about connections between neighbors, for instance through kinship.

Although the author and his family lived in the Bluff for around 7 months of this project, in many ways it was a harder area to study. Household sizes were smaller and members are more likely to be working; in contrast to Umlazi many interviews were arranged in the evenings or on the weekends. Participants were recruited from across the Bluff by a local Research Assistant (a

married white lady in her 60s) through word of mouth, snowball sampling, and via an information leaflet. Taped conversations, all undertaken in English, were transcribed by my research assistant. I consider only white informants here, though I also spoke with a smaller number of African, coloured, and Indian residents who had moved into the Bluff. In both areas, to provide some compensation for household participants' time, a small 'thank you' monetary gift was given. In respect of the 94 schools with whom I spoke alone, these were mostly located in the south and central Durban area, and ranged from pre-primary to primary and secondary schools. At most times conversations took place with the Principal or her/his deputy, and over half of these were recorded. Most schools were very open about their strategies on fees and admissions, but even when they were not they were almost always keen to discuss the strategies of their competitor schools, especially when these were perceived to be unfair. I changed the name of all interviewees and protected the security of data in accordance with ethics approval granted by the University of Toronto; in general it can be noted that questions on education was not seen to be particularly invasive. Finally, I also spent considerable time reviewing archival material. This included records on the planning and administration of Umlazi township held in the National and Durban archive repositories, material on education held in Killie Campbell Africana library, and civil court cases discussing family issues held in the Durban Archive. I also read issues of Durban's daily newspaper, the Natal Mercury, from 1962 to the present (at least one complete month every year), and virtually all issues from 1991 to 1999 (after 2000 issues are searchable online). One of the most useful sources on south Durban schools former-white schools is the free local weekly newspaper the Southlands Sun (formerly Pigeon Post), and I looked at every issue from 1975 to 2001.

It should be noted that the research method prioritized the study of guardians and not children, although Aslam Fataar's work (e.g. 2010) shows particularly richly the importance of children's subjectivities to their movement for schooling. In this paper, I focus on former-white boys' schools that tend to compete (especially through sports) with the greatest intensity. The strong influence of the private English educational system on South African schooling, especially in the Province of Natal, yielded a large number of single-sex schools (Morrell 2001). Space restrictions also limit me from considering private schools (which still account for only around 5% of the student body) although similarities between these and some semi-privatized public schools are growing. This paper gives attention to Umlazi and the Bluff but it is important to note that many children travel from Umlazi to schools in-between these two nodes, especially to the former 'Indian' and 'coloured' areas of Merebank and Wentworth. Although I conducted 40 interviews with schools and parents in these areas I do not discuss them here (see the work of Sharad Chari, for instance Chari 2006, for detailed analyses of differences between these two areas).

Finally, south Durban's geography must be considered in relation to other parts of the city. Suburbanization and the growing importance of service work, two of the most significant changes over the last 30 years, shaped the development of what we might cautiously call 'edge-cities'—a name coined in the U.S. to describe self-contained suburban areas (see Freund 2007: 190-192 on Durban's 'edge city'; for somewhat similar 'post-Fordist' spatial changes in Johannesburg see Crankshaw 2008). Thus Durban has seen a mushrooming of houses and businesses to its west (Westville/Hillcrest/Kloof) and north (Durban North/Umhlanga/La Lucia). These 'edge cities,' which vary considerably in housing stock, boast excellent services and (increasingly private) schools. Disproportionately white, they are nonetheless more racially

mixed than their U.S. counterparts and rarely beyond daily travelling distance from former black areas. While many children in Durban's 'edge cities' attend local schools, research on the high-income Sandton area in Johannesburg (Bell and McKay 2011), anecdotal accounts in Durban, and research on children's mobility in other South African cities, suggests that high levels of schoolchildren's mobility do take place in these areas.

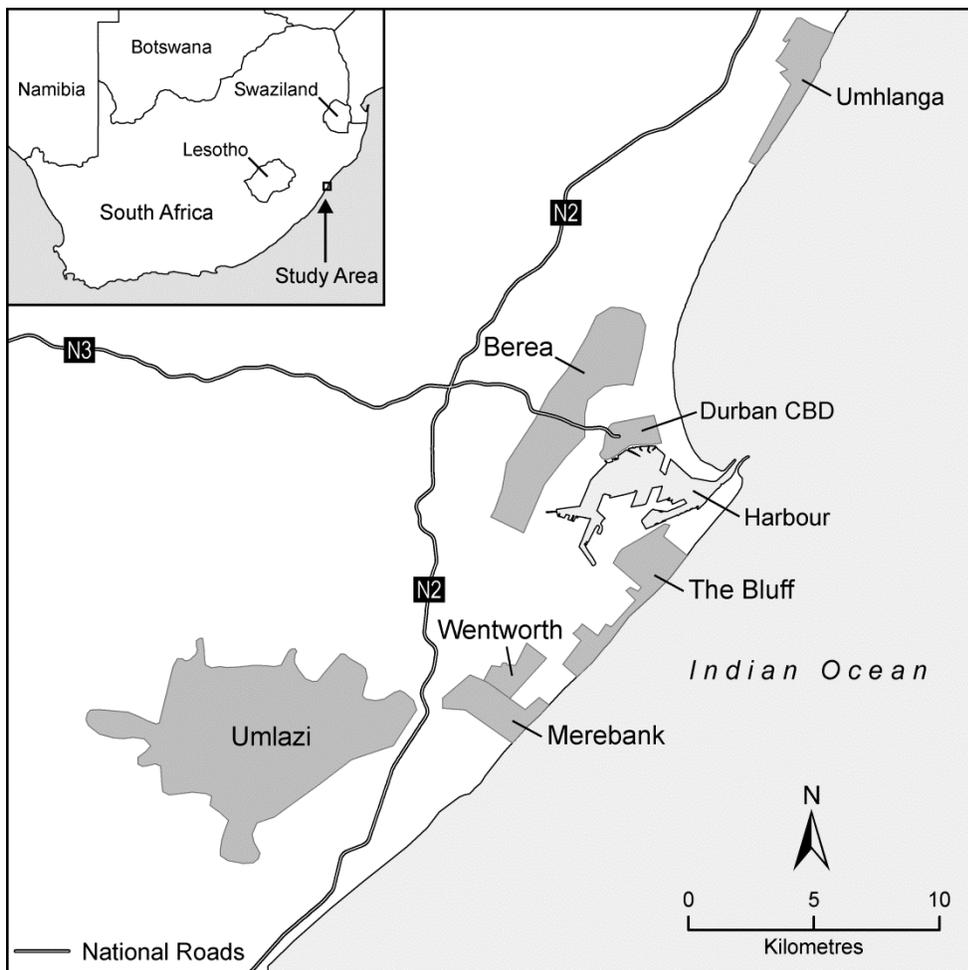


Figure 1: Durban, South Africa

1.3. Social and Institutional Background to Schooling Mobility in South Africa

Rich in gold and diamonds, modern day South Africa attracted a relatively large white settler community that, utilizing black labor robbed of its land, oversaw the growth of the largest industrial economy in the continent. Apartheid refers specifically to the post-1948 period when the National Party, elected in that year, embarked on a draconian social engineering project that rigidly segregated urban areas and sought to devolve power to ‘traditional’ leaders in rural ethnic ‘homelands.’ In the 1950s and 60s, Durban’s whites were largely untouched by ‘Group Areas’ zoning, remaining located in central and nearby suburbs, including the fast-growing Bluff. Africans who, through birth or employment, were allowed to live in the city—and thousands were removed to rural ‘homelands’—were rehoused in townships, the biggest of which became Umlazi, located 20 KM to the south of the city. Coloureds (very broadly those of ‘mixed-race’) and Indians (mostly descendants of indentured laborers employed in Natal’s sugar industry) were located in south Durban at Wentworth and Merebank or Chatsworth. Schooling resources followed this racial hierarchy. Africans learnt in overcrowded schools and were taught by underpaid and under-qualified teachers; at the other end of the educational spectrum, whites benefited from a generous education system, enjoying small class sizes, well-equipped science labs, and well-paid teachers. Indian and coloured education was funded somewhere in-between these two poles (for overviews on apartheid education see Hyslop 1999; Kallaway 2002). Today, the eThekweni Municipality that incorporates Durban has the following racial demography: 63% African, 22% Indian, 11% white, and 3% coloured.

The apartheid era (1948-1994) represented an extraordinary experiment in racial segregation but in reality it faced crisis for the much of the second half of its existence. In

economic terms the 1960s was a booming decade, but the 1970s ushered in increasingly militant anti-apartheid protests, unionization, school boycotts, as well as a harsh recession. In 1986, urban influx controls were completely abandoned and in 1991 the Group Areas Act was repealed. As the country tottered on the edge of civil war, white capital, the ruling National Party, and black political leaders agreed a compromise whereby all citizens won political rights but within a free-market economy that preserved private property (Marais 2001). Reforms to education policy in the early 1990s echoed these wider changes. Under pressure to cut public spending and end racial discrimination, the flailing apartheid government encouraged white schools to desegregate, introduce fees, and become more autonomous (Lemon 2004). The ANC-led government, elected in 1994, had the unenviable task of integrating 15 separate education bureaucracies, reforming a racist curriculum, and redistributing state expenditure. In doing so, it continued the general thrust of late-apartheid reforms—the semi-privatization of education—but added a rights-based and redistributive agenda: key changes were that no child could be excluded from her school (once admitted) for financial reasons and that greater funds would be given to the poorest schools so that they did not have to charge fees (for overviews, see Bray et. al. 2010; Chisholm 2004; Lemon 1994). Very little was said in official documents about ‘zoning’ and so the longstanding practice of ‘soft-zoning’ was in effect not disturbed. In reality, the expectation was that former-white schools would take local pupils, but some black students who lived out of area would also be admitted. In the long term, it was thought, schools would remain predominantly local but the local community would become more racially diverse. Previously underfunded black schools would, in turn, improve once greater public investment overturned the apartheid legacy.

In reality, the huge rise of daily-travelling for schools in South Africa is demonstrated by qualitative studies in the country’s three largest cities (for Cape Town see Fataar 2010; for

Johannesburg see Bell and McKay 2011; for Durban see Hunter 2010b). Moreover, a recent survey found that only 18% of learners in Johannesburg's Soweto Township attend their nearest school (De Kadt et. al. forthcoming). Given that strict racial segregation existed in public schools and residential areas until the early 1990s, another indicator of schoolchildren's increased movement is the difference between the level of racial mixing in residential areas and in their schools. In Europe studies have tended to find greater levels of racial mixing in a schools' catchment area than in the school itself—this might happen for instance when white parents gentrify a racially mixed area but then send their children to non-local private schools (for Denmark see Rangvid 2007, and the U.K. Burgess, Wilson and Lupton 2005). By contrast, a decade after schools and housing began to desegregate in the former-white Bluff suburb considered below, 72% percent of the residential population remained 'white' (a figure that would be higher were it not for live-in 'African' domestic workers) but only 33% of pupils in secondary schools were white.⁵

2. Parents' spatial strategies: why do white and black guardians move children and not move house?

By the early 1990s, racial desegregation in residential areas, schools, and the labor market marked a new era in South African history. Guardians anxious about their children's futures could adopt essentially two spatial strategies to access a 'good' school: either live close to one or ensure that their child travels to one. Since schools were historically built for different 'races,' and funded accordingly, the first strategy raises questions about the extent that black residents have bought or rented accommodation in formally white (or Indian or coloured) areas of the city.

Some scholars have argued that there has been a relatively ‘slow pace of residential desegregation’ in South African cities, pointing to the continuation of massive virtually all-black townships (Christopher 2005). Schensul and Heller (2011) studying Durban, however, find that some parts of the city desegregated quite quickly. Both perspectives, which are not incompatible but rely on different use of census statistics, leave open a central question: why did more residential desegregation not take place? This is especially intriguing since, as Owen Crankshaw (1997) and Seekings and Natrass (2005) chart so well, a prospective African middle-class grew significantly from the 1970s but was restricted spatially to living in townships. After 1994, the end of the employment color bar and state support for Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) contributed to the rapid growth of a black middle-class.

Common explanations for the limited pace of residential desegregation include the improvements made to housing, infrastructure and services in former black areas, the considerable gap in house prices between townships and suburbs, and potential buyers’ difficulty in securing credit (see Selzer and Heller, 2010 for a discussion on Johannesburg). But an additional reason, with which I begin, is that areas with previously well-funded schools—and here I examine the Bluff—faced an exodus of children to historically higher-classed schools. This left a lot of empty desks to be filled by students whose parents did not have to live locally to secure admission. A second reason is the particular structure of households common to townships that limits individuals’ ability to move up the housing ladder.

2.1. Bluff Children: Travelling to a higher class white area for schooling

Movement 1: From working/lower-middle to upper-middle class white suburbs: Piet Jacobs lives in the Bluff but travels daily to attend a boys' school at the historically higher-income Berea. His father, Mr. Jacobs, now in his 50s, attended the local Afrikaans secondary school on the Bluff and is an administrator for a local company. Mrs. Jacobs, Piet's mother, grew up not far away in south Durban and works as a Personal Assistant in a local firm. Mr. Jacobs tells a familiar story. In the early days of desegregation, white Bluff parents were committed to local schools but over time standards in these schools dropped. Eventually their two sons were welcomed into a primary school located 10 KM away at the Berea; the fees are higher but they said that the school had excellent academic and sporting standards. The Jacobs family, with a joint income and two cars, has the resources and means to transport their children daily to the Berea.

Scholars in the apartheid era did not give much attention to class divisions among white South Africans, but they are key to explaining why Piet Jacobs and other white children now travel daily to non-local schools. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth century the most prestigious place to live and school in Durban was the Berea ridge, located just inland from the CBD. Some of the country's oldest and most prestigious schools are located in this suburb. The Bluff, in contrast, gained an identity as a white working class suburb—as the saying goes 'rough and tough and from the Bluff'—after the 1950 Group Areas removed a large number of Indian, African and coloured residents (especially the former), and rapid industrial and port expansion took place south of the CBD. The political influence wielded by Afrikaners in the post-1948 apartheid period ensured that many Afrikaans speakers found work and subsidized housing at the Bluff through the state-owned Railways and Harbours Company. Separate Afrikaans and English schools were built, many in the 1960s, as part of a national strategy to prevent Afrikaans becoming subsumed to English—the historical language of business and power in the country.

This spatial ordering of Durban's white society means that the core of Bluff families are today working/lower-middle class—though some very wealthy residents live in sea-facing houses and some quite poor residents live in flats or former Railway houses. In 1991, as elsewhere in South Africa, parents were required to vote on whether their schools would admit black pupils. To stoke the 'No' vote, a group of Bluff parents formed the 'Own Schools Association' that demanded 'the maintenance of white schools for white children.'⁶ But despite the Bluff being one of Durban's most conservative suburbs, nearly 90% of parents did vote in favor of integration. This resounding 'yes' vote reflected a feeling that desegregation was inevitable and should be proactively managed as well as concerns, common across the country, at the dropping number of white people of school-going age. To accommodate parents' limited incomes, school fees on the Bluff were generally set at lower rates than in richer suburbs like the Berea.

For black parents living nearby—in Merebank, Wentworth, and Umlazi—Bluff schools offered three key attractions in comparison with other former-white schools: they were not in such demand as the more prestigious Berea schools, had relatively low fees, and were located within easy travelling distance. The latter resulted from the city's historical classed-raced cartography, whereby working-class white areas were generally located closest to black areas. Though it is important to remember that Bluff parents overwhelmingly voted to desegregate their schools, over time many developed a sense that local schools had 'gone black' and declined in standards. Beginning at the secondary school level, parents with the means like the Jacobs moved their children to Berea schools: importantly, this led to a widening gap in fees and thus facilities, class sizes, and ultimately exam results between Berea and Bluff schools, further propelling this movement for those with the means. Today, parents can pay around R30 000 to

school their child at a Berea boy's secondary schools but only half that at the Bluff. And the two Berea boys schools have maintained an almost 100% matriculation pass rate whereas this fell below 90% in recent years at the two Bluff secondary schools that admit boys (data taken from schoolmaps.co.za). This move to Berea for schooling included Afrikaans-speaking parents who largely abandoned the historically Afrikaans schools in favor of English medium schools or the one Afrikaans medium school located on the Berea.

As I describe later, crucially it was rarely necessary for white Bluff parents—at least those with a demonstrable ability to pay fees—to buy a house in the Berea to gain admittance into one of its schools. And most families have the capacity to organize and finance out-of-area schooling because of their likelihood that both parents are working, their historically privileged access to the labor market and (sometimes subsidized) housing, and their ability to use existing assets for income generation (e.g. home and/or family businesses). In respect of household labor, it should also be noted that black female domestic workers, who themselves often try and place their children in local Bluff schools, play a critical role in meeting a 'care deficit' created by families' need to work longer hours to fund schooling or drive children to and from schools (public transport is widely seen as too dangerous today). Indeed, whites who attend local schools on the Bluff tend to have lower incomes than those who send their children out-of-area. Single mothers in particular face three challenges that make out-of-area schooling difficult: a sole income, practical difficulties with transporting their child, and the preference that many Berea schools give to children from dual-income families.

2.2. Umlazi children moving to 'multiracial' schools

While, on the face of it, Umlazi township and the Bluff are a world apart, Umlazi parents and guardians with resources face similar dilemmas, namely whether to move home, support local schools, or find ways for their children to travel to better schools.

Movement 2: Moving from Umlazi township to attend a ‘multiracial’ school: From a young age, Thembeke Sithole, now 20, was sent to school in the former coloured area of Wentworth. Her mother is a nurse, and her late father was a policeman. Thembeke’s parents favored a ‘multiracial’ school mainly because it had native English-speaking teachers; today her English is fluent and her schooling enabled her to enrol in the distance learning university. She has no children, but her unmarried brother has a young son who lives in the family house. Thembeke says that her mother takes primary responsibility for this child.

For Umlazi residents like the Sitholes, schools outside Umlazi, or as they are colloquially called ‘multiracial schools,’ offer better facilities and smaller classes than township schools. Yet the most commonly-stated benefit of these schools is that their pupils learn to speak fluent English. This is a vital attribute in an increasingly service-orientated economy and one rarely passed on by parents schooled under ‘Bantu Education’ (see Hunter and Hachimi 2012). In fact, the term ‘multiracial’ signals not so much the social make-up of schools—some multiracial schools have nearly all African students today—but the fact that most teachers’ native language is English. Some black children access these schools when their parents buy or rent accommodation in the suburbs. Discussing Johannesburg’s Soweto township, Selzer and Heller (2010) found a ‘dramatic outmigration of professionals’ into former white areas. In Durban, comparable movements have taken place among higher-income groups as seen in the ‘greying’ of parts of the CBD from the mid-1980s (Maharaj and Mpungose 1994) and later accounts of desegregation in the prestigious Berea area, especially in cheaper flats (Schensul and Heller 2011). While the posh

northern or western suburbs are mainly affordable to the highest paid professions such as doctors or lawyers, the Bluff is one area where Umlazi families can access affordable family housing. But much more common than parents moving out of Umlazi is that their children travel to outside schools.

No attempt is made here to consider all the varied family arrangements that enable schoolchildren to travel from Umlazi to ‘multiracial’ schools. Sometimes a child’s father or grandfather pays for this schooling, and in other cases the mother might work in a new service job (on the expansion of the ‘middle middle class’ in Soweto township see Selzer and Heller 2010). But it is the frequency with which I encountered women like Thembeke’s mother, a nurse who supported not only her own child but her grandchild, that encourages me to give attention to three social features that illuminate why families often do not move out of Umlazi but still send their children to ‘multiracial’ schools: 1) the difficulty of making liquid the value of the ‘family house’; 2) the priority that professional women, especially female teachers or nurses, give to schooling; 3) the fact that high unemployment and low marriage rates mean that most children live only with their mother but do so in large extended families. We need to probe the gendered history of the township and families to understand these dynamics.

The feminization (or de-masculinization) of housing and the labor market

Umlazi’s 20 000 four-roomed houses were built in the 1960s as modern homes for ‘African’ men and their families. This ambitious project reflected the view that the stabilization of the black working class required the rehabilitation of the African family (Posel 2006). Yet a significant minority of working women did access Umlazi’s houses as primary beneficiaries.⁷ Some of these women, as well as those who inherited houses from their husbands, are still alive;

as a result of men's earlier deaths roughly twice as many women as men over the age of 65 are now living in Umlazi. This longstanding presence of women-led households played a key role in legitimizing daughters' and granddaughters' demand that the township house should not be inherited by a son or uncle (a claim with some support in law) but by the family as a whole. The *isiZulu* name given to township houses ('*ikhaya*') and its English translation ('the family house') came to signal a moral economy whereby close relatives of the first owner have shared rights to its use. But the flip side of an arrangement that gives women some security is that the 'family house' can rarely be sold, even though it can fetch between 100 000 and 400 000 Rand (UK pounds 7 000 to 28 000). This is because to do so would require all close family members to agree to move out—a scenario that is unlikely because of unemployment and low marriage rates (however, see Chipkin 2012 on those who do move to middle class suburbs to avoid family obligations).

If housing became feminized (or less masculinized) over the course of the twentieth century, women came to play an increased role in household finances. For all but a few African women, teaching or nursing represented the most prestigious available work in the apartheid era. These employment opportunities increased significantly from the 1970s as industry demanded a more educated and healthy workforce and the central state sought to legitimate what it hoped would eventually become ten independent ethnic 'homelands' (Crankshaw 1997; Hyslop 1999; Seekings and Natrass 2005). Together with some men who also attained better-paying work at this time—as civil servants, businesspersons, and semi-skilled industrial workers—these women came to form an aspiring middle-class in South African townships.

Unemployment and Reductions in Marriage

Yet although the turbulent 1970s saw the advancement of some, an unrelenting rise in unemployment means that today more than 50% of young people in Umlazi are without formal work. One painful consequence of chronic unemployment for households is that young men became increasingly unable to pay *ilobolo* (bridewealth) and finance the costs of establishing a new house; linked, fewer than half as many black Africans are in wedlock today compared to the 1960s (Hunter 2010a). Marriage—or at least men’s demonstrated commitment to the process of marriage in the form of *ilobolo* payments—is usually necessary to legitimize co-habitation, and when this occurs children do live with both parents. As in the case of Thembeke’s family, outlined above, some children stay with their father’s families—a situation enabled by customary law—albeit with their grandmothers often taking the primary responsibility for schooling. Most children, however, live with their mothers and extended families in shared ‘family houses.’ This, and the fact that women play a key role in domestic finances, means that intergenerational social mobility can rest on women’s ability to fund a schoolchild’s out-of-area schooling. This typically involves the cost of school fees and transport such as buses, trains or taxis (either ‘malume’ [lit. uncle] taxis for young children or 16-seater public taxis for secondary school children).

3. Schooling hierarchization: competing for the right students

If some parents’ strategies are driving schooling mobility, this is magnified by the priority many schools give to selecting and retaining the right students.

3.1. Hierarchies within Umlazi’s schools

Movement 3: Moving within Umlazi for a better school. When she was young, Nonhlanhla, now in her early 20s, attended a pre-school in the former coloured township of Wentworth. She returned to Umlazi, however, to school in her nearest primary school, and then passed an exam to attend one of Umlazi's best performing secondary schools. Her father is a Principal of another Umlazi school. Although her family had the resources to continue her 'multiracial' schooling, her father was concerned that she might lose competence in *isiZulu* and, related, lose 'respect.' Sending a child to a 'multiracial' primary school and then a local secondary school can be seen as getting the best of both worlds. After doing well at school, she now attends university. She is unmarried but sends her 4-year-old child to the same pre-school she attended in Wentworth, the former coloured area.

As Nonhlanhla's case suggests, many children travel within Umlazi to attend better schools, especially at the secondary school level. Matriculation (final year) pass rates, which vary from 40% to 100%, build or destroy the reputation of township secondary schools. This hierarchy became very evident in the Umlazi survey we conducted: 60% of the 125 respondents chose a mere three out of the total of 29 Umlazi secondary schools as the 'top' township school. In some instances, Umlazi's best schools can be preferred to outside ('multiracial') institutions that are more costly and, especially in the case of 'white' schools, can be derided for producing 'coconuts' (children who are black on the outside and white on the inside) (see Rudwick 2008). However, when children attend schools outside and inside the township, the primary school level is usually preferred for 'multiracial' education. This is because a multiracial primary school allows early exposure to first-language English teachers and keeps the door open to multiracial secondary schools. In contrast, students are rarely admitted into multiracial secondary schools if they are schooled in township primary schools.

A key tenet of Bantu Education was that most Africans should be educated only at primary school level. It was only when this policy was relaxed in the 1970s and 1980s that most

secondary schools were built in Umlazi. From the 1990s, children's mobility for schools within Umlazi increased for a number of reasons: some children left local schools to attend 'multiracial' schools, parents placed greater emphasis on education at a time of democracy and labor market desegregation, and schools themselves gave greater attention to selection. Most Umlazi schools charge fees that range between 100 and 300 Rand a year (UK pounds 7 – 20), with a few nearer R1 000. Unlike former-white schools, which can employ a large number of fee-funded ('governing body') teachers and charge up to R30 000, in Umlazi the relatively low fees do not make it possible for schools to differentiate themselves significantly in terms of class sizes or facilities. Interviews with teachers and parents suggest that more important in driving township schooling mobility are two mechanisms for selecting students that are followed by the most successful secondary schools desperate to retain high pass rates. The first is an entrance exam (which is contrary to legislation) and the second is what one Principal called a pyramid system, whereby a large number of students are admitted at lower grades and the weakest students leave before the final matriculation exam. Some remarkably committed Principals and teachers overcome poor facilities to foster excellent results in Umlazi's most prestigious schools. But weaker students are also excluded from these schools and study in (and help to create) worse performing schools, or exit the schooling system altogether (an astonishing 50% of children leave South Africa's schools in the final three years).

3.2. Hierarchies within former-white schools

Movement 4: Winning a sporting bursary to enhance the prestige of a school. Jonathan Venter, 17, lives on the Bluff but won a prestigious sporting bursary to attend one of Berea's schools. His father is an engineer in a local factory, and his mother runs a business from home. Many school bursaries are for rugby, an enormously popular

sport among whites, but Jonathan's was for hockey and surfing. His father explains how two Berea secondary schools tried to lure him: 'If you have your provincial or [sports] colours then you automatically are classified for a bursary. X [in Berea] wanted him and Y [in Berea]. X offered David a 100% bursary but we took 75% [from Y] because it's closer.' The bursaries provided a significant benefit to the family; the Berea school had long been seen as one of Durban's most prestigious institutions and today charges twice the fees of the Bluff boys' school. Indeed, as a young Bluff pupil in the 1960s, Jonathan's father would probably have been refused admission to this 'larny' (snobby) Berea school. What Bourdieu (1984) calls a class 'habitus' is evident in the family's surprise when they attended the Berea school for an interview: 'we walked into the very old traditional school and said "this looks like Harry Potter's place"'

With different histories and leadership, former white schools have followed quite different strategies and, like businesses, adjust these on an ongoing basis; some put greater emphasis on academics, others on sports (see Hunter 2010b). Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that there are two strategies that all former white schools have followed at one time with various degrees of success: to manage desegregation in a way that maintains the school's appeal for whites; and to attract high-income parents who will support the school.⁸ Given extended powers by the government, Principals of former white schools are now somewhat akin to CEOs managing a business: the most well-known are proactive strategists working long hours to improve the financial and symbolic status of the school. To attract the right students, many boys' high schools, as well as a number of girls' schools, hire full-time marketing personnel, and some employ full-time sports coaches. A prestigious school gets to raise its fees, and these can be channeled into facilities and the employment of extra teachers. The growing gap among former white schools is reflected in the bursaries they offer, fees they charge, class sizes they have, and sports and exam results they produce.

In the 1990s, growing competition among Bluff schools is evidenced in the numerous adverts they placed in local newspapers. By the 2000s, as competition intensified, Berea schools had begun to advertise in the Bluff's local paper, a deliberate spatial strategy to increase their catchment area and, particularly, their crop of white applicants. These Berea schools had a head start over Bluff schools because of their well-endowed old students' societies and a legacy of being seen as the most prestigious institutions in the city. Also important, quite a large number of Berea schools are located in a relatively small area, a geography that partially protects them from having to admit 'undesirable' students. While schools find it hard to refuse applicants who live very close-by, non-local applicants perceived as becoming a burden on the school—for instance the children of low-paid domestic workers—are frequently directed elsewhere. One Principal told me that he himself visits houses to ensure that applicants' addresses are bona fide and measures to the metre a household's distance to his school compared to others. Principals also conduct hundreds of admissions interviews to choose students from outside the area who they are not obliged to admit. Here, they assess parents' finances and students' English and aptitude. They also regularly ask applicants' past schools for information on whether fees were paid on time and require 'donations' once a pupil is accepted.

There is remarkable unanimity among parents and teachers that one way for a former-white school to increase its prestige is through its achievements on the sports field. Bursaries for sports—'white' sports that is—are seen as particularly necessary to brand a school as 'white' and select certain out-of-area students above others. Numerous times I was told that white parents 'judge a boys' school by the results of its Rugby first team.' While rugby has long been passionately supported by whites, the sport was especially associated with upper-class English and Afrikaans-medium schools. In the 1980s, English-speaking south Durban celebrated soccer

more than rugby—the region in fact producing two soccer stars, Clive Barker and Gordon Igesund, who went on to coach the national team.⁹ The strategic choice some schools place on promoting rugby does not mean, however, that they simply sought to exclude black students. There are certainly examples of this taking place but even the most ‘white’ schools have close to a majority of black students; rugby came to signify the preservation of ‘whiteness’ rather than simply a schools’ white demography. Indeed, most white teachers and parents accept that desegregation must take place but point to the perils of schools admitting *too many* black pupils which, it is said, can lead to an irreversible slide in a school’s prestige, finances, and standards (see Vandeyar and Jansen 2008). It should also be noted that teachers and black students frequently mention that higher-income black parents desire predominantly white schools that denote prestige and distinction. Richer black parents, therefore, have a class-based stake in maintaining the ‘whiteness’ of certain schools.

If former white schools can see value in retaining a sense of their ‘whiteness,’ the tremendous amount of money that some devote to marketing and sports, and thus away from teaching, begs the question: why do white parents not rally to demand that maximum resources are devoted to raising academic standards? One shouldn’t underestimate the passion that many white parents and children have for rugby or their aversion to racially-mixed schools, yet it is also the case that ‘white’ schools bestow certain non-academic class advantages. Here we must recognize that in a postcolonial setting like South Africa qualifications are necessary but insufficient means to maintain white privilege. This is because they are vulnerable to claims of illegitimacy as a result of past racist practices (one rationale for affirmative action) and they are ‘devalued’ by the political pressure to expand educational opportunities for all (on devaluation of ‘scholastic’ knowledge in relation to ‘authentic’ culture see Bourdieu 1984: 67). It is in this way

that we can see the advantages offered by social networks gained by attending a certain school. A Berea schoolboy's father (for instance Mr. Venter) might have studied at a Bluff school and been employed in artisan work—being excluded from the prestigious Berea schools. Today, though, his son is socialized into generally English-medium networks, including 'old boy' networks. The resultant consolidation of whites in a few of Durban's English-medium public schools therefore serves to enhance social networks among groups previously divided by language (Afrikaans and English) and/or the specific emphasis of the curriculum (technical or academic). This is especially useful for accessing Durban's still white and English-dominated business world. And because the long term effect of schooling mobility is to expand divisions between schools, the exodus by whites from Bluff schools can also be justified and experienced in objective and not racial terms: the high status Berea schools are much better financed today and do tend to have good academic results with most students going on to tertiary education. Desegregation in these schools also allows for a select group of black students to join, and by doing so legitimate, the racialized and classed practices of elite schools.

4. Displacement

A final mechanism driving pupil mobility is displacement: children travelling to attend schools that perform worse than their local ones. It should be noted that shack dwellers, the poorest urban dwellers, not considered in detail here, perhaps capture best how educational displacement can have an enormously detrimental effect on a child's future. At times, and usually after great struggles, children of shack dwellers can gain access to proximate schools. One lady, Zodwa, whom I interviewed, lives in a shack settlement near Merebank; after the local councillor intervened her three children were admitted to the local former-Indian schools, and she benefited

from laws requiring schools to provide fees remissions (which are much easier to enforce than laws preventing non-discrimination at the point of admissions). But shack dwellers will frequently experience (or fear) exclusion and their children can be located with relatives far-away. When this is in a rural area, as is common, the child will be educated in some of the country's poorest schools (Hunter 2010b). More widely, displacement has to be seen as the flip side of schooling selection, already described. To illustrate this point, I outline below a brief example of displacement from the two areas considered here, Umlazi and the Bluff.

Movement 5: Displaced from local Township school. Dumisa, 17, lives in Umlazi close to two very good secondary schools, although he travels to attend what a lesser-ranked school (as reported in the survey). He is one of eleven people living in a four-roomed house. His older brother passed an admissions test to enter the prestigious local schools and then attended the local university and is working. But Dumisa failed the test, and attends a worse school.

Movement 6: Displaced from former white school. Thami, 16, is schooled at one of the Bluff's least prestigious secondary schools. He lives with his mother, 48, in *ikhaya* (the domestic workers quarters of house). Many of these women work as domestic workers, but Bajabulile rents the place. She worked in the insurance industry but is currently unemployed, relying on support from family and friends. Neither of the fathers of her two children provide any support. Part of the reason why her son was refused entry to his nearest school, she feels, is her late application. However, she is adamant that had she been better-off her child would have been admitted. The best schools, she says, find excuses not to take children whose parents struggle to pay fees.

5. Conclusion

The turn toward ‘parental choice’ has fundamentally reshaped education in many Western countries. Ironically, in South Africa, although the government did not explicitly promote parental choice, thousands of urban children travel very long distances to attend schools. Many middle-class white parents have the means and ability to choose better schools, and are favored by white schools who compete to brand themselves as white (or at least not having ‘gone black’)—a strategy that can be justified as necessary to attract upper class black as well as white students. African parents with the resources can move their children to white or Indian or coloured schools. Within townships like Umlazi, selection for schools has intensified after apartheid. And the flip side of schools selecting certain students is that others can be displaced, having to travel to a worse school. One destructive consequence of these circuits of schooling is the huge diversion of resources away from classroom teaching. Parents spend large amounts of money on travel costs, schools’ resources are channeled into marketing and bursaries, and of course a huge amount of children’s time is spent travelling. Despite government policy that allocates more money to poor schools, the movement up the schooling hierarchies of children with the means works to increase the gap between public schools—for when students travel they travel with fees.

Today, it is a fact that most young South Africans are attaining more years of schooling than their parents. But in the context of broadly neo-liberal economic policies aimed mainly at deracializing privilege after apartheid (see Marais 2001), the devaluation of qualifications that accompanies any expansion in schooling is experienced not only as an educational issue but in the huge competition that exists for limited jobs (on India see especially Jeffrey et. al. 2008; Jeffrey 2010). Education has always been a way to divide groups into social hierarchies as much as to provide learners with skills, but in South Africa command over space is a fundamental

source of social power and key to how schooling geographies unfold. If in the apartheid era social hierarchies were very closely linked to racial and spatial hierarchies, the massive mobility of children for schooling marks a key dynamic through which socio-spatial hierarchies are being reconstituted. In many respects, the stark levels of racial segregation and inequalities make South Africa an unusual case. But as countries across the world suffer the continued fallout of the 2008 financial crisis—with competition for schooling and employment operating through the contours of race as well as class—it may be that the ‘south’ can offer lessons on the wider urban politics of schooling.

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NOTES

¹ The benefits and limits of the terms ‘global South’ and ‘global North’ and of using ‘southern’ cases are not discussed in detail here, but see Mabin (2013) for a helpful assessment.

² It is impossible to avoid using the four apartheid-rooted racial categories still widely utilized in South Africa: ‘African’, ‘white’, ‘Indian’, and ‘coloured.’ I use ‘black’ to refer to all people designated as being of color. I use scare quotes conservatively to improve the article’s readability and capitalize only ‘African’ and ‘Indian’ since they refer to places.

³ It is the stark competition for jobs that also helps to explain why students can cross borders to attend prestigious northern educational institutions and gain ‘cultural capital’ (see Waters 2006).

⁴ Many of course have critiqued Bourdieu’s work, usually revolving around his emphasis on social reproduction and not change; his characterizing of subjects as unreflexive (they acquire a ‘habitus’ through socialization); his weakness in recognizing how class ‘intersects’ with other social relations such as gender and race; and his frequent use of economic terms (like ‘capital’) that can imply a certain economic reductionism. See, for instance, Sayer (2005).

⁵ These figures are calculated from census data provided by the eThekweni Municipality and data for two of the Bluff’s three secondary schools provided by the Department of Education.

⁶ ‘Parent Body Wants White Status Quo,’ *Southlands Sun*, Feb 1, 1991, p. 3.

⁷ Indeed, many civil court cases in Durban from the late 1960s involved women applying for ‘emancipation’ from Natal customary law in order to gain the right to access a house, and many other women registered houses under their sons’ names but remained de facto heads. This statement is based on interviews and perusing approximately 500 Bantu Affairs Commissioner’s Court Cases from 1966/7 found in the Durban Repository of the National Archives. This period was the height of Umlazi’s growth. Under the Natal Code of Native Law, codified in the nineteenth century by British colonial officials, African women were designated as ‘perpetual minors,’ a position that continued until the 1980s.

⁸ Though I don’t look here at coloured and Indian schools, my research in Wentworth and Merebank suggests that one secondary school in each of these areas emerged as a ‘school of choice’ for its past-designated racial group. The others took in significantly more African students.

⁹ This soccer culture is richly captured in the 2010 documentary ‘Soccer: South of the Umbilo’ (Barking Rat Film).