Decolonising Schools in South Africa

The Impossible Dream?

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Chapter 1

The long reach of coloniality

Setting the scene from a marginal place

1 The long reach of coloniality

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The place of Carnarvon

In South Africa's semi-arid and remote Karoo region – an interior plain of vast skies and stretched out land – lies the small town of Carnarvon. The Karoo is one of the world's richest palaeontological sites containing fossils of earliest life forms, and it also holds a multitude of archaeological scatterings showing hominid presence from more than a million years ago. Archaeological and historical research attests to indigenous hunter-gatherer presence on the land, and movements of nomadic pastoralists across it, hundreds of years before European occupation. Colonisation brought fierce competition over sparse resources of grazing land and water, violent confrontations, decimation of indigenous people, and distinctive patterns of settler colonialism in waves of possession and dispossession. Carnarvon is one of several small towns established in the Karoo in the 1800s, and its present-day conditions provide a particular vantage point for tracing the development of racial capitalism in South Africa over time. Embedded inequalities echo from the past to the present in this marginal place and are reflected also in schooling arrangements and outcomes. The current circumstances of the town highlight the difficulties of achieving social and economic change in spite of South Africa's political transformation of 1994.

Because of its pristine skies, stable geological formation and remote location, this place has been selected for the construction of South Africa's share of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), an enormously costly international project in 'big science' (on the scale of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, CERN). Farms near Carnarvon have been turned into the site of the world's largest radio telescope array probing the origins of the universe. This place, where there are traces of the oldest forms of life on earth, is thus a focal point for a cutting-edge future-focused endeavour in astronomy. Remote and semi-arid as it is, however, this is a peopled place. The occupation by the SKA invites the interpretation of yet another wave of displacement, this time of farmers and others living in a rural service centre being displaced by the infrastructure of big science. Justifying this very costly endeavour, the post-apartheid government has asserted the importance of expanding scientific knowledge alongside the provision of basic needs in what is a deeply unequal society.
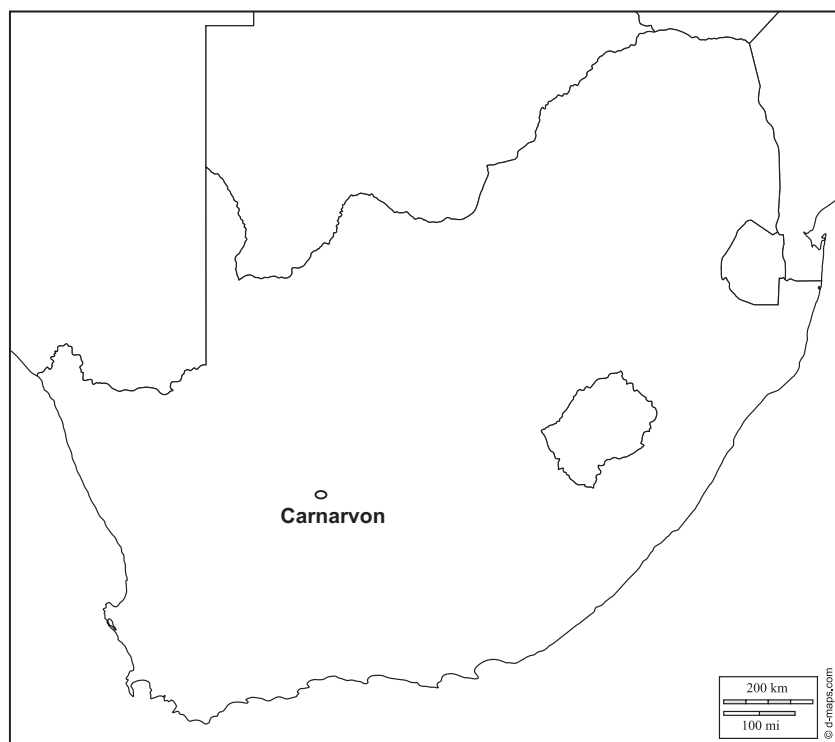
Figure 1.1 Approximate location of Carnarvon, South Africa.

Place and schooling

Schooling in the town of Carnarvon in the Karoo provides the spine of this book, running from colonial times to the period after the end of apartheid which offered a 'decolonial' moment for South Africa.[1] The study of schooling, place, and time reflects my long-standing commitment to working for social justice in education. Schools are emblems of modernity, and though they are flawed institutions, their social mandate is important: to provide systematic teaching and learning for young people in ways that prepare them to contribute to a shared world and, hopefully, change it for the better. Schools do not always fulfil this mandate, and I believe it is important to grapple with why this is so and how to improve the experiences and learning outcomes of students to achieve greater equity.

Having visited hundreds of schools in South Africa and Australia over many years as a researcher and teacher educator, I have been fascinated by the differences as well as similarities between schools. There is a 'sameness' to schools, such that it would be hard for me to come upon a school and not recognise it for what it is – even if there are no buildings, or if classes are conducted under trees. At the same time, despite their sameness, schools are very different places, and each has its own distinctive vitality or tonality.

In general, though, it is important not to romanticise differences between schools, since these differences also express the profound inequalities of their broader societies. Indeed, there is general agreement among sociologists of education that schools and classrooms enact inequalities in multiple ways – though there is fierce debate about how to explain and remedy these practices. By now, there is a powerful accumulation of research showing that inequalities in schooling follow predictable patterns of social class, race, gender, region, and language. Research also shows the stubborn endurance of inequalities in the face of multiple attempts to shift them.

Where once inequalities in schooling in South Africa could be straightforwardly related to apartheid (although not reduced only to this), the persistent inequalities in post-apartheid schooling have perplexed policy makers whose intention has been to redesign the system towards greater equity and quality. In addition to the imprint of apartheid, remnants of interventions that have failed to achieve what they intended to are also visible. Understanding the persistence of deep problems in the face of policies designed to achieve equity and excellence is an important task to grapple with.

The schools in the town of Carnarvon are the centre point of the empirical work of this study, stretching from colonial times to present-day times of 'big science'. From the vantage point of this marginal town, the book throws light on larger patterns of schooling, place, and the social formations they fold into, over a span of time. In magnifying one place on a very large canvas of schools, the intention is to provide insights into the multiple ways in which inequalities in schooling take shape, endure, and shift – insights that are not easily identified by the broad histories and policy analyses of education alongside which this book is written. From the vantage point of this marginal town in the middle of South Africa, the book begins by laying out the palimpsest of colonial schooling and examines its endurance in post-apartheid times, with the aim of stretching beyond current ways of understanding continuity and change in schooling. Drawing on the analytical terrain opened up by theories of decoloniality, the book explores how historical inequalities linger in South Africa after the seismic political changes that heralded a more equal social order. It explores what might be required to shift these inequalities in current global contexts, towards an ethical consideration of how we might live together with all others in the world we share.

Colonialism and apartheid

During the period that I was visiting Carnarvon for fieldwork from my base at the University of Cape Town (UCT), student protests erupted at this university and others. Initially a stand against the prominently positioned statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a master-capitalist of colonialism, the UCT protests soon broadened from #RhodesMustFall to the nationwide call for #FeesMustFall. In the course of protests, students highlighted

issues of 'coloniality', including racism, the Western-oriented curriculum, and cultural exclusion. Before long, school student protests hit the media, with black girls in particular complaining that hair policies were discriminatory in former white, now integrated, schools, and that they were penalised for speaking their home languages at school. In short, black students challenged the ethos of schools that had changed very little despite the raft of new education policies which enabled racial desegregation. And this is to say nothing of conditions in the majority of schools in South Africa, located in former townships and rural areas, which have remained predominantly black and comparatively under-resourced and are generally the worst performing in the system – surely a remnant of apartheid and colonialism.

The challenges raised by students led colleagues and me to explore the literature on decoloniality, in part at least to understand why it captured their imagination so powerfully (Christie & McKinney, 2017). As one who had felt uncertain about using theories of postcolonialism to analyse South African conditions, I found that de/coloniality theories opened useful theoretical spaces for exploring the particular conundrum facing South Africa and its education system: continuing economic, social, cultural, and spatial inequalities remaining so starkly evident long after the massive political changes of 1994.[2] To give specific examples: the burdens of poverty and unemployment continue to be skewed towards black people; 'race' has certainly not disappeared as the major predictor of social and schooling outcomes; African languages are given almost no space in the school curriculum; the schooling system systematically fails the majority of students (who are black); and the racial geography of apartheid remains all too evident in practices of daily life including schooling. (I substantiate these points in later chapters of this book.)

In accounts of colonialism and decolonisation, the end of apartheid is rightly taken to be a watershed moment. Yet South Africa's association with colonialism (and postcolonial theory) is not a straightforward narrative and warrants some elaboration at this point. South Africa has a complex and violent history of colonialism long predating apartheid and its history is not amenable to easy labelling. Briefly, white settlement at the Cape began with a Dutch trading station in 1652, taken over by the British in 1806, and including waves of other European settlers (French, German, Scottish). European pastoralist expansion into the region over the next century was achieved through violent contestation over land and resources, resulting finally in the subjugation of existing inhabitants. In the early phase of encounter, local indigenous KhoeKhoe (herders) and San (hunter gatherers) people were largely decimated, with remnant groups displaced into desert areas in the interior. Bitter battles were waged to defeat the significant African polities living across the region. Africans were successively dispossessed of their land and proletarianised, becoming labourers on farms, and later on in mines and in manufacturing as the economy developed. At various times, labour was imported – slaves from several sources including elsewhere in Africa as

well as India and South-East Asia to work in the Cape settlement, labourers from India for sugar cane plantations in Natal, and indentured Chinese labourers for mining on the Witwatersrand – and this added to the diversity of the population. European penetration into the interior resulted in four different settler polities by the end of the 1800s: two differently governed British colonies and two fragile Boer Republics. In these settler polities, schooling was often meagre, and schooling established by British and Dutch settlers expressed their different aspirations and worldviews. Schooling for black people was left entirely to missionary endeavours. The discovery of minerals – diamonds and then gold – was decisive in the economic development of the country, catalysing British interest in the Boer-held goldfields and leading to the Anglo Boer War (alternatively named the South African War) of 1899–1902.

In the initial colonial period, racial and gender hierarchies and different forms of labour control were put in place in coercive ways, well before apartheid institutionalised these.[3] It is important to recognise, though, that colonial rule – whatever its forms – was always contested, with original occupants far from passive in their responses, and hegemony never stably attained by successive governments.

In 1910, the Union of South Africa was formed as a British dominion and much later, in 1960, South Africa declared itself a republic and left the British Commonwealth. Both of these are moments relating to colonialism, rendering complexity to notions of 'postcolonialism' in temporal terms. The establishment of the Union formalised racial and spatial inequalities. The limited land and franchise rights of black people were reduced. The 1913 Land Act (adjusted in 1936) confirmed the division of land achieved by settler conquest, enshrining white ownership of 80% of the land and confining black land ownership to reserve areas under government-endorsed traditional leaders. In response to these measures, the African National Congress was formed in 1912, sending a delegation to negotiate – unsuccessfully – with the King of England. In the ensuing period, segregation was entrenched along with the development of capitalism. In the 1920s, 'job reservation' legislation secured employment for whites at the expense of people of other races, and the ownership of wealth and productive forces was held exclusively in the hands of whites. Black access to urban areas and possibilities for land ownership were curtailed. Public schooling for whites became progressively free and compulsory, but racial segregation in schooling remained, with the state making no provision for black people beyond subsidies for mission schools. Thus, by the time the Afrikaner nationalist party came to power in 1948 with its ideology of apartheid, the groundwork for spatialised relations of power linked to labour control and capitalist development were in place, with space already linked to race, and access to opportunities already linked to race and place (Christie, 2013).

While there is no doubt that apartheid was the apogee of centuries of violent conquest, there has nonetheless been considerable scholarly debate

about the form and nature of the apartheid state. Without 'reinventing the wheel', three examples will suffice for an audience unfamiliar with Soth African studies. First, the particular configuration of race and class in capitalist development in South Africa has been much debated (see e.g. Posel, 1997; Dubow, 1989; Wolpe, 1972). A central issue has been to understand the nature of the relationship (e.g., correlative, causal, or contradictory) between racial segregation and capitalist development, particularly as this has played out in varied forms of labour control, spatial divisions, and measures to control the movements of black people.

Second, in relation to education, issues of race, class, and the apartheid state have also been much debated. A particular focus has been on the early move of the apartheid state to close missionary schools and bring education for black people under tight state control – the infamous 'Bantu Education' system of segregated and unequal schooling. Understanding the interplay of the different logics of racial segregation and labour reproduction in the establishment of apartheid education has been vigorously debated (see Kallaway, 1984; Christie & Collins, 1982).

A third example surrounds the particular forms of spatial division of land. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state established ethnically based 'bantustans' in former reserve areas, and afforded limited rights to African people, classified according to ethic groups, in their designated bantustans – while denying them South African citizenship. Land allocation policies meant that the bulk of the country's productive resources (minerals and most of the farming land) were secured in white hands. Bantustans were spatially splintered, too over-populated to sustain productive agriculture, and bypassed by networks of transport and communication. During the 1960s and 1970s, bantustans, administered by government-paid chiefs and officials, were steered towards forms of self-government. Between 1976 and 1981, four of the ten bantustans were granted 'independent' status by the South African government (though they were not internationally recognised) – a complex variant of 'decolonisation' at the time when much of Africa was being decolonised.

In terms of colonialism, the apartheid state has been variously theorised, for example, as 'internal colonialism', 'colonialism of a special type', 'settler colonialism', and so on (see Evans, 2012; Everatt, 1992; Hopkins, 2008; Mamdani, 1996; Saunders, 2000). These are not simply semantic or even analytical differences in a complex theoretical terrain; they also point to differences in political struggle at particular moments.[4] This means that the terminology associated with colonialism needs to be used with care in South Africa's case. And while the end of apartheid may indeed be viewed as an end to the colonial era, simplifying this into a semantic designation may gloss over a deeper understanding of complex historical processes explored in specialist scholarship. Similar problems apply when postcolonial or de/coloniality theorisations are applied too literally to South African conditions, without taking historical specificity into account – to say nothing of local specificity.

Without further discussion of South Africa and colonisation, the approach taken here is that theories of postcolonialism, de/coloniality, and 'southern theory' may be understood as different entry points in mapping a shifting analytical terrain that is simultaneously marked *both* by histories of colonialism *and* by changing contextual issues at a global level. The current context has generated a particular set of analytical challenges, including global neoliberalism, cybertechnologies, shifting identities and inequalities, climate change, ecological damage, and global health pandemics. Spanning these different strands of debate, I suggest, is a concern for developing new ways of living in the world beyond existing ontologies of difference and including the more-than-human world.

Taking the vantage point of a marginal town like Carnarvon provides a context for exploring these intertwined issues and the particular challenges facing South Africa. The enormously costly Square Kilometre Array telescopes in the locality of a poor and marginal town stand as signifier of the unresolved relationship between 'big science' and human development needs. And in the penumbra of this venture in international astronomy lie schools that offer limited opportunities to students in the poor and divided communities they serve.

Decolonising schooling?

On the shifting analytical terrain that I have mentioned, educationists face particular challenges given that our work lies both in scholarly understanding and professional practice. On this terrain, the larger project of this study grapples with several key issues that are highlighted with particular clarity by theories of de/coloniality and have direct application to education. These raise questions such as: how should we understand the enduring, intersectional inequalities that remain after the formal demise of colonialism, and how do we work against these? What is required epistemologically for working *within* the 'border' contexts we find ourselves in? How do we shift the form of current conversations towards a different ethics of engagement with all others in the world we share? I look briefly at each of these three questions in turn, using de/coloniality as a springboard.

First, in grappling with the inequalities that continue after colonial administrations have formally ended, it is useful to name these inequalities in a way that differentiates them from colonialism itself. Demarcating the difference between colonialism and coloniality accords a particular space to explore the nature of the latter, explained as follows by Nelson Maldonado Torres (2007):

> Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of

power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday.

(p. 243)

In relation to how lingering inequalities may be remedied, theorists of de/coloniality firmly close the door on easy assumptions that all previously colonised countries could proceed along the path of Western modernity. Linking the enlightenment and the emergence of Western modernity to the fifteenth century Atlantic trade circuits (including slavery) and the colonisation of the Americas by Europeans, de/colonial theorists argue that Western modernity is inextricably linked to colonialism in a co-constitutive way. Western modernity took shape in the economic, social, and epistemological relationships of colonialism – conditions which are not straightforwardly available for former colonies in the form of 'development'. In other words, Western modernity, imbricated as it is in the economic, social, and epistemological relationships of colonialism, is not an option that is straightforwardly available for former colonies in the form of 'development'. 'Progress' in the name of modernity is an illusion.

If this is so, the implications for schooling in South Africa are immense. It questions the common assumption that historically disadvantaged schools are on the developmental path to becoming the same as their 'modern', historically advantaged counterparts. If this cannot be assumed, what options might there be for reducing inequalities in post-apartheid schooling? This is a troubling question that I return to throughout the chapters of this book, taking the vantage point of a marginal place to highlight what this might entail.

The second key issue concerns the adequacy of describing and conceiving of the world from universalising Western perspectives alone. Recognising the power relations of knowledge, de/coloniality theorists argue that these particular universalist perspectives have been historically imposed on other parts of the world that are then ranked as inferior. Recognising the situated nature of knowledge, these theorists argue instead for an epistemic approach of pluriversalism. In saying this, a crucial point is that this does not mean that the Western episteme should be discarded or be supplanted by indigenous knowledge or precolonial knowledge systems. Nor does it mean cultural relativism. What is required, rather, is to acknowledge and work within the entanglement of knowledge systems, and to strive for different ways of thinking and understanding from within the situated complexity of border positions. In other words, what is required is to think from *within* the

border, rather than *about* the border, in working against inequalities to find sustainable alternatives. This requires an openness to exploring different forms of ethical relationship in the world we share with others, human and other-than-human.

In South Africa, protests by university and school students highlight the complexities of working within border conditions of knowledge. Given the association of 'excellence' and 'powerful knowledge' with the canonical and disciplinary knowledge of the Western episteme, it is important that this not be simply set aside in a gesture of protest. At the same time, the historical and situated nature of this canon needs to be recognised, and questions raised about its sufficiency and adequacy in understanding the situated complexities of a country like South Africa. Also to be recognised is the violence that is implicit when languages other than English are devalued as lesser or regarded as irrelevant. These issues have no simple solutions, requiring instead a willingness to work with them as tensions inherent in border contexts.

The third key issue is how to move towards a different conversation, beyond the inevitabilities of Western modernity and working towards a different, pluriversal imaginary. As Walter Mignolo (2007) states:

> Decoloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin. The struggle is for changing the terms in addition to the content of the conversation.
>
> (p. 459)

On the analytical terrain I outlined earlier, there is a global need for ethically reframing how we might best live together in a common world we share with all, human and other-than-human. This is an enormous challenge for those working in schools, which are unbending as institutions of modernity, yet it is one that must be grappled with. In the conclusion to this book, I address the issue more fully, in discussion with the 'one world' position advocated by Achille Mbembe and others and described by Mbembe as the need for 'repair'.

Research from the vantage point of Carnarvon

Using the broad framework of de/coloniality, this study takes the provision of schooling as its centre point, with the aim of investigating how inequalities take shape, endure, and change over time. It presents the findings of research on a single place and its schools, using a place-based study as a vantage point for insights to accompany broader historical studies and policy analyses of schooling. The study focuses on two time periods: the

establishment of the town of Carnarvon and its schools as part of processes of colonisation, and the contestation over the schools in the post-apartheid period as an indicator of the complexity of changes away from the power relations of colonialism. This complexity illustrates the inequalities of colonialism that linger on after changes in government – conditions of coloniality that require further work to achieve more fundamental change. The study draws on the rich historiography of the Karoo and South Africa more generally, on extensive literature on education in South Africa and more broadly, on literature on the political transition of 1994, and on my own mixed method research findings.

The value of taking schooling as the focal point is two-fold: schooling is an important institution worthy of study in its own right; and it is closely related to broader social practices and imaginaries as they emerge and change over time. Schooling as a social institution has accompanied industrialisation in the West and colonisation in Africa and elsewhere. Schooling systems were instituted in virtually all European states in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, were prominent institutions of colonisation, and were signals of modernity in newly independent African countries (see Fuller, 1991). The value of taking a single place as the focal point in a broader narrative is that it is possible to explore the textures and complexities that are necessarily glossed over in general policy studies and histories. Including the dimension of history enables closer consideration of continuities and changes over time. Building on the large body of national and international research showing well-established patterns of inequality in schooling, the intention of this study is to provide a more fine-grained understanding than is possible through statistical analyses or policy studies alone.

The premise of this book is that the study of schooling in place is able to show in nuanced ways how the power relations of coloniality take enduring forms. Particular patterns of possession and dispossession become evident upon closer study, and it is these very patterns – often in their daily and micro enactments – that must be understood and engaged with if policies and practices are to shift. Locating an in-depth study within a larger analysis of policy and history shows the fissures and gaps in governmentality, and also the stark ways in which policies fall short in their ambit claims of change. Without detailed engagement at this level, theories of change – including postcolonialism and decoloniality – cannot come to grips sufficiently with what may be entailed in shifting beyond current inequalities and exclusions, how they are lived and resisted, and how change may be envisaged and enacted.

The fieldwork research of this study combines document study, systematic observations, and formal interviews, with views and information gathered more informally from people and place. In drawing together an account of the schools in the town based on this range of resources, I have taken care to leave an 'audit trail' as a form of research accountability. My intention is to provide a trustworthy account that contributes to scholarship, but not

to 'neaten' the untidy mix too much.[5] Too much distillation in the quest for clarity may smooth over the complexities and contradictions in what Henri Lefebvre (1991) terms 'the encounter of everything' (p. 101) – although too little structure may fail to show the patterns and regularities in daily life.

I selected Carnarvon for my research as a distinctive yet marginal place, anticipating that a study of schools from the vantage point of this place would give a specific face to well-established social patterns of schooling and how its inequalities might be shifted – it would give a vantage point to magnify 'difference' in the generalisable 'sameness' of these patterns. I had anticipated that, armed with my research design and university ethical clearance, I would be able to investigate schooling arrangements, how these related to the comings and goings of daily life of the town, and what schooling offered for the future of young people living in this place. I had also hoped that it would be possible to throw some light on the links between the 'big science' of the SKA and improvements for local people, particularly in schooling. However, I had misread the complexity of what I was to find.

On my first visit to Carnarvon, one of the most striking features of the two schools in the town was the total absence of white students, though the town was clearly dominated by the resources of white people living in the town itself and on surrounding farms. How could this be, so long after the official end of apartheid? Although well aware that research on schooling in South Africa cannot avoid dealing with matters of 'race', I was nonetheless surprised by what seemed to be an extreme divide in a small place serviced by few schools. I had anticipated that the schools' results would be influenced by language differences among students (as is the case in many South African schools), only to find that all of the students and teachers were Afrikaans-speaking and that language of instruction was not a barrier to learning. My prior scanning of the Senior Certificate and Annual National Assessment results for the two schools (results which are generally mediocre to poor) did not prepare me for the classrooms I saw – which were well-ordered and mostly staffed by an appropriately qualified mix of Afrikaans-speaking teachers.

Given that very little has been written about this remote and marginal place, I had come to the town with no knowledge of the history of contestation over the control of its schools in the post-apartheid period, since this is not recorded in available secondary sources. I had no idea that the former white school had fought bitterly against attempts by the new Northern Cape Provincial Government to restructure the schools in the town in 1997, and I certainly did not anticipate the visceral anger expressed by many white interviewees about the amalgamation of schools ten years later. I also had no idea of the significant role played by the church in the history of the town, or that the town's Uniting Reformed Church was involved in the international reformed church movement that declared apartheid to be a heresy in 1982. I did not know that the town had been active as a rural node in the political struggle against apartheid in the 1980s. I could not have anticipated

that the pastor, who had faithfully served the local Coloured church in this remote town for more than twenty years, would be a white, middle-aged Afrikaans-speaking missiologist who had studied Marxism and theology in Germany for his doctorate and was himself politically active in giving voice to the poor. (I observed his wife, also a Stellenbosch graduate, teaching with great care and commitment in her visually colourful classrooms in the Carnarvon primary school on my research visits.) In short, in selecting this small, remote Karoo town as a place to study, I was unaware that it had a very particular history, whose reverberations would continue to be felt in the town to this day.

Needless to say, my research endeavours became far more complex than I planned, stretching me far beyond my comfort zone. As an English-speaking visitor, I found myself an immediate outsider in this Afrikaans-speaking town, regarded with suspicion as I asked questions and probed issues. It took many more visits than I had planned for people to talk to me about the schools, which they did with enormous reluctance. Without the assistance of a colleague who had taught in the town in the 1990s, and to whom I owe an enduring debt of gratitude, it is unlikely that doors would ever have opened for me as they did. I found myself struggling on many an ethical knife-edge, not least in relation to university ethics requirements for 'informed consent' for structured interviews and observations, but also because of the detail of some of what I saw and heard. In my research process, I conducted formal interviews and I also spoke informally to people in the town and the schools. I had permission to observe classes in the schools, and I spent many hours on informal observations around the town. I walked and drove the streets of the town and its surroundings over the course of five years, making short visits during different seasons and school terms. I visited the Northern Cape Education Department in Kimberley, and the District Offices in De Aar, as well as the SKA offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg to gain information about the broader context of the schools in Carnarvon and the programmes and people that supported their endeavours. And in between my visits I scoured archives and libraries to find out what I could about the history of the town.

Finding documentary sources proved unexpectedly elusive. In the Cape Archives, I found that records of certain times and events were simply missing, with the archived records for Carnarvon's Coloured schools signing off abruptly in November 1989 with the note 'File Closed'. Records of the Rhenish Missionaries for this period are housed in Wuppertal in Germany, and the sample available to me in Cape Town are written in a Gothic German which I could not read. From what I could gather, these records also provided very little on the Carnarvon mission station and its school. The original records held by the Carnarvon mission church were taken away by an earlier researcher and are hopefully still in existence somewhere that I have not been able to locate. No official investigation was conducted when the primary school burnt down in 1989, and no one I interviewed could say

conclusively what had happened. Nor could I piece together a satisfactory picture of the intense internal dynamics of the two Coloured schools that operated in completely unsuitable, overcrowded conditions on a single set of premises for nearly twenty years after the primary school was relocated there without being rebuilt after the 1989 fire. With regard to the former white school, *Hoërskool* Carnarvon, litigation between its governing body and the Department of Education was not always straightforward to locate, with some cases being joined to other schools' litigation. Carnarvon is too small to have a newspaper of its own, and the regional newspaper, Calvinia's *Noordwester*, provides sporadic coverage of events in the town.

The result, for me, was an abiding sense that just beyond my grasp lay the evidence I earnestly sought to build a more precise account of schooling in this place. I felt a lingering concern that I was observing a picture through reflections in the glass, not as clear or sharp as I would like.

As I wrestled with the discomfort I experienced as an outsider in a place of evident inequality and social complexity, I found it necessary to reflect more carefully on the social relations of my research: the power relations of 'researcher' and 'researched'; the objectification of others in the research process and its 'outputs'; the resistances I encountered from people who were unwilling to participate in research that they did not support on a contested political issue; the danger that, in a context of asymmetrical power relations and value-differences, my 'interviews' could be perceived as 'interrogations', and 'home visits' as 'invasions of privacy', thereby evoking unhelpful resistance and evasions.

Consequently, while reaffirming my research aims, I approached my research process with greater attention to its power relations and sensitivities. Since I regard research itself as an artefact, albeit following accountable procedures and conventions, my account would need to assemble what was available to me, acknowledging the silences, absences, and blocks as part of the yield. My task would be to work respectfully with what was available, without attempting to hide the gaps or shape the fragments into a neat and complete narrative that did not fit what I had experienced. Through discussions with colleagues about the ethical and methodological dilemmas of this task, I found the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) on decolonising methodologies and Mary Louise Pratt's (2007) notion of the 'contact zone' to be particularly helpful, since both give particular consideration to power relations of research in colonised contexts. As explained by Pratt, the 'contact zone' refers to a space of encounter where the 'centre of gravity and the point of view' are shifted, particularly when power relations are unequal as in colonial encounters.[6] Pratt writes of the contact zone as follows:

> It invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect. The term "contact" foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or

suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.

(p. 9)

Viewing my fieldwork research in Carnarvon as a 'contact zone' activity enabled me to foreground the co-presence of myself as a researcher with others in the town, interacting in the materiality of place, with representations of it in documents and photographs (my own and those of others), and acknowledging the lived interactions of meaning-making in the research activities. Approaching my research process as working with co-presence in complex interaction, I crafted a hybrid account of everything I could gather together, including what I had experienced as resistance or partial truths, and as elusive, blurred, or missing information, to understand how particular patterns of inequality in schooling were formed in this place, and how they have endured while also shifting over time.

The notion of the contact zone of research also meshed with my intention to think with Lefebvre's notion of social space as an 'encounter of everything' – a point I explain more fully in the following chapter, where I outline the various theories I draw on as a framework for my analysis of schools, opportunity, space, and place.

In this spirit, through the chapters on the first time period addressed in the book, I have used mostly historical sources (largely secondary but also primary) to show the impact of colonial expansion into the semi-arid, sparsely peopled land in the 1800s, and to show how patterns of possession and dispossession took racialised forms that hardened over time. I show that this interpenetration of race and class manifested not only in the ownership of land and economic resources, but also in the town's institutions, in particular the municipality, church, and school. I show that in this specific colonial context, stretching far away from the government in Cape Town, schools were established through the efforts of different social actors with their own intentions and aspirations, and during this period the foundations were laid for segregated and unequal schooling. I argue that the social relations established in these colonial times have continued to reverberate through the period of apartheid and into the period beyond its formal demise, and that they have salience in the current ownership of land and economic resources, as well as in the town's institutions. The struggle over the control of these institutions – in particular the schools – has been a central dynamic in the social relations of the town, exemplifying the intersectional relationships of lingering inequalities characteristic of coloniality.

For the second time period of the book focusing on the post-apartheid period, I have placed the struggle over the schools in Carnarvon in the context of post-apartheid education restructuring. The place-specific picture I present in these chapters draws on my approach to 'research-as-contact zone'. I use the vantage point of this specific place to show the compromise nature of the 1994 political settlement and the limited extent of redistribution in schooling and more broadly – insights into conditions of coloniality. These chapters show how the ambitious and ambiguous system of school governance enabled individual schools to resist the equalising intentions of state policies. They also show the cross-cutting effects of policies on curriculum, assessment, and inclusion as they are enacted in schools in conditions of structural poverty. They point to the bare provisioning of schools that rely on state funding alone, and the limited opportunities that these schools are able to afford to the young people they serve. And they illustrate the social imaginary of difference that needs to be challenged if the decolonisation of schooling in South Africa is to be more than an impossible dream.

The penultimate chapter of the book looks at the arrival of the SKA into the vicinity of Carnarvon, exploring its potential to shake the sedimented social and economic relationships in ways that the political changes of 1994 could not. This is a possibility that is perhaps visible – if only just – on the very horizons of this study. The chapter considers the interaction between 'big science' and 'development', both from the perspective of this particular place and in consideration of broader issues of skills and capacity-building in science in South Africa.

In the concluding chapter, I explore the possibilities of shifting the inequalities in schooling, picking up on the challenge of decoloniality theorists and others that the form of the conversation needs to be changed as well as its contents. In doing so, I propose the need for alternative ethical considerations about how we might live together in the world we share with all others.

Notes

1 This book is based on a research project entitled Space, Place and the Affordances of Schooling in South Africa, funded by South Africa's National Research Foundation from 2015 to 2019.
2 For a thorough problematization of the term 'postcolonial' in the context of colonization in Africa, see Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012). 'Decoloniality' refers to the work of a predominantly Latin American group including Mignolo (2007) and Maldonado Torres (2007).
3 Much is written on this. For a general history, see Hamilton, Mbenga and Ross (2012) and Ross, Mager, and Nasson (2012).
4 This difference relates in particular to the political positionings of the ANC and South African Communist Party, as set out in Everatt (1992).
5 I undertook six short research visits to the town and its schools, conducted more than 30 formal interviews, and had many dozens of informal conversations and periods of observation. Documentary sources included holdings in the Western Cape Archives, the National Library, UCT's Jagger Library, and Stellenbosch University's research collection.

6 Pratt suggests this as an alternative to the notion of 'frontier' which foregrounds a European expansionist perspective. I am particularly indebted to Brenda Cooper for reminding me of this. See also Tuck and Yang (2018).

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