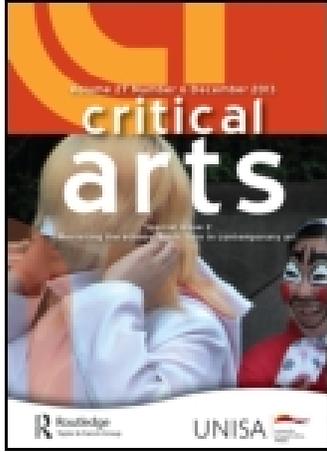


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## Class dismissed? Youth resistance and the politics of race and class in South African education

Rajendra Chetty

### Abstract

Informed by the writings of the Frankfurt school and critical pedagogy, this article is a reflective piece on the engagement with the race and class debate in South African education. The article opens with the recent stampede to gain access to a university as a backdrop for an interrogation of the notions of race and class in both higher and basic education. Thereafter, the article highlights how universities and schools reproduce social and economic power systems to the detriment of the advancement of poor and working-class youth (the overwhelming majority of whom are black). The objective here is to encourage a deeper engagement with theoretical constructs of marginalisation, and racial and class inequalities. Over the past year there has been student unrest at 11 universities, and when one reflects on the youth resistance of the 1980s, it is evident that an academic engagement with discourses of power beyond polemic is needed to ensure that the youth take on the power brokers on equal terms.

**Keywords:** class, education, power, race, working class, youth resistance

### Introduction

They lined up well before dawn, some driving from the deep countryside with bags of fluffy blankets and neatly packed sandwiches, to wait for the gates to a new life to open.

They hoped for a shot at a coveted spot at one of South Africa's public universities, and with it a chance to escape the indignity of joblessness that afflicts more than a

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third of the nation. By morning, the line was more than a mile long. As the gates were about to open at 7:45 Tuesday morning (10 January 2012), thousands of students, many accompanied by their anxious parents, surged forward, desperate to win one of several hundred last-chance places still open at the University of Johannesburg. Amid shoving and screams, Gloria Sekwena, the mother of Kgositsile, a prospective student, was trampled to death and several others were badly injured in a frantic scrum. (Polgreen 2012)

This event embodies the broad crisis in an overstretched higher education system as it struggles to extend access to disadvantaged youth, together with the desperation of poor people who view a university qualification as an escape route from poverty. Access to higher education for all South Africans was one of the most cherished goals of the liberation struggle, yet the current reality with regard to access is not favourable for black students. Only 11 per cent of black youth and seven per cent of coloured youth in the 18–24-year age bracket are in university, compared to almost 60 per cent of white youth (*Higher education in context* 2011). The key reason for this is low-quality primary and secondary schooling. Crain Soudien (2006) rightly observes that working-class communities, because of their vulnerable economic and cultural situations, feel alienated from the state's education reform process and how the provision of education continues to be structured on racial and class lines. Hence, despite the best intentions of the educational reform process post-1994, there is evidence of the growth of social bifurcation through education (Motala and Vally 2010: 88). The poor quality of the mathematics achievement scores of those black students who gain university admission militates against them securing places in the prestigious science, medical and engineering programmes. The large majority are left with few options after high school, since the limited seats are effortlessly filled by middle-class and urban-based students. Even for those who are able to secure a place at university and complete a degree programme, the chances of finding employment are limited, given the high rate of unemployment among graduates. State allowances and scholarships are awarded on the basis of merit and not on factors such as financial need or poverty.<sup>1</sup>

The limited number of black students who are able to secure scholarships, are the privileged ones with good matriculation results from advantaged schools where parents are able to afford high fees. The opportunities for poor and working-class students from townships, informal settlements and dysfunctional schools, who are in far greater financial need, are limited when the key factor for funding is merit, as opposed to poverty, class and need. The interests of the poor and marginalised are unfortunately not the foundation on which the post-apartheid educational system is built (since the advent of democracy in 1994), although there are constitutional and other imperatives to achieve a just, fair, equitable and humane social order with the *mélange* of official policy that only looks impressive at face value (*ibid.*).

Poor students are further disadvantaged with regard to access to technology and resources – if they had Internet facilities, they would have been able to complete a virtual application to the university much more easily and much earlier, as opposed to crowding the gates when universities open in January, hoping to compete for a few last-minute seats. The response of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande, was that a university degree was not right for everyone and he urged students to attend Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. The question emerges: For whom is a university degree right? Hopefully, not only for middle-class students, thus relegating working-class youth, who are mostly black or coloured, to FET colleges. Further, post-school youth struggle with the complexities of higher education, and the lack of guidance counsellors in poor schools exacerbates the situation. There is much confusion among youth about the differentiation of South African tertiary institutions into traditional,<sup>2</sup> comprehensive universities and universities of technology (see Note 1), together with the concerted (yet unsuccessful) effort by the state to push for FET colleges with diploma and certificate programmes and students' perception that employers will not hire them with FET qualifications.

### **Marginalisation, race and class**

Critical theory is a theoretical construct that originated among scholars such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, founders of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in the 1920s, and who became known collectively as 'the Frankfurt School' (Kellner 1995). Their purpose was to reveal and explain inequalities and hypocrisy in society. They pursued this aim by using two techniques:

- Immanent critique: the researcher questions from a position within a phenomenon in order to expose contradictions between claims and reality; and
- Dialectical thought: a mode of inquiry that seeks the origins of social phenomena in the tensions between opposing social forces and their resolutions. (McDaniel 2006: 19)

Critical theorists explain marginalisation as a process by which individuals are excluded from society based on various traits, the key being social class and race. Critical race theory explains marginalisation as the process by which people of colour are excluded from society to maintain the dominant hegemonic power structure. The theory argues that the forms of power which existed prior to the formal and legal recognition of discriminatory policies continue to exist through the distribution of resources and power, and that concepts of merit continue to obfuscate the reality of privilege and power in favour of those who determine the very meaning of 'merit' (Motala and Vally 2010: 99).

The focus of critical race theory is on three primary strategies to expose and analyse racism: 1) a commitment to articulating and valuing the voices of people of colour; 2) scepticism about liberal narratives and colour-blind agendas; and 3) the recognition that racial hierarchy stems from relations of power, giving its beneficiaries powerful incentives to maintain existing power structures (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Educational research should not ignore the everyday manifestations of racial inequalities and the notion of social class, and their connection to broader structural systems. The aim of a critical paradigm should be exposure, as the first step, followed by commitment to a particular paradigm of empowerment that gives youth traction in discourses of power beyond polemic, so that they can take on the power brokers on equal terms. The concepts of ‘voice’ and ‘naming one’s own reality’ are central to critical race theory, in that they can serve as emancipatory means for marginalised groups and individuals. Class analysis implies the importance of listening to the voices of the most oppressed social classes, as it is through these voices that greater clarity might be obtained about the challenges of development (Motala and Vally 2010: 106).

How do poor youth name their reality? In Fine, Burns and Torre et al.’s (2008: 230) study on working-class schools, poor students spoke with strength and confidence of their skills, their knowledge of the streets, the fact that they have different life experiences, that they know about struggling and could recall, with fondness, teachers who supported them. However, once they discursively wandered beyond the borders of the local, shame, stigma and fear peppered their talk (Bronfenbrenner 1979). They described themselves as academically handicapped by opportunities denied, ill-equipped to attend a real or serious college, embarrassed by their limited vocabulary, math skills and exposure. They thus embodied the inferiority of their schooling:

If kids from a wealthy school came in here right now, I wouldn’t talk because they would be more sophisticated or something, and understand words I don’t know and I don’t want to be embarrassed. (Fine et al. 2008: 230)

Alternatively, they articulated their mis-education: ‘That is like putting all the bad kids in one school, that’s just like putting, you know, just like putting them in jail. They going to be crazy ...’ (ibid.). The quality of the contexts in which they are growing up, speaks to youth about how they are viewed and valued. If surrounded by decay, disrepair and filth, and if no adult intervenes to protect her, a learner may come to see herself as worthy of little, or may believe that adults see her as unworthy.

Social class, while perhaps a ‘phantasmatic’ category, organises the social, cultural and material world in exceptionally powerful ways. While class is clearly connected to income and occupation, and there is ample evidence that income inequalities are widening in South Africa, class must also be understood as practices of living –

‘the social and psychic practices through which ordinary people live, survive and cope’ (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001: 27). Examples of profoundly classed experiences include which schools youth attend, school-based interventions if students fail, and the extent and type of extracurricular activities they engage in. Important factors include where they live and the nature of their housing, which universities they attend and under what expectations of success, and their imagined and/or taken-for-granted financing. Further, the extent to which students are prepared for university admission and benchmarked testing, the nature of school-based counselling and access to adequate medical support are integral to classed experiences.

While class certainly has its roots in economic realities, people live class in response to such realities, and schools and universities are important mediators in this regard. Recognition of the structuring effects of class has never been more pressing, given the deepening social inequalities in South Africa. This is not to deny the ongoing effects of race in relation to the production of inequality (Weis 2008: 3). Despite much rhetoric and a few policies directed against it, inequality in educational outcomes, as related to social class background, persists largely unabated. Deepening segregation, severe constriction in the educational pipeline, increased stratification in higher education through the emergence of a more highly segmented system of universities, as well as what counts as official knowledge are all tied to the production of unequal class outcomes. This is particularly apparent in the concentration of African and coloured students in high-poverty schools and historically disadvantaged higher education institutions.

At a time when politicians sing the praises of science and mathematics as necessary for the country’s development, many schools lack science laboratories, or, if they have the space, do not supply up-to-date equipment so that students can perform even the most routine experiments in chemistry and biology (Hartley and Treagust 2006). Schools are chronically short of qualified science and math teachers, the result of which is that many courses cannot be offered to meet university entrance requirements. Environments for facilitating learning – books in the home and parents who help teach their children how to read – are not the norm. The class system in schooling has taken a disturbing turn. Students know that obtaining credentials is simply an endurance test and most have no expectation of receiving a critical education. The problem is that in our profoundly anti-intellectual culture, it is hard to know where working-class young people can find education (Aronowitz 2008: 83). With the decline of the oppositional Left (the Mass Democratic Movement, People’s Education, civic and unity movements, etc.) – once important sources of critical thought – the marginalisation of the poor will continue. Until a real pro-poor movement re-emerges, there is limited optimism that things will change in disadvantaged schools. Unlike race, social class is not constitutionally protected:

there is no guarantee of equal opportunity on the basis of poverty. South Africans have witnessed almost no political mobilisation on the part of the poor, in contrast to the mobilisation activities of race pre-1994. Many social programmes have been directed at enhancing opportunities for black children and women, but educational programmes directed at those who are economically disadvantaged have been far fewer. Hence, if inequality is not addressed, the low levels of black student intake at universities may persist.

## **A racialised social system**

South African society's racial structure and its customary racial practices have been rearticulated since the advent of democracy, however, this re-articulation should not be characterised as a decline in racism, an example of increased assimilation or of effective 'norm changes' (Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985). In effect, South Africa has maintained a racialised social system, since the allocation of economic, political, social and even psychological rewards to groups are, to an extent, still based on racial lines. The view that discrimination has disappeared and exclusion based on race does not exist, is false. Neville Alexander (in Motala and Vally 2010: 94) rightly cautions against idealist and economic reductionist theorisations of racism when he argues for a historical-materialist analysis of the causal factors explaining racism: 'The conservative and liberal-pluralist approaches have tended to attribute to the category of "race" an independent causal value, however different the levels of sophistication of individual analysts might be.' On the other hand, radical approaches have tended to veer in the direction of broadly economic reductionist or, more narrowly, class reductionist, explanations. Political developments in the world and in South Africa during the last 15 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century left their mark in the form of a kind of paradigm drift that has affected all these schools of thought. On all sides, there has been a shift to a much more pragmatic stance in social science scholarship. In the case of some formerly avowed Marxist approaches, one is tempted even to speak of a return to empiricism (ibid.).

Significant examples of racism in higher education institutions were outlined in the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* (Soudien 2008). Racism does not have an independent structural foundation; rather, it has a strong material basis in contemporary society. We cannot miss the rational element on which racialised systems such as the South African university system were originally built. It was far easier to understand racism during the pre-1994 era, when racial practices in universities were overt, and it is far more difficult to engage with the concept currently, where racial practices are subtle, indirect and strongly inter-linked with notions of class. When considering racism as a legacy, we discount the significance of its contemporary materiality. When class replaces race as the central

variable of social life, the lens through which to view the race–class struggle in South African higher education becomes clearer. Social divisions and collective conflict (youth resistance and civil society protests around housing and poverty) are derivations of the class structure (Aronowitz 1992).

A possible reason why racism is excluded from an understanding of the current youth resistance in higher education, is that the education system has distributed relatively petty advantages within the working class through limited scholarships and loans, and entry into elite formerly white institutions based on academic achievement. This serves to disorganise the entire working class, allowing the capitalist democracy to more effectively exploit the majority of poor youth. The fact that it is poor and working-class youth who are resisting fee increases or limitations in terms of spaces in higher education, makes it a class struggle. This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of the students who protest are black. The unchanging element of pre- and post-1994 South Africa is that black youths' life chances are significantly lower than those of whites – the more dissimilar the races' life chances, the more racialised a social system (Bonilla-Silva 2005: 12).

### **Post-1994 educational reforms: the decline of agency and voice**

Efforts to eliminate racism, the ideological cornerstone of apartheid policy, need to be recognised and acknowledged in any discussion of educational reform post-1994. Nevertheless, there are remarkable continuities between apartheid-era management principles and current trends. Alexander (1994: 66) predicted at the advent of democracy, that 'the present strategy of the African National Congress was and does not have the potential to become the continuation of a revolutionary strategy for the seizure of power'. Further, Alexander correctly foresaw that the eventual settlement would be for a power-sharing arrangement between Afrikaner and African nationalism, in which the denouement would be at the expense of the urban and rural poor (Motala and Vally 2010: 101). The continued marginalisation of poor people by African nationalism after the demise of Afrikaner nationalism was not inherently inevitable; it was the result of choices made by education policy-makers and management. Viewed from a critical praxis point of view, some of these continuities are seriously undermining the translation of the transformative intentions of educational reform. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (2006:1) denounced the educational policies for not promoting the interests of working-class communities by addressing inequalities in the education system. Unfortunately, this voice, like the voice of deep thinkers in the academe, has been discouraged and quelled – 'when apartheid ended, critical thinking ended, and abruptly too' (Jacklin and Vale 2009).

Contrary to the spirit of critical praxis which should generate conditions in which agency and voice can emerge, school governing bodies' policies often endorse

exclusionary practices. For example, a school's admission requirements can include compliance with age norms and evidence of academic achievement. The effects of these criteria are the exclusion of youth who have fallen out of sync with age norms due to migrancy and poverty, and youth who have not achieved excellence in grades completed elsewhere. The question of what happens to youth who have failed grades in primary school, who are out of sync with age norms or who are not highly competent in the school's medium of instruction (in many instances meaning competent at home language levels) and are denied places in high schools, deserves serious research. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the drop-out rate in schooling between Grades 1 and 12 currently stands at 52 per cent, i.e. 539 102 learners disappeared from the system since starting off in Grade 1 in 2000 before reaching Grade 12 in 2011 (John 2012: 35).

Marketisation and neoliberalism, with their fiscal imperatives, drive exclusionary practices and marginalisation – there is competition for students whose parents are willing to pay high fees to schools that can promise '100% matric passes'. High schools are reluctant to admit students at risk of 'failure' to the school. In order to keep their places in the league tables of 'good' schools, high schools are becoming increasingly exclusive in their selection processes. The parallel with universities is also striking, with their neoliberal strategies of massification, marketisation and managerialism (Bundy 2006), as well as their league tables with the previously white (both the liberal English and the 'verkrampte' Afrikaner) institutions occupying top positions as research universities, concomitant with charging much higher fees than the 'bush colleges' that were built exclusively for black students and hence, maintaining the class structure of the pre-1994 era. It is logical that universities (like schools) that charge higher fees are able to provide a higher quality education to middle-class students.

Although there have been reforms in South African Higher Education (*Higher Education Act*, 1997), the economic status of most blacks has been left unaffected by these reforms. The democratic state's response to youth resistance has been similar to that of the apartheid state, where the police are called in to halt protests with teargas and live ammunition. The state has been astute in absorbing some demands (state support for students' rights) and actors (for example, some militant leaders of the African National Congress Youth League and South African Students' Organisation have been co-opted) and it insulated crucial areas of youth resistance from any contestation by defining them as non-racial. The latter definition is untrue, since almost all the recent resistance in universities has been limited to black students. An increase in student protests over the past two years is also noted: in 2011, there were protests at the Durban University of Technology, the Westville and Edgewood campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of Fort Hare, the University of the Free State, Tshwane University of Technology, the University of

Limpopo and the University of Zululand. In 2012 there were protests at the Walter Sisulu University, the University of Venda, the Vaal University of Technology and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

It should be acknowledged that the state has had success in challenging the means to achieve equality through ear-marked funding for black students; increased research funding from the National Research Foundation for black postgraduate students; insistence on the inclusion of black students in state-funded research projects; affirmative action in the selection of students and the appointment of academics; and the employment of black students as junior faculty. However, not all black youth receive the same level of rewards, since the rationale for affirmative action ignores internal divisions of race along class lines. Hence, black students are fragmented along class lines, and the vast majority of poor and disadvantaged students remain marginalised.

Rather than arguing whether racial practices or the significance of race has declined or not changed at all in higher education, the focus should be on assessing whether transformation has occurred in the racial structure of universities. The current black student resistance over fees, housing and limited intake is evidence that the transformation agenda of higher education needs serious consideration. It is also evident that in spite of profound policy changes in higher education, a 'new' racial structure is operating which accounts for the persistence of racial inequality.

Poor black youth from working-class backgrounds are direct victims of the poor-quality public education system that has not prepared them adequately for tertiary education. The history of black education in South Africa remains one of substantive inequity, maintained through township and rural public schools. Although the *South African Schools Act*, 1996, removed discriminatory practices with regard to access to schools based on race, the situation in black township schools is by no means one of equity. There has been a narrowing of the gap in terms of quantity of education, but the quality of the education received has widened tremendously, given the replacement of the emphasis on race with class. The level of segregation of black schools remains extremely high in all regions of South Africa. Working-class black learners who can afford the fees charged by previously advantaged schools in urban areas, along with the increase in black middle-class numbers, has resulted in the desegregation of white schools. Township schools are characterised by poor buildings and a lack of basic amenities such as toilets. The schools are overcrowded, lack educational technology, do not have textbooks, pay their staff less and suffer greatly from low levels of teacher morale and dedication. In 2009, only 7.71 per cent of South African schools had libraries, and it is the former Model-C schools<sup>3</sup> which were able to maintain libraries through their own resources (Equal Education 2011: 24). The consequence is low achievement in literacy and numeracy audits and poor matriculation throughput rates.

Black youth should fear less the angry policemen with their purple rain, teargas and batons – reminiscent of the struggle of my generation at South African universities in the 1980s – than the men in suits with their black limousines and their covert discrimination against the working class. Thomas Pettigrew and Joanne Martin (1987: 42) articulate it succinctly: ‘The greater subtlety of these new forms of racial discrimination pose new problems of remedy. They act at both the structural-institutional level focused on by sociologists, and the face-to-face situational level focused on by social psychologists.’ Modern forms of class prejudice remain invisible even to the perpetrators who remain unconvinced of the class struggle of black youth and dismiss it as unruly behaviour, a lack of respect for the new order governing universities, irrational action and a lack of understanding of fiscal imperatives facing universities. The students who protest are viewed as insensitive to the feelings of their peers who want to get on with their education and whose progress is hampered by the disruption of the academic programme.

### **A world apart**

The great contradiction of education in the modern era is that it is both an avenue for upward mobility, and the main social institution in which social status is reproduced from one generation to the next. The social reproduction theories of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Basil Bernstein (1996) and Henry Giroux (1981) highlight extensively the role of schooling in maintaining and perpetuating marginalisation and socialising students in ways that reproduce class structures. Bourdieu’s (1990) notions of social and cultural capital are attributes used in schools to reward students who have high social capital (as defined by society) and to punish those who have low social capital (poor students). Habitus, which includes attitudes, beliefs and experiences, promotes a belief in lower-class learners that they will not achieve because they do not have the cultural capital that upper-class learners possess – capital which is valued by education.

South Africa is a world apart, characterised by a super-rich and sizeable middle class, juxtaposed against extreme poverty and deprivation. Many recent writers on the political economy of the post-apartheid state have concluded that rather than an aspirational development state straddled with ‘two economies’, this country has neoliberalism twinned to liberal bourgeois democracy – that is, two ‘right wings’ (Motala and Vally 2010: 103). The metaphor is extended into South Africa’s two education ‘systems’. The second school system enrolls the vast majority of poor and working-class youth whose health, economic and community difficulties, concomitant with equally deficient schools, produce students who read mostly at the functional level, write without fluency or confidence, and use inappropriate concrete techniques in numeric operations (Fleisch 2008: 2).

Given this notion of a world apart, it is intriguing that both the state and educational researchers have completely ignored the need for a bimodal distribution of achievement scores for literacy, and settled for the rather misleading measure of central tendency. Hence, statistics on South African youth with regard to literacy do not paint a valid picture. Measuring central tendency may be a deliberate attempt by the state to obscure the underlying pattern of unequal achievement based on race. For example, the 2011 Annual National Audit of Grade 3 literacy indicates that 30 per cent of learners achieved at that level. In mathematics, the figures are more disconcerting, where only one learner in ten was at the standard required by the *National Curriculum Statement* (Fleisch 2008: 8). In the context of substantial inequality, it is vital that the true picture of underachievement of disadvantaged schools be portrayed. It is only when the average scores are disaggregated that one may be able to get the real story of unequal learning in South Africa. When the literacy achievement scores in Grade 6 were disaggregated in the Western Cape, four out of five children in the former white schools were reading at Grade 6 level, while in black schools, only four children in 100 were reading at grade level (WCED 2004).

The structural conditions of disadvantaged schools (the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, announced in February 2012 that it would take 20 years to replace the mud schools in the Eastern Cape province), combined with the belief that wealthy youth received more resources, provoke a sense of anger which is voiced by many youth. It is a case of relative deprivation, a substantial discrepancy between what they believe they deserve and what they actually receive (Crosby, Muehrer and Loewenstein 1986). Relative deprivation, with its associated anger and grievance, derives when individuals experience a discrepancy between what they have and what they want; what they have and what they believe they deserve; what they do not have and others do (Fine, Burns and Torre et al. 2008: 229).

## Concluding remarks

Inherent in the notions of marginalisation and disadvantage is the process of 'epistemic violence' of imperialism that has resulted in the unequal balance of power between the middle class and the working class, and the exploitation of the poor in the process of maintaining economic advantage and wealth (Spivak 2004). This ideology produces the discourse of 'development'. Also within this framework, poverty is constructed as a lack of resources, services and markets, and education, rather than a lack of control over the production of resources (Biccum 2005: 1017) or enforced disempowerment. This sanctioned ignorance places the responsibility for poverty on the poor themselves and justifies the project of developing the 'other' as a 'civilising mission'.

Does our discourse of emancipatory politics and cultural solidarity among poor people ignore the history of appropriation? Even without Marxist leanings, it is not difficult to detect that the appropriation of land and the displacement and relocation to townships were economic ventures for the colonial masters, and that apartheid South Africa was an advanced capitalist society underpinned by the statutory oppression and exploitation of blacks. It would be highly irresponsible to forget to lodge analyses of youth resistance within the context of colonialism, the organisation of production and the appropriation of surplus. Were the disenfranchised not the 'surplus people'? The issue of class is more problematic since it transcends race. Hence, in an analysis of post-apartheid schools one encounters cartographic representations of schools, the movement to effective schools outside the townships, migration from poor provinces, journeys to a better quality education in the suburbs, and the aspiration to escape poverty and disadvantage on the part of those learners who gain access because of their ability to pay high fees.

So where can a bright, intellectually ambitious poor student turn? Perhaps inspiration and support come from the occasional teacher, perhaps from a chance encounter with ideas. What is certain is that in our profoundly anti-intellectual culture, it will not come from schools or the media. What is equally sure is that without an articulate and culturally motivated Left, the powerless will remain at the mercy of the system of control and subordination.

The educational inequality emanating from socio-economic disadvantage is a moral, rather than an economic issue. It is a challenge to the fairness of the African nationalist democracy in a society in which education is the major public instrument for equalising life's opportunities. The continued inequality of disadvantaged schooling is the creation of a society that violates the most basic social and political precepts underlying its democratic claims. It is also an economic issue for society because low levels of literacy among such a large portion of the populace exerts significant social costs in the form of lower societal income and economic growth, and higher costs of criminal justice and public assistance. As the public sphere realigns so that the state increasingly finances its prisons, the literacy and numeracy testing industry, zero-tolerance measures in crime-infested schools, poor and working-class youth are reading the condition of their schools as evidence of public betrayal. Not simply incorporating the messages, they critically analyse class and race stratification and their 'place' in the social hierarchy. Like abandoned children who learn to have faith in society, poor black youth are being asked to learn in contexts of humiliation, betrayal, hunger and disrespect. It would be inaccurate to say that the youth learn nothing in poor urban schools. Neither fully internalising this evidence nor fully resisting it, these youngsters are learning their perceived worth in the social hierarchy (Fine, Burns and Torre et al. 2008: 226). These schools are not simply reproducing race and class inequities: far worse, they are educating poor and

working-class youth away from academic mastery and democracy, toward academic ignorance and civic alienation.

## Notes

1 For example, the Funza Lushaka bursaries for teacher education, awarded by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

2 Traditional universities refer to institutions that offer a broad range of general formative and professional programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Comprehensive universities are institutions that offer the full spectrum of programmes, including vocational, professional and general formative programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Universities of technology (previously called technikons) offer a range of programmes that are vocationally and/or professionally orientated, primarily at the undergraduate level (CHE 2012: iii–vi).

3 During the apartheid era in South Africa, such schools accepted only white learners.

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