School Choice and Inequalities In Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the consequences of the new policies of school choice in post-apartheid South Africa and the reasons they have largely failed to achieve greater educational equality – their stated purpose. I argue that the dominant reason for this lies in the continuing inadequate resources of many poor schools and the failure to address them. It draws on the perspectives of parents whose children attend schools in poor neighborhoods, known as the townships. I argue that the resource situation in these schools directly contributes to poverty in their children's lives; further, the issue of resources is inextricably connected to the larger neoliberal agenda of privatization and markets that has influenced social policy in post-apartheid South Africa. Neoliberalism in education has encouraged school choice as a way to desegregate schools and reform education. I conclude that instead it has continued the marginalization of Black children in township schools, and adversely affects their future by limiting their educational opportunities and their right to quality education.

Keywords

Neoliberalism, post-apartheid South Africa, school choice, township schools, educational equality, educational opportunity, privatization

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the lack of resources in township schools fails to redress the historical marginalization of children who attend these schools and makes it likely that these children will remain in poverty. In the South African context, township schools are an equivalent of urban schools in the U.S. However, they not are necessarily in large metropolitan cities as in the U.S. They are schools in large Black urban areas and were grossly underserved and segregated by apartheid. They were greatly underfunded and their students were not given opportunities for quality education because of the color of their skin. I am mindful of the various conceptions of what may constitute urban schools in the U.S. (see Milner, 2012). My definition of township schools in South Africa is consistent with Milner's characterization of urban schools in the US: that of a deep connection with the large population of communities that share similar socio-economic and political contexts (Milner, 2012).

I argue that inequalities of resources

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among schools in post-apartheid South Africa are related to the neoliberal policies adopted in the nation; primarily policies that promote school choice as opposed to addressing issues of resources in public schools. First, I discuss a brief history of education under apartheid, showing how it perpetuated poverty among Black communities, including its youth. Second, I draw on data from my previous research of school choices of Black parents that examines their perspectives about the conditions and experiences of their children, who attend schools that lack adequate resources. They provide clear illustrations of how the lack of resources in Black schools impedes educational opportunities for most Black children. Lastly, I situate these findings within the school choice policies of post-apartheid South Africa and show how these have contributed to the perpetuation of poverty.

Manufactured Social Inequalities

It would be difficult to discuss school choice in South Africa without contextualizing it in the apartheid education system that spanned many decades. Apartheid was a hegemonic government system designed to enforce racial segregation and the institutionalization of White supremacy (Biko, 2002; Lodge, 1983; Marks & Trapido, 1987; Mothlabi, 1985). It legislated and enforced racial categories - Blacks, Coloured, Indians, and Whites - which were also stratified in terms of relations to the social structure. This racial classification guaranteed that White supremacy and privilege were maintained, while Blacks, Indians, and Coloured people were treated as second-class citizens. This was the major factor that created and reproduced deep-seated social inequalities among communities.

One of the laws that (re)produced resource inequalities in township schools was the Group Areas Act of 1952. This Act enforced the residential segregation plan of apartheid. On one hand, the majority of Black communities in rural and semi-rural areas were forcefully relocated to settlements known as the Bantustans, which were arid areas where no industrial or economic activity took place. On the other, Black communities in cities and suburban areas such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town, were also forcefully removed and relocated in areas that became known as the townships. Townships were state-controlled areas on the periphery of the cities. Describing the rationale for this forceful removal and relocation, Lodge (1983) stated that "Johannesburg was proclaimed under the Urban Areas Act: this meant residential areas were to be segregated and blacks (sic) living in predominantly 'white' (sic) areas were to be rehoused" (p.93.) Seidman (1994) wrote the following about the creation of townships in South Africa:

> By the 1960s, new black townships had been created on the edges of even small South African cities: whites lived near the city center; blacks lived on the edges, often near the industrial sites where they were expected to work (p.235).

While this was the apartheid strategy for political control and oppression of Black communities, it was also for economic control. As described by Lodge (1983), "The Group Areas Act extended residential and occupational segregation and threatened in particular those [non-Whites] who owned property or operated business in a 'white' (sic) area," p.42. Thus the forced removal of hundreds of Black families from economically thriving areas was one of the manufactured poverty crises in Black communities that the country would witness for many years to come.

Under apartheid, education played a major role in creating social inequalities and poverty in Black communities. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs in 1950 and

Prime Minister in 1958, introduced the Bantu Education bill in the White-only parliament. Verwoerd believed that Black people should be subjugated through education to support the apartheid ideology. In analyzing Bantu Education, Christie and Collins (1984) assert that this system of education was by far the most repressive education system South Africa has ever experienced:

> [It] stipulated that all black schools would have to be registered with the government, and that registration would be at the discretion of the Minister. This measure enabled the government to close any educational programmes which did not support its aims...The Act gave wide powers to the Minister of Bantu Education, including control over teachers, syllabuses [syllabi], and any other matter relating to the establishment, maintenance, management and control over government Bantu schools. (p. 171)

Christie and Collins (1984) further explained that, by 1959, virtually all Black schools (except for the few Catholic schools) had been brought under the central control of the Native Affairs Department and operated in accordance to the laws of Bantu Education.

While the implementation of Bantu Education was mainly ideological, it was also economic. It systematically created social inequalities and poverty among the oppressed because it was designed to restructure the conditions of social reproduction of the Black working-class, stabilizing a Black, urban under-class of semi-skilled laborers in growing industrial cities (Fleisch, 2002). In fact, Kallaway (1984) argued that Bantu Education was aimed at shrinking the minds of Black children by denying them intellectual challenges:

> Like the segregated and inferior schooling before it, the new system was intended to prepare Black children for subordinate positions that awaited them in such a way that they were appropriately equipped with limited skills as well as ready to resign themselves to their exploitation. (p. 94)

Through both explicit and hidden curricula, Black students and teachers were coerced to become docile supporters and transmitters of the state ideology of social inequality (Kallaway, 1984; Nkomo, 1990). For instance, Nkomo argued that Bantu Education's aim was "to socialize black students so that they can accept the social relations of apartheid as natural. That is, to accept the supposed superiority of whites and their own 'inferiority'" (p. 2). This was an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971) used to produce hardship and poverty amongst the marginalized communities. It is no surprise that Black students had a disproportionately high dropout rate during this time. According to Hartshorne (1992), in 1988 alone, 307,000 Black students left school, having gone no further than grade four, and approximately 440,000 did not study beyond grade seven.

These educational inequalities had a huge impact on the economic and social lives of these children, including the lingering poverty they endured during their adulthood. In the next section I discuss the education policy changes during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. I argue that although the new democratically elected government had good intentions in their education reform policies, the school choice policy has unintentionally perpetuated educational inequalities among poor Black communities, whose children attend township schools. School choice, therefore, has obscured the crucial need for the government to

address the challenges of inadequate resources in schools that serve communities who were historically marginalized.

Policy Changes in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The post-apartheid government adopted a democratic Constitution (1996) the purpose of which was to transform the long-standing social inequalities of the nation. It instituted socio-political and economic changes, including changes in education. Since education was crucial (Nkomo, 1990; Samoff, 2001), the government introduced the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 which was meant to repeal all forms of discriminatory education and address the needs of schools that were put in poverty by apartheid. The goal was to create a uniform and democratic school system. As Samoff (2001) noted: "Education had been at the center of the anti-apartheid struggle. Its task, everyone agreed, was social transformation" (p. 25). While Samoff's argument is significant, it is important to note Wong and Apple's (2003) reminder of the subtle state policy dynamics that can counter an intended goal, no matter how progressive the state's intentions might be.

As in many nations where policies for equality of education are being implemented, new challenges soon emerged. Township schools, mostly in poor neighborhoods, that served Black children remained entirely racially segregated and lacked educational resources (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Ndimande, 2006; Vally & Dalamba, 1999). The funding issue became problematic because the government policy to fund all public schools *equally* turned out to be unfair and biased against historically Black schools. These schools were grossly underfunded under apartheid, while historically White schools enjoyed an abundance of resources, and these accumulated differences continued. Several scholars (Jansen & Amsterdam 2006; Moll 2000; Motala, 2006) have argued that equal public funding of all schools does not necessarily correlate with equity in resources. Even with the government's recent "pro-poor" funding policy, (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Sayed & Motala, 2009), inequalities in resources between formerly White-only schools and township schools persist.

One may ask, why do educational resource inequalities persist when funding has increased for all schools? Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that inequalities are not eliminated just because money has been added. She stated that the deficit is so great that equalizing funding is not sufficient to make resources in schools equal. Clearly, as I have shown in the historical context, township schools have accrued an enormous education debt which needs to be addressed if resource disparities are to be eliminated or even mitigated.

In the South African context, wealthy suburban schools can obtain additional local funding that schools in poor communities cannot (Motala, 2006). Formerly White-only schools normally charge high school fees that White parents can afford to pay but most poor parents cannot (Ndimande, 2006). In addition, they can organize massive fund-raising drives, where wealthy parents donate funds and other school materials, such as computers, printers, laboratory resources—including sufficient money to allow a school to hire additional teachers to cover areas not adequately covered by the full-time teaching staff. Hence resources in these schools are abundant in comparison to township schools that charge low fees, and most of their students qualify for free tuition (Ndimande, 2006). For instance, some formerly White-only schools in the Gauteng province charged an average of R600.00 in tuition fees compared to the R60.00 tuition fees charged in township schools (Ndimande, 2005). In addition

there are non-tuition costs of participation in these suburban schools - for example, the transportation costs parents have to pay for their children to go to wealthy schools in the suburban areas.[1]

These and other reasons have resulted in public schools that historically served Black children to remain under-resourced, and as a result these schools did not desegregate (Ndimande, 2005). While the government's pro-poor funding policy intended to address these long-standing resource inequalities, this was limited by education policies that promoted parental school choice. Put simply, the school reform policies did not mandate the desegregation of schools, nor did they focus on lack of resources schools in township schools as a priority. Instead, education reform policies encouraged parental choice, a neoliberal policy in education reform. Although the intention of choice was to encourage desegregation, no White parents chose to send their children to township schools (Vally & Dalamba, 1999). According to Pampallis, (2003), approximately 28% of all South African schools were desegregated; most, mainly Black schools, did not desegregate. As Pampallis (2003) stated:

> Most of the schools that remain uniracial are schools catering to Africans in townships, informal settlements, and former homelands, largely because their paucity of resources makes them unappealing" (pp.153).

On the other hand, while some Black parents could afford to participate in school choice, there are many who are unable to do so because of their material conditions. Neoliberal policies in education focus on consumer choice and competition among individuals and schools (Lubienski, 2003). Such policies pay little attention to questions of equal opportunity of parents to choose or of schools to compete because of issues of financial ability or lack thereof. Hence school choice has obscured the difficulties faced by poor parents and by schools with inadequate resources.

Of course, this lack of adequate resources has effects on children. As Bhorat's (2004) study of labor market and unemployment trends in post-apartheid South Africa shows, schools affected by lack of resources tend to produce poor academic results, which drastically diminished graduation rates. According to Bhorat, the drop-out rate is high (47%) among Black South African children who attend inadequately resourced schools. This, in turn, reduces their chances of entering college and lessens their opportunities to enter the skilled and white collar labor market. Even more troubling is the increasing rate of unemployment amongst students from historically Black schools.

In the next section, I use data from my previous research to illustrate how inadequate resources in township schools that serve Black children perpetuate child underperformance and poverty. I situate these inequalities within the broader neoliberal policies that promote school choice instead of fully addressing the problems in Black schools.

Data From My Previous Research

Data from my previous research with Black parents in the Gauteng province of South Africa illustrates school choice policy in that nation.[2] Historically, these parents were mandated to send their children to township schools. With the new political changes, these parents were now given options to choose their children's school. The purpose of the study was to examine the parents' perspectives about school choice policies and the reasons for their choice. Most of the parents I interviewed endorsed school choice policies, because they wanted their children to access schools with better resources so they

could succeed in education. They believed that the success of their children in education would help them escape the poverty of the township. For this review, the data I use here come from working class Black parents who told me they wished to participate in school choice but they were not able to do so because of their financial situation.

Gauteng province is one of the nine provinces of South Africa. South Africa has a population of approximately 51.8 million, and Gauteng is the most populous province, with 12.3 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2011). It is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse provinces; it has mining and manufacturing industries and is a leading commercial and business center in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2011).[3] In fact, in South Africa there is great economic disparity between Black and White communities. According to Statistics South Africa (2014), poverty among Black communities was at 40.3% compared to 0.4 among White communities.

I interviewed a representative sample of parents with diverse socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. I interviewed Black parents who participated in school choice and those who did not; upper middle class Black parents who lived in the suburban areas and those, mostly working-class, who lived in the townships. The sample of parents included a range of educational backgrounds, for example, there were parents who did go to college and parents who did not.

The overall findings showed that parent' choices about their children's education and views of public schools are complex. The findings showed that the issue of insufficient resources in township school is an undeniable reality and is precisely the reason that all parents wished to engage in school choice for the sake of a better education for their children and their future. This was the overarching reason for working class township parents to wish to participate in school choice.

School Choice and Black Parents who live in the Townships

The majority of the parents who live in the townships that I interviewed did not participate in school choice because of their adverse material conditions. Transferring their children to formerly White-only schools in suburban areas costs money, which most of these parents cannot afford to pay. As I discussed in the beginning of this article, the socio-economic conditions in the townships are characterized by social and economic disparities and hardships. Recently, there has been increasing unemployment and the first communities to be affected were the townships (Statistics South Africa, 2014). This phenomenon, of course, is connected to the fact that township schools cannot provide quality education so that the children can have a chance for social mobility.

Of the township parents I interviewed, very few were employed, and very few were in professional careers. The parents' household income was minimal. The majority of those employed worked in factories and/or as domestic servants for White families in the suburban areas. In addition, the high unemployment rate meant most parents could not afford to buy an automobile. Only thirty three percent of the participants in this group owned automobiles, which in itself is a measure of their low socio-economic status.[4] Overall, parents in this group represented the typical township socio-economic situation, which is characterized by overwhelmingly poor living conditions, including a high unemployment rate, at 48%, and a low educational attainment of only 20% with high school diploma.

Table 1

Type of Employment	**Number**	**Percentage**
Teacher	6	15.38%
Factory Worker	4	10.26%
Domestic Worker	3	7.69%
Unemployment	19	48.72%
Other	7	17.95%
TOTAL	39	100.00%

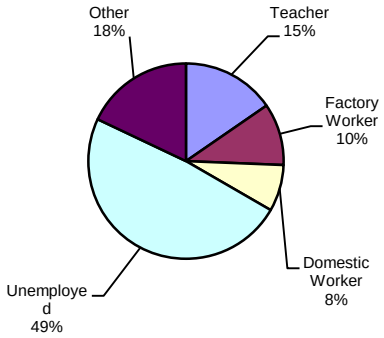

Table 1. Employment of township parents interviewed.

Table 2

Educational Level	**Number**	**Percentage**
University Degree	1	2.56%
Teacher Training Diploma	2	5.13%
High School Diploma	8	20.51%
Secondary Education	16	41.03%
Elementary Education	12	30.77%
Total	39	100.00%

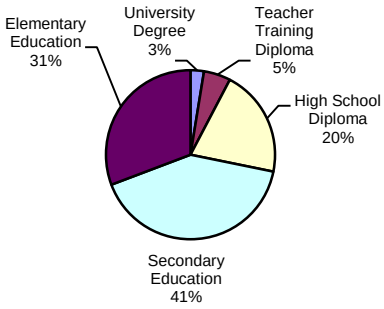

Table 2. Educational attainment of township parents interviewed.

Table 3

Car Owners	**Number**	**Percentage**
Own Car	13	33.33%
No Car	26	66.67%
Total	39	100.00%

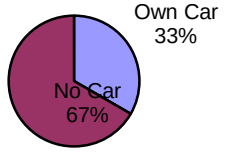

Table 3. Car ownership among township parents interviewed.

Here is a representative sample of the most important things they said.

Mama Nontokozo,[5] was born in the township and has three children enrolled in a township school. She said she was not able to engage in school choice because of her financial constraints. She complained about the problem of resources in township schools:

> *We [in township schools] don't have resources--we don't have computers. We need resources so that we don't have to wish to send our children to formerly White-only schools.*

Mama Tsidi, who also has 2 children who attend township schools, said:

> *[One] thing that I noticed is the lack of a feeding scheme [in our township schools]. [I know that] children study well on a full stomach and they get motivated to go to school because they know they will get food, too...There are no such facilities for feeding schemes in township schools.*[6]

Mama Sindiswa said:

> *There is no transportation for children who live far from schools, especially in bad weather. [Because of the lack of transportation] small children may be subjected to abuse, especially those who live in far-away sections [of the township].*

Some parents said they could not participate in school choice. Mama Zodwa, an unemployed working class mother, is one of them. This is what she said:

> *We do not have money to afford formerly White-only schools. We are unemployed, that's the reason we do not send our children to formerly White-only schools in the suburban areas.*

Baba Dube, one of the few fathers in the interviews, has 3 children and has been unemployed for many years. He said he lost his job when most companies left South Africa just before independence in 1994. He said:

> *Yes, we wish we could send our children to formerly White-only schools too, but only if we can get jobs and the money.*

Mama Vuyisile agrees. She is one of the few parents who is employed but says her salary is so meager that she cannot afford the cost of transferring her children to schools outside the township:

> *It is the same with me, I agree with this brother here, my neighbor. The expenses of sending children to formerly White-only schools are too high for people like us who get less than R2000 a month.*[7] *We don't have the [financial] power to do that. We could be happy if they [the government] can devise plans so that we, too, could send our children to formerly White-only schools.*

Mama Nandi, like most of her neighbors, is unemployed. She echoes others:

> *I would like to send my children to formerly White-only schools, but I don't have the money, I am unemployed...Formerly White-only schools have a much-improved education [because of resources]; it is just the money problem on my part. Otherwise I would transfer my children to formerly White-only schools. ... [These] schools are very expensive...There is no work and no money...[the] economy is bad...[Even] if I had money for school fees [meaning tuition], I wouldn't be able to afford money for transportation.*

Mama Monki, who is employed at a local grocery store where she earns a meager salary to supplement her husband's income, said:

> *I don't like the school where my child is currently enrolled—a township school. It is just because I don't have the money to*

send my son to a formerly White-only school.

When I asked parents if somebody were to give them money, would they consider sending their children to formerly White-only schools, Mama Sego said:

> *"We would be very happy if we can get the money to send our children to formerly White-only schools. I would transfer my kids to a formerly White-only school the next day."* Mama Mapule, who has been sitting quietly in the group said: *"Ohh yeah, if I had money, I would definitely send my children to a formerly White-only school."*

However, there were also parents who, albeit wishing their children to go to formerly White-only schools if they were to get the money, were also critical of biases in formerly White-only schools, including cultural biases. This what Mama Viki said:

> *I would like to send them [my children] there, but I don't have the money. But also I am ambivalent about sending them to formerly White-only schools because if you send them there, they might lose [our] culture.*

Some parents said that the uneven resource availability between White and Black public schools needs to be addressed. Mama Thoko said:

> *I would like to send them there, but I am also wondering why can't they [the government] bring better education here in the township, too".*

Mama Nozipho shared the same sentiments:

> *I would like township schools to match up the level of schools in town [meaning suburban areas]. Curriculum 2005 is a promise so we might level up things. Then there won't be any reason to transfer children to formerly White-only schools.*

Discussion

It is clear from the statements of the parents that a major issue that impedes the education of their children is the lack of sufficient resources in Black schools. Their narratives help us to see the contradictions in policies that were meant to ameliorate education inequalities. They show that school choice as a policy does not help their children out of the inequalities and poverty that was inflicted upon them by the apartheid system. School choice is a problematic neoliberal policy that does not address the larger and deeper problems of poverty and social inequalities among the dispossessed groups.

I now contextualize the parents' narratives within three inter-related neoliberal functions that affect education reform in South Africa and in other countries. The first context is the international trends in politics that influence neoliberal social policies. The second, is the role of neoliberal policies in post-apartheid South Africa and the influence of school choice on education. In the third, I discuss the underlying philosophies that undergird school choice policies and how they impede democratic reforms and their effect on marginalized and poor communities.

International Trends in Education Reforms

To understand the South African education reform policies, one must situate the discussion within emerging trends in international politics. South Africa is not immune to international contexts; some of our educational reforms and curriculum policies after 1994 - for example, the outcomes based education curriculum—were largely due to the influence of countries such the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand (Jansen, 1999). In addition, the Department of Education relied heavily on

overseas consultants to guide education policy reforms. As Jansen (2002, p. 204) noted:

> The role of American William G. Spady cannot be underestimated in providing to the Department of Education a neat and elegant language for making the consumption of OBE accessible to practitioners. Overseas consultants played a crucial role in developing options for the financing of public education. The role of international consultants is particularly revealing of how international specialists come to influence local policy. Christopher Colclough and Paul Bennell were the two influential finance specialists influencing school funding policy.[8]

Hence, some parts of the educational reforms were very much associated with and influenced by the international discourses of economy, race, culture, gender, class, and politics.

The economic front in South Africa is associated with global economic institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with goals related to "assimilation" to the global economic culture, rather than policies that address local economic problems within the local contexts. In fact, Giroux (2008) pointed to even harsher realities of the impact of the WB and IMF on other nations, particularly poor nations:

> The restrictions that the IMF and World Bank impose on countries as a condition for granting loans not only impose capitalist values, they also undermine the very possibility of an inclusive and substantive democracy (p. 4).

In the South African context, Devan Pillay (2002) lamented the following:

> The [South African] government has to please a range of interests, including its working-class mass base, the emerging Black elite, predominantly White big business and its allies, and the global investment community. Like other center-left parties, the ANC [African National Congress] has found it difficult to avoid the allure of the global economy, and the logic that all economic and social policy has to be subordinated to the need to attract foreign investment to build the economy (p. 24).

Brock-Utne (2000) criticized the policies of the World Bank and the IMF in the Global South.[9] She argued that the Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) introduced in these countries have done more harm than good. Both the WB and the IMF supported and promoted the ESAP. Brock-Utne (2000) argued that the ESAP has been presented as a medicine to African countries' problems, not as the cause of the problem. We [the people of poor countries] are always told that the ESAP were for the best economic growth in African countries. We are also told that the ESAP are intended to enhance export growth and subsequently the growth of the entire nation. Yet it is also important to remember that the 21st century socio-economic problems of the Global South do not exist in a socio-political vacuum. They are connected to the history of colonialism and imperialism of the past centuries.[10]

Neoliberal Social Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa

A question needs to be asked: How is it possible that a nation like South Africa, just emerging from apartheid, associates itself with neoliberal ideologies in its reform policies? Bond (2005) argued that even before the dismantling of apartheid, the South African economic landscape had drastically shifted from what he referred to as a popular-nationalist, anti-apartheid project, toward the global economic framework largely influenced by the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund.[11] This economic shift subsequently influenced the country's social policy toward neo-liberalism (Bond, 2005; Desai, 2002; Garson, 2002; Gumede, 2005; Monbiot, 2004; Pillay, 2002). For instance, at the initial stages of the democratic government in 1996, post-apartheid South Africa adopted a neoliberal policy called Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) as the country's economic policy. According to Gumede (2005), this policy recommended the complete privatization of non-essential state owned corporations. This exacerbated the economic hardship of most marginalized and poor people, especially those living in the townships. For instance, when water was privatized, the effects were soon felt when the water rate was increased in the township of Soweto (Garson, 2002; Monbiot, 2004). Water supply was cut off for most of the residents whose bills were not paid. Although this economic policy was reformed in 2005 and renamed the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative South Africa (ASGISA), the underlying tenets of neoliberalism are still its guiding principles.

The effects of neoliberal ideology on social policy were soon noticed in education as well. In an article titled "*The education business: Private contractors in public education*," Pampallis (2004) pointed to the White Paper of 1987, which allowed the government to engage external educational agencies to undertake tasks previously performed by the National Education Department. Although in 1987 this outsourcing of government responsibility was on a small scale, the role of non-governmental agencies to provide service in the education sector increased after 1994. As John Pampallis (2004) stated:

> After 1994—for reasons different to those put forward in the 1987 White Paper...government increasingly engaged external educational agencies to undertake a growing range of tasks previously conducted by the education department or not done at all. These agencies included a variety of education NGOs...parastatal organisations such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a growing number of new for-profit educational consultancies, individuals operating as educational contractors and university academics. They also included large multinational consultancy companies...contracts are usually given through the process of competitive tender which treat the various agencies on a more or less equal basis (p. 422).

The issue of school choice and the insufficient resources in poor schools should be viewed within this public/private nexus.

The main agenda of neoliberalism is the privatization and marketing of the public sphere so that individuals must compete for their own social mobility and success (Apple, 2001; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1994; Chomsky, 1999; McChesney, 1999; Lauder & Hughes, 1999; Whitty, Power; & Halpin, 1998). It is claimed individuals will be rewarded according to their ability (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) to compete in the "free and neutral" terrain called the market.

This theory dates back to the writings of theorists and philosophers such as John Lock and Adam Smith, who argued that the market forces will bring prosperity, liberty, and democracy, if unfettered by government intervention (Chomski, 1999; Eitzen & Zinn, 2012; Giroux, 2008). As Giroux (2008), argued, the neoliberal ideology allows a handful of private interests to control much of the life possibilities of those who are socially marginalized. Neoliberalism does not consider the unequal social field of power in which this competition takes place. Nor does it recognize

the historical social exclusions by which the marginalized groups have been disadvantaged. In fact, McChesney (1999) argued that neoliberalism across the world is opposed to participatory democracy, and helps to create individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless.

For neoliberals, as pointed out by Apple (2001), "Public institutions such as schools are "black holes" into which money is poured—and then seemingly disappears—but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results" (p.38). Such ideologies put lots of pressure on institutions supported by public funds, calling for reductions of support for the common good.

The Politics of School Choice

Milton Friedman, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, published an influential essay in 1955 in which he argued that, in order to improve public education, government should not be involved in the running of the schools. Instead, the government should only provide funding for education and then allow private agencies to run the schools. Friedman's ideas became popular and have since influenced a number of policy makers and some parts of government.[12] Chubb and Moe (1990) have advanced similar arguments. Like Friedman, Chubb and Moe believe that public schools could be run efficiently if handed over to private agencies. They argue that public schools lack strong organizational structures, which is the result of government intervention and people in government who profit from public schools. For the proponents of this discourse, providing school choice to parents is the best way to access better education, where children and parents can become consumers in the education market.

As a result of this influence, school choice is rapidly expanding as an education policy to reform public schools in many nations around the world. See, for instance, Espínola (1993) for school choice policies in Chile; Ndimande, (2005, 2006); Pampallis, (2003) in South Africa; Corwin and Schneider, (2005); Lipman, 2011, 2013; Lubienski, (2001; 2003); Miron, et al (2012) in the United States; Lauder and Hughes (1999) in the United Kingdom; Whitty, Power, and Halpin, (1998); in England, Wales, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand; Windle, (2013) in Australia; and Yoon (2013) in Canada. While this policy is growing in many nations, it is also criticized for its contradictions that (re)produce education inequalities. Miron and Welner (2012) stated the following:

> The allure of school choice is, in part, ideological. But the allure is also linked to a very real problem: there exists tremendous variation among neighborhood schools in terms of quality and resources, and access to those neighborhood schools depends on wealth. Lower wealthy families are less able to purchase a residence in the catchment (enrollment) area of high resource, high quality neighborhood schools. Breaking the link between residence and school assignment would seem a logical way of addressing this problem. p1.

Proponents of school choice, on the other hand, argue that choice will give parents control (in terms of decisions) over particular schools to the benefit of their children's education (Chubb & Moe, 1990). They claim that, in contrast to the traditional public schools where elected politicians have control over education policies, parental control in the form of market-driven schools will make the education system successful.[13] This neoliberal agenda for education reform has paved the way for the establishment of private charter schools in the U.S. (i.e., for-profit schools) and public charter schools (i.e., supported by public funds) to compete with traditional public schools (Sarason, 1998).

School choice proponents believe that a market-oriented approach will benefit schools and reward parents who could compete "on the level playing field" in which the choice system should operate. This includes competition between schools through national testing systems, national curriculum standards, and the relaxation of certification requirements for teachers (Ball, S. J., Bowe, R.; & Gewirtz, 1994; Lauder & Hughes; McNeil, 2000; Zeichner & Ndimande, 2008).

However, Lubienski and Ndimande (2014) offer a counter argument. They argue that school choice and competition are not effective remedies for the intractable social and educational challenges in the 21st century, over which parents have little control. Lubienski and Ndimande argue that nations with a history of deep-seated institutionalized racial divisions and social inequalities, have seen such policies operate in both intended and unintended ways. School choice takes away the support for the common good and replaces it with competition to get into better schools. Since school choice is a competition, it ultimately protects the interests of the wealthy communities and neglects the poor; as is evident in this context where the most affected schools are those that serve Black children in township schools.

The notion that public education is bad and private is good has been challenged. In the U.S., for instance, research shows very little evidence that school choice or charter schools increase students' educational outcomes, including the positive social effects of alternative education. In fact, evidence shows the opposite. Lubienski and Lubienski's (2014) study shows that public schools actually do better than private and/or charter schools. Further, they provide valid criticisms regarding the ability of schools of choice to engineer their criteria for admission, which can have the effect of excluding children by social class, ethnicity or various special needs, and by poverty. Social inequalities can be reproduced through such school admission policies.

Conclusion

According to Chomsky (1999), "Neoliberal doctrines, whatever one thinks of them, undermine education and health, increase inequality, and reduce labor's share in income" (p.32). Statistics for South Africa (2014) reports that the relationship between population group and poverty levels is strong, with more than half (54%) of Black South Africans living in poverty. This can [re] produce poor living conditions for township communities. As I have shown in this article, such poverty-producing conditions are exacerbated by the lack of adequate resources in township schools. Although I am critical of the school choice policies that have marginalized the poor people of South Africa, I also want to point out the glimmer of hope in this new democracy. Reversing long standing policies of racial discrimination that have brought poverty to more than half of the population is a daunting task. Although the school choice policy has resulted in unintended inequalities, there are also policies that have been successful in ameliorating inequalities. For example, the Children's Rights Act of 2008, which has brought back the rights of township children and families that were denied in the past, particularly the rights for provision (Swadener & Ndimande, 2014).

The effort to desegregate schools was a partial victory in the struggle toward equal educational opportunities. But it was susceptible to subtle hegemonic tendencies. Apple reminds us (2003) that the processes of discursive and social disarticulation and re-articulation of power - partial victories like the desegregation of public schools - can be pulled back so that their critical potential gets lost. The creation of the "common sense" around markets and individual success can work in retrogressive ways in which social inequalities are (re) produced, as school

choice seems to be producing an unintended result in South Africa.[14]

Notes

1. I want to thank Jonathan Jansen who brought this point to my attention.
2. For a detailed discussion of Black parents and school choice in post-apartheid South Africa, see Ndimande (2005).
3. The (Johannesburg) *Sunday Times Metro* newspaper (March 2, 2003) reported a massive influx of families with their children from other parts of the country to Gauteng province in search of better economic opportunities. Most of these families settled in the township areas. In spite of Gauteng being the center of business and industrial manufacturing, the township areas where Black people live experience high rates of poverty and unemployment.
4. See Tables 4, 5, and 6 for specific statistics. All these statistics are of self-report.
5. All names are pseudonyms
6. Although, recently township schools in South Africa have started to receive public school feeding schemes under the National School Nutrition Program. See Weaver-Hightower & Robert (2011)
7. The currency exchange rate between the US$ and the South African Rand (ZAR) is approximately 1 USD=R13.97 in September 2015.
8. I am very appreciative of the immense contributions by international researchers and scholars toward the improvement of socio-economic and educational conditions in South Africa and in other Sub-Saharan countries. I am simply raising a point of how the international context and influence has also played a role in shaping local social policy.
9. According to the Center for Global South at the American University, the Global South includes the nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia. These are nations who are prone to political, social, and economic challenges, including poverty. Accessed, June 6, 2015: http://www1.american.edu/academic.depts/acainst/cgs/about.html
10. Walter Rodney's (1972) discussion of this phenomenon is helpful in understanding this socio-political and economic history of the Global South.
11. Bond (2005) in particular, provides a historical and insightful analysis of these economic policy changes from apartheid to democracy, especially the introductory chapter, *Dissecting South Africa's Transition*.
12. See Pauline Lipman' (2011; 2013) s in-depth account on how Chicago public schools were shut down to open way for charter and private schools
13. Unlike in the United States, school choice in post-apartheid South Africa was largely a movement from poor township public school to wealthy suburban schools, which I call formerly White-only public schools. Choice did not, however, preclude the movement from public to private schools (Independent Schools in South Africa) especially by White parents.
14. I would like to thank Michael Parsons, for the critical comments in this article as well as the helpful suggestions and edits. I also thank my colleagues, Zaid Haddad and Tim Yuen, for helping me with the paper format. I am also grateful for the comments from the editors of *Global Education Review*, Mel Wermuth, Ann Allen, and Marytza Gawlik.

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