

# Decolonising Schools in South Africa

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The Impossible Dream?

**Pam Christie**

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## Chapter 10

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**Towards decolonising schooling**

Realising the impossible dream?

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# 10 Towards decolonising schooling

## Realising the impossible dream?

### The decolonial moment

The dismantling of apartheid, which began in 1990, signalled the end of an era of colonialism, which had significance well beyond South Africa.

Thirty years before this, in February 1960, British Prime Minister Harold McMillan had signalled the end of empire in a speech delivered to the white parliament of South Africa, which was then a British dominion. ‘The wind of change is blowing through this continent’, he solemnly observed, ‘And whether we like it or not this growth of national consciousness is a political fact’. McMillan also voiced his concern that the ‘achievements of western civilisation’ – the ‘freedom, order and justice’ of its way of life – would be tossed aside by nationalist movements seeking to rupture ties with their colonisers. It is hardly surprising, then, that McMillan, as a guest of the Verwoerd apartheid government, did not accept the ANC’s request for a meeting during his visit.

At the same time as McMillan’s valedictory to empire, Franz Fanon (1961/1990) published his excoriating critique of colonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, writing from Algeria, at the other end of the African continent. Fanon declared in no uncertain terms that colonised peoples experienced ‘western civilisation’ in quite different terms to the ‘freedom, order and justice’ set out by McMillan. In the compartmentalised world of the colony, colonised people’s experience was of violence and forced labour; plunder and pillage; dispossession, bodily degradation, and denial of their humanity – an experience later named ‘the dark side of modernity’ by theorists of decoloniality. Fanon was contemptuously clear that colonised people should not be expected to embrace the ‘way of life’ so positively projected by colonisers:

The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him ... In the period of decolonisation, the colonised masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up.

(1961/1990, pp. 33–34)

Fanon also warned against inherent weaknesses in colonial national consciousness – pitfalls by which it could become ‘an empty shell, a crude and fragile tragedy of what it might have been’. The weakness, he argued,

is not solely the result of the mutilation of the colonised people by the colonial regime. It is also the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of its spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mould that its mind is set in.

(1961/1990, p. 119)

As it happened, the South African government shrugged aside McMillan’s observations and battled against the ‘wind of change’ for a further three decades. It chose to leave the British Commonwealth as a republic, to tighten apartheid’s grip and uphold white supremacy for as long as it could, and to violently suppress national consciousness other than its own. Over the decades, the project of decolonisation became increasingly more complex even as it became increasingly more likely.

Part of the complexity faced by South Africa’s new democratic government was its timing on the global stage: the Cold War that McMillan feared was at its end by 1990, the Berlin Wall had been torn down, and neoliberal capitalism was globally ascendant. With the collapse of a socialist utopian vision that had inspired the liberation movement, the challenges of entering the global marketplace on neoliberal terms, and the compromises of a negotiated settlement, the new government operated on unsteady and unfamiliar terrain. To this complexity on a global scale would soon be added the movements of migrants and the crisis of climate change, an awareness that the earth needed to be considered in its own terms beyond human exploitation, and the health pandemics of HIV/Aids and later COVID-19. In short, the timing of the victory of South Africa’s national liberation struggle meant that the legacy of colonialism needed to be addressed in complex and rapidly changing global circumstances, different from the 1950s context in which the Freedom Charter had been written. Establishing a modernist constitutional democracy and equal citizenship in these conditions has produced wicked socio-economic and political problems for South Africa, as this book has shown, and these conditions pose challenges on the terrain of ethics and ontology as well.

As earlier chapters have illustrated, the dismantling of apartheid was uneasily achieved on the basis of tough negotiations, with much future work to be done. The intense powerplays, vested interests, and competing ambitions of the negotiated settlement produced uneven outcomes. Unresolved issues – particularly relating to land and to traditional authorities – remained to be settled under the 1996 Constitution. The contradiction between political freedoms and limited economic and social change is evident in the continuing poverty, inequality, and unemployment inflected by race and gender, and in continuing social restlessness.

Fanon's work has been one of the reference points for theorists of de/coloniality, concerned to understand the multiple and intertwined power relations that sustain colonial inequalities beyond the moment of governmental change. Although present-day South Africa cannot be read through the lens of Algeria in the 1960s, Fanon's insights on the ravages of colonialism and the mammoth task of forming new societies in its wake still have relevance. Of particular salience are his cautionary observations about the weaknesses of national middle classes who take over from colonial regimes. Without having wealth of their own, the national bourgeoisie could become the intermediaries to big capital; taking over the positions of former colonisers, they could be unable to steer change or set the national economy on a new footing.<sup>1</sup> That said, Fanon's message was one for humanity also: he argued that national consciousness would need to give way to political and social consciousness – in his view, a different form of humanism – for liberation to bring betterment to the lives of the majority. National governments would need to throw all their efforts into building an inclusive economic programme in order to fight poverty, ignorance, and injustice, and to give dignity to all citizens. This is a point I return to later.

This book has told the story of Carnarvon and its schools in two time periods to show the establishment of colonial relationships in the 1800s and the process of their dismantling after 1990. Drawing on Lefebvre's notion that the analysis of a 'fragment of space' may potentially disclose 'not just one social relationship but a host of them' (1991, p. 88), I sought to trace rhythms of practice in this place on different scales and at different times. With reference to broader analyses of policy and history of schooling, the study has magnified one place in two time periods to provide a more granular description of relationships, activities, and meanings than is possible in more general accounts. In studying the larger picture from the vantage point of a particular place, it has traced a complex range of issues: how power relations and racial hierarchies are established and maintained; how interest groups gain and maintain their privileged positions – while others oppose them; how human agency is able to shift government intentions in local contexts; how social imaginaries inform actions in ways that link the present to the past and future; the uneasy relationship between 'big science' and social development; and how schooling folds into broader intersectional power relations, social interests, and imaginaries. There is no single story of schooling, colonialism, and decolonisation, and the story of Carnarvon is illustrative without necessarily being typical. Nonetheless, when viewed alongside broader accounts of schooling and social change, this study of a specific place provides insights into the multiple ways in which inequalities in schooling take shape, endure, and shift, and what might be required to work towards justice in current times of global complexity.

In this chapter, I reflect further on questions of decolonising schooling. In particular, I return to questions raised in Chapter 1: how to understand the intersectional and entangled inequalities running from colonial to current

times, how to work epistemologically within border contexts rather than asserting simple universalisms, and how to shift the form of current conversations towards a different ethics of engagement on how to live together with all others in the world we share – an all-world ethics.

### **Entrenched inequalities of coloniality and the illusion of sameness**

It is not hard to describe the inequalities embedded in South African education from colonial and apartheid days, through post-apartheid policy shifts and into the present – though explaining these inequalities is the subject of continuing debate. As set out in Chapter 2, there is general agreement that the education system as a whole performs dismally, with South Africa ranked among the worst performers on all international comparative scales.<sup>2</sup> There is also general agreement that performance patterns in the education system are bimodal: there are distinctively different results for students attending different schools, and these results differ according to the poverty quintiles and former apartheid departments of schools. In the bimodal results, nearly 80% of students attend the poorly functioning part of the system, with a small minority (8%) attending the fee-paying schools (mostly desegregated) that achieve good results.<sup>3</sup> Almost all of the poorly performing schools are black schools in rural areas and townships. These patterns of performance have persisted in spite of post-apartheid policies which aim to achieve greater equity and quality in education.

In the face of evidence of poor performance, there have been numerous interventions and proposals for change, targeting different aspects of the schooling system seen to be problematic. Interventions target the ‘usual suspects’ for school reform: teachers (accused of being not sufficiently knowledgeable or not covering the curriculum); school leadership and management (accused of not running the school effectively as an organisation, or not adequately monitoring curriculum planning and resource use); parents (accused of not reading enough to their children or not being sufficiently supportive of schools); students (accused of not attending regularly or not working hard enough); and so on. Seldom are the policies themselves or the design of the system included in exercises of problem identification, save for criticisms of some of the provincial departments that are earmarked for inefficiencies and corruption.

Exploring the failure of most interventions to change what happens in schools, Larry Cuban (1988) points out that the basic organisational structures of western schooling have hardly changed over more than a hundred years. Students are sorted by age and grade (which he calls ‘chunks’ of curriculum); teachers work alone in separate classrooms; and each school has its own principal. This basic structure has endured in the face of numerous attempts at school improvement and school change, and this structure has been the template for colonial schooling as well. Explaining the endurance

of schools in the face of interventions to change them, Cuban applies the distinction between first-order and second-order changes. First-order changes are changes of quality control, aiming to improve what exists while leaving the basic organisational form intact. They may address any part of the schooling system, including the range of issues mentioned above, and may be valuable in ameliorating problems. By contrast, second-order changes are changes in system design, targeting the basic organisational form of schooling. Second-order changes, Cuban argues, are much less likely to be successful than first-order changes, not least because their success depends on social and political changes occurring outside of schools.

Using Cuban's heuristic, it could be said that the major social and political changes of the 1990s provided enabling conditions for second-order changes to be made to South African schooling, and indeed, changes were made to its basic organisational design. Through the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) and South African Schools Act (SASA), racially based departments were collapsed and replaced with new national and provincial departments; a strongly decentralised form of school-based management was introduced; and a different funding model was put in place, introducing fees to supplement state allocations. In addition, provision was made for a relatively small portion of the budget to be allocated on equity principles. Curriculum 2005 may also be viewed as a second-order redesign to replace the apartheid curriculum with outcomes-based education (a redesign, followed by a number of quality control revisions before the design was abandoned).

Questions may be asked, then, about the adequacy of the system redesign in relation to its stated goals of 'redressing past injustices in educational provision' and 'providing an education progressively high quality for all' (as set out in the Preamble to the South African Schools Act). Is the system as redesigned capable of redressing past injustices? Will all public schools be able to progress towards the same quality of education provided in the well-performing parts of the system – or will 'high quality' mean different things for different parts of the public system?

I suggest that there are limits to what the present system can achieve, and that its basic design has limited capacity to redress apartheid injustices, overcome the deep inequalities between schools, or provide equal quality for all in terms of experiences and outcomes.

The major political changes of 1994 offered a moment for fundamental change – a decolonising moment. However, the education policy settlement of the 1990s was the product of broader negotiations, and in these negotiations the apartheid National Party – determined to secure the future of Afrikaans-medium schools – succeeded in ring-fencing former white schools and achieving a privileged status for them all.<sup>4</sup> The newly formed national education department, weak from the start in relation to schooling, was increasingly disconnected from the actually existing conditions in schools as it drew up its policies in ways that conformed to modernist parliamentary governmentality – white papers, national commissions, portfolio

committees, and so forth. Policy formulation was ongoingly top-down in mandating change.<sup>5</sup> The division of powers between national and provincial departments hampered efforts of change in cumbersome bureaucracy, and possibilities for applying equity measures were further impeded by the allocation of extensive powers to the level of school governing bodies – schools that reflect, albeit with some changes, the profiles of their apartheid histories. Changes in curriculum did not take into account the very different learning conditions in legacy apartheid schools or the linguistic diversity of the population, nor was there sufficient consideration of how to remedy the historical inequalities and damaging effects of apartheid.<sup>6</sup> In the enormous task of running the schooling system while changing it, the government's pre-eminent concern was to maintain system legitimacy above innovation.

Though the Constitution had declared education to be a basic right and outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, this did not translate into equality of provision for all. Establishing a single national education department and a single set of norms and standards for all schools established a mantra of 'sameness' across the system, but glossed over significant differences. New provincial mappings had no particular educational logic, resulting in a distribution of schools whose current performance largely reflects their legacy apartheid departments. The mantra of sameness does not give sufficient consideration to the historically unequal circumstances of schooling or the destructive effects of apartheid racial denigration.

With regard to funding, two aspects of post-apartheid arrangements have limited the possibilities of achieving equity: the amount of earmarked equity funding is not sufficient for improving the conditions of schools in poor communities, leaving them trapped in historical inequalities; and the introduction of fees into the public system results in major resource differentials between schools, protecting historical privilege, but also catering to new black elites. Schools where state provision is supplemented by private contributions and fees provide the model for 'good schools' in the post-apartheid imaginary as the hegemonic norm for all to aspire to. However, they are a small minority of schools, funded at a level that is not available to all. Geography traps the students of rural schools where they are, while in urban areas, mobility is viewed as the route to a better school – from former African township schools to former Coloured and Indian schools, and from those schools to former white schools. And within former white schools, a competitive market of desirability operates, as is well laid out in Mark Hunter's (2019) work on schools in Durban.

Poverty, inequality, and unemployment are structural features of the post-apartheid dispensation, which is deeply marked by inequalities of race and gender (as described in Chapter 6). South Africa is recognised as one of the most unequal countries in the world (World Bank, 2018) and the structure and performance of its schooling system contributes to this. Certainly, there will always be schools in poor communities that perform 'against the odds' and individuals in poor schools who achieve excellent

results. However, these are exceptions (see Christie, Butler & Potterton, 2007). Repeating this point: the majority of the country's schools are black schools in poor communities where African languages are spoken, and the performance of these schools relative to their privileged counterparts has remained fundamentally unequal over the years.

Moreover, schools are linked to social inequalities in ways that go beyond funding and provision, as the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1976) (among others) has highlighted. Without reading Bourdieu's analysis of schools and social reproduction too deterministically, his work points to the different relationships between families, schools, and culture. He argues that French schools match the cultural capital and ethos of the middle class, whose success at meeting the demands of the curriculum is not recognised as the 'social gift' that it is. Working class children without this cultural capital are disadvantaged from the start. Bourdieu elaborates as follows:

In fact, to penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its *de facto* sanction to initial cultural inequalities.

(p. 113)

In short, inequalities in schooling indicate that the power dynamics of colonialism have not substantially shifted in the decades since the decolonising moment of political change in 1994. The structure of the current system limits its capacity to redress past injustices and to produce equal experiences and outcomes for all students. The implicit assumption that all public schools will be able, with sufficient effort and 'quality control' improvement measures, to progress towards providing the same quality of education as that provided in the well-performing and well-resourced parts of the system is not realistic. It is a myth of progress which distracts from the important tasks of repair and rebuilding at the moment of decolonial change.

### **Border tensions**

Policies for post-apartheid schooling in South Africa are pulled in competing directions: the desire to preserve excellence as defined in terms of former white schooling; and the desire to provide quality education for all, across the vastly different living conditions in the country. These competing desires bring about particular tensions as the knowledges and subjectivities of the colonial past come up against the limits of what can be achieved in the coloniality present.



In the case of Carnarvon, one simplifying feature is the fact that all townspeople speak the same language, Afrikaans (even though defined in different racial and class categories). Afrikaans is one of only two languages (along with English) that the official curriculum supports from Grade 4 onwards, despite the fact that there are 11 constitutionally recognised national languages. On a national scale, adding to the structural inequalities in the resourcing of the system is the unmediated Eurocentric orientation of post-apartheid curriculum and language policies, and their non-acknowledgement, if not silencing, of the damage done by apartheid education. Curriculum policies take for granted that the ‘powerful knowledge’ of the Western episteme is appropriate for post-apartheid South African students, that it is equally accessible in all schools, and that it should be delivered in the medium of English or Afrikaans from Grade 4 onwards. This approach holds sway, seemingly without question, even though most students fail against the demands of the current curriculum. Haunted by the explicit racism and discrimination of the apartheid past, post-apartheid curriculum and assessment policies are intent on emphasising ‘sameness’ over difference.<sup>7</sup> They do not acknowledge the situatedness of the curriculum knowledge they propose and the partialities and exclusions of its languages. Nor do these policies take into account the harm done by apartheid and what repair might be needed. Western superiority is naturalised and remains unquestioned – a form of ‘sanctioned ignorance’, to use Gayatri Spivak’s (1990) term. The curriculum does not mediate its Eurocentric bias, seemingly assuming that this is the only path towards critical thinking and meaningful learning. It does not engage with local conditions and the different circumstances in which it is implemented; it does not value cultural knowledges; and it does not support the use of African languages to build on the linguistic diversity of the country (see McKinney, 2017). Neville Alexander labels the monolingual habitus of South African schooling as ‘lamentable shortsightedness’ (2013, p. 108) – and for good reason.

Expanding on this point, the link between language and colonial domination is powerfully articulated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo (1986). As an established Kenyan author publishing in English, Ngũgĩ switched his writing to Kikuyu, reflecting as follows on the destructive effects of language suppression under colonialism:

When people or anybody alienates you from your own language, it’s a kind of alienation really from many things. First, from the knowledge carried by that language – so the knowledge of the area, the trees, the rivers, whatever, gone. Second, from the history of the community that made that language, gone. For a language it takes many years, hundreds of years to be where it is. So, that external power completely whips out, like a hurricane, like a bomb that comes and clears everything that was there and it tries to plant something else on this terrain or contaminated ground, that’s how I call it.

(Barison, Carmello, El Hansali, & Pratali Maffei, 2018, p. 276)

As Ngũgĩ (1986) points out, language is more than a means of communication; it is also a carrier of culture and meaning: ‘mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature’ (p. 15). In an observation that would apply to post-apartheid schooling for students speaking African languages, he states:

Colonial alienation ... starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. (p. 28)

Summing up, post-apartheid schooling with its distorted resource distribution is caught in the polarising border dynamics of coloniality. The schooling system, designed to match the institutional framework and curriculum of unmediated Eurocentric modernism, cannot simultaneously achieve its goals of redressing past injustices and providing education of progressively high quality for all. The dynamics of border conditions – the desire for what cannot be achieved, and the unwillingness to accept what exists – trap the system in its bimodal achievement patterns and its continuing inequalities. This is a cycle where the decolonisation of schooling remains an impossible dream.

Stepping out of this dynamic requires a different approach to working within border conditions. It requires a willingness to acknowledge the ways in which existing intersectional inequalities and power relations are reflected in schooling, so as to work against their inevitabilities and redress their consequences in a spirit of repair. It requires a willingness to shift the structure of resource allocations to schooling so that historical inequalities are adequately redressed. It requires a willingness to engage with the actual conditions of learning of the majority of students in order to build an education, which, in Paolo Freire’s terms, replaces a ‘banking’ approach with the development of critical capacities to read the world in order to change it. It requires recognition of languages spoken by students and the development of these as languages of formal education. If the goals of justice, redress, and quality education for all are to be given serious weight, it is necessary to review current practices, including funding, curriculum, and language policies, and be willing to change them as needed. In Freire’s words, ‘Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality or, under pain of revealing itself as a farce, avoid creative discussion’ (1974/2005, p. 33).

In short, what is required is a different ethical imagination informing the provision of an education which values intellectual rigour as well as care for others and a common good, and a political commitment to working collectively to achieve this. In the sections that follow, I explore the ethical basis to

support a redesigned system that would affirm the equal dignity and value of all in relationships grounded in respect, reciprocity, and care.

### **Towards an ‘all-world’ ethics**

The conceptual challenges of current times entail grappling with the legacies of colonialism and imperialism alongside additional challenges: the effects of global neoliberalism; developments in technology and their implications; violence-induced mobilities and xenophobia; ecological crises and climate change; and issues of global health pandemics including HIV/Aids and COVID-19. The confluence of these imperatives calls for new ways of understanding and living in the world beyond existing ontologies of difference and also including the more-than-human world. I suggest that this requires reclaiming and reconfiguring what it is to be human, towards developing a different approach to ontology, ethics, and politics.

In rethinking the human subject in current times, it seems appropriate to return to Fanon as a starting point, given his powerful exhortation for humanity beyond the devastation and trauma of colonisation, the violence of ending it, and the disappointments of an inadequate national bourgeoisie. Fanon’s legacy, though dated in some ways, still speaks powerfully to the decolonial task of reconfiguring a common humanity. In this regard, Achille Mbembe (2017) has observed:

If we owe Fanon a debt, it is for the idea that in every human subject there is something indomitable and fundamentally intangible that no domination – no matter what form it takes – can eliminate, contain or suppress, at least not completely. Fanon tried to grasp how this could be reanimated and brought back to life in a colonial context that in truth is different to ours, even if its double – institutional racism – remains our own beast. For this reason, his work represents a kind of fibrous lignite, a weapon of steel, for the oppressed today.

(p. 170)

In seeking new directions for life beyond colonisation, Fanon (1961/1990) was deeply cynical about what the European version of humanism could offer: that for all its proclamations about ‘man’ it was murderous in its actions and stifling of humanity across the globe; it stratified the world; and it was incapable of inclusivity and collaboration with others. Fanon’s call for action was a call ‘to work out new concepts’, a new history beyond Eurocentric formulations. These points remain applicable today. In this spirit, he famously stated that ‘Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it’ (p. 166).

With regard to legacies of colonialism and its ontologies of difference, race remains an active signifier that must be tackled.<sup>8</sup> Important post-colonial and decolonial theorists have sought to unsettle the notion of race

and to foreground its configuration in the systemic injustices of western domination.<sup>9</sup> In *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembe (2017) recognises there does not yet exist a ‘world-beyond-race’, and that as long as racism persists in imagination and practice, the struggle to create a different world will be necessary. However, he proposes conjuring with the signifier ‘black’ and extending it, ‘in order to reaffirm the innate dignity of every human being and of the very idea of a common humanity, a same humanity, an essential human resemblance and proximity’ (p. 173). Recognising that the scars of history require restitution and reparation, Mbembe calls for a position beyond victimhood towards building a shared world of equal dignity and care for the other in a common humanity:<sup>10</sup>

To build a world that we share, we must restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification. From this perspective, the concept of reparation is not only an economic project but also a process of reassembling amputated parts, repairing broken links, relaunching the forms of reciprocity without which there can be no progress for humanity.

(p. 182)

In South Africa, where shifting configurations of structural racism and race-thinking have prevailed over time and continue into the present, there can be no easy route to nonracialism or a world beyond race. The task of repair cannot be simplified into a meme of sameness, as current education policies assume, without the accompanying labour of recognition, revaluing, and reconstruction. The remaking of social and economic relationships beyond colonialism, including schooling, requires ontological as well as political work.

For Mbembe, reparation requires expanded concepts of justice, dignity, reciprocity, and concern for the other – extending beyond the human:

There is only one world. We are all entitled to it by the fact of our very existence. The only way in which to ensure its sustainability or its duration is to share it as equitably as possible.

And when I say we must share it, I do not simply have humans in mind; we must share it with every other existent, and in so doing, reinvent democracy.

(Goldberg, 2018, p. 217)

The work of Mbembe and Fanon as well as others calls for the reconfiguration of notions of the human and humanity, and the relations we establish with others in a shared world.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, this reconfiguration requires a shift from Enlightenment thinking, its ways of dividing the world, and the central position it accords to the concept of ‘Man’ as separate from and superior to the rest of the world and other beings.

### **Ontological and ethical reframing**

Reconfiguring the notions of human and humanity requires relational rethinking about ontology, about the nature of the world in its form and substance, in order to include not only humans and other living beings but also the earth itself as the basis of life. The earth has its own forces of change, including geological changes, changes in climate and ecology, and planetary changes. As theorists such as Kathryn Yusoff (Yusoff, 2015; Yusoff, Grosz, Clark, Nash & Saldanha, 2012) have proposed, the notion of geopower (the power of the earth) needs to be considered alongside biopower (power operating through life and the body) as part of the substance of the world. Ontological reframing of this order to include the earth and its powers as well as all forms of life, human and more-than-human, requires an accompanying reconsideration of ethics – how we might best live together with all others and the earth. And, as Liz Grosz’s project on ontoethics shows, a reconfiguring of ontology and ethics also involves politics ‘which addresses social, collective, cultural, and economic life and their possibilities for change’ (2017, p. 1).

If ontology, ethics and politics are understood to include all-world considerations beyond the human and including the earth itself, the nature of climate change also needs fuller consideration. The ways in which climate change is to be understood, and the implications of theorising this in the ‘Anthropocene narrative’,<sup>12</sup> is the subject of much continuing debate, the detail of which lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Also beyond the scope of consideration here is the global COVID-19 health pandemic, unfolding as this book goes to press and highlighting the shared vulnerability of all human life.

Whatever the understanding on issues of climate change and global health, it is increasingly clear that important shifts in understandings of humanity and the earth are taking place. These shifts acknowledge the limits of human knowledge and the need to embrace uncertainty and complexity. I suggest that for education, these shifts require a relational ethics of continuously assessing how humans might best live together with others and the earth itself – a shift I refer to as the relational ethics of the all-world – and building schools that sustain this ethics.

### **Schooling and the all-world**

Running through the chapters of this book is the theme of schooling as a significant social institution, with its mandate of providing systematic teaching and learning for young people, hopefully in ways that will prepare them to contribute to a shared world and change it for the better. Entangled as schools are in broader political economies and social relations, they have limited possibilities for leading change, being far more likely to reproduce their broader contexts than to challenge them. That said, there are always opportunities to shift current practices in and beyond schools to improve the quality of learning experiences for all students. These opportunities for improvement – be they first-order changes in quality control or second-order

changes in design – must always be worked with, both within and beyond formal schooling, towards the telos of building a shared world.

In the post-apartheid period, much of the emphasis on education has rested on formal structures and government policies and actions. The dominant narrative is government-centred, and, though this is important, it should not be regarded as the only space for action. It should not overshadow South Africa's history of resistance and radical alternatives in education, both within and outside of schools.<sup>13</sup> As Salim Vally reminds us:

South Africa has a proud legacy of education for liberation comprising a history of resistance in and through education. This resistance generated various popular epistemologies and pedagogies including the 'peoples' education movement', 'worker education' the 'popular adult and/ or community education movement' and 'education with production'. There were also many community-based initiatives around early childhood development, reading and literacy.

(2019, p. 2)

South Africa's legacy of political and social activism around education provides a reservoir of experience for critical reflection and action in decolonising projects in schooling, alongside broader social, political, and economic movements for change. For it must be remembered that colonialism and decolonisation in South Africa are based on capitalism, currently configured in the markets, consumerism, and hyper-individualism of neoliberalism. Under these conditions, struggles against inequalities involve struggles of economic ownership and distribution in various significant intersectional configurations.

There are no blueprints for a decolonial schooling system. What is required is to work beyond the inevitabilities of current inequalities towards a different imaginary and different aspirations for schooling, as well as for education beyond schooling. This brings with it an ethical stance of reciprocal, collective responsibility and repair, towards affirming human dignity and equal sharing in one world. And it requires a political commitment to the collective work of social and economic change, within which schooling plays its part.

Beyond victimhood and guilt, beyond blame and recrimination, lie the possibilities of building the all-world that we share with others, human and more-than-human, and the earth itself.

## Notes

- 1 As a Marxist humanist, Fanon placed little hope in the national bourgeoisie to work for the betterment of the majority:

In under-developed countries ... no true bourgeoisie exist; there exists only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power

hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature.

(p. 141)

While the racial prejudice of the Western bourgeoisie is one of contempt towards 'the nigger and the Arab', the racial prejudice of the national bourgeoisie 'is a racism of defence, based on fear' (p. 131).

- 2 In an IMF Working Paper, Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) sum up the position as follows:

In a group of fourth-grade learners from 49 countries, South African fifth-grade learners ranked bottom last in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) test scores. Moreover, secondary education is failing to address these gaps. In a group of 39 mathematics and science eighth-grade learners, South Africa's ninth-grade learners rank bottom and second last, respectively, in TIMSS test scores. Peer countries such as Kenya, Swaziland, and Botswana out-rank South African learners in reading and mathematics scores.

(p. 5)

- 3 Mlachila and Moeletsi, p. 5: 'The poorest 75–80 percent of learners depend on dysfunctional public schooling and achieve poor outcomes while wealthiest 20–25 percent of learners enrol in private schools and functional public schools, and achieve better academic outcomes'.
- 4 Of course they were not alone in securing these existing privileges but with regard to schools, their determination was crucial in securing the constitutional settlement, as described in Chapter 7. All former white schools were 'protected' through these measures.
- 5 It is interesting to note the very formal nature of government processes of 'consultation', for example through invitations to comment in formal governmental announcements, that assume a literate population that reads this form of documentation and responds in writing to it – surely a small minority of the population. This process stands in strong contrast to the traditions of consultation evident in the anti-apartheid struggle.
- 6 On acknowledging the psychological damages of colonialism and colonial education, see also Abdi (2011); Biko (1996); Memmi (1965); Nandy (2009); Rodney (1982).
- 7 It is worth noting the problematic history of post-apartheid curriculum, from the outcomes-based Curriculum 2005, through its revisions, to the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS).
- 8 I acknowledge that the account I have provided does not adequately consider other intersectional inequalities, particularly gender, and including sexuality and religion.
- 9 There is an enormous and significant body of work by anti-colonial and postcolonial scholars over decades that this research acknowledges but does not cite for reasons of space.
- 10 The move beyond victimhood, which Fanon also calls for, is a complex shift to propose, particularly given the persistence of racism across in the world beyond the formal end of colonialism. Fanon's call is for an existential act of freedom against dehumanization. Both black and white 'must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible'. Beyond relationships of superiority and inferiority is the 'the quite simple attempt to touch the other' in a reciprocal relationship 'building the world of the You' (p. 165).

- 11 For an elaboration of *tout-monde*, see Glissant (1997). For reconfiguring the human, see Wynter (2003). For the politics of an alternative modernity building on difference see Cusicanqui (2012).
- 12 If human activity is indeed responsible for ushering in a new global epoch – the Anthropocene – then human history and natural history cannot be separated, but need to be considered together. This itself calls into question the disciplinary divides between humanities and natural sciences and how this particular moment might best be understood. Concerns such as these are articulated in Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2012) 'Four Theses' and subsequent debates e.g., Luisetti, (2019). In relation to the scale of climate change, Chakrabarty questions the adequacy of existing debates on globalisation, modernity, and the history of capitalism, and calls for a fundamental rethinking of human understanding of the world. The centrality of 'anthropos' in this narrative is challenged by alternative namings such as 'capitalocene' and 'chthulocene'.
- 13 My book, *The Right to Learn*, was written within an alternative education project, SACHED Trust.

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