WHY CLASS MATTERS: RACE AND CLASS IN ADULT EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the role of class in adult education practice and research in South Africa under apartheid and in the post-apartheid era. Historically adult education was orientated towards the black working-class and to oppressed black communities more generally. In the post-apartheid era, oppositional currents in adult education have continued but have shifted focus to inequalities and oppressions other than class such as race and gender. Much of the adult education literature displays a reluctance to engage explicitly with the concept of class and in many cases, class has been dislodged as the primary category of analysis. The article reviews recent sociological debates on race and class and argues that these are relevant for adult education as a field of practice and research. The article argues that class continues to 'matter' if adult education is to realise its potential to contribute to socialist transformation.

KEY WORDS

South Africa; working-class; radical adult education; social transformation; social reproduction; social theory.

SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 01,

2024, PP 13-36

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.30666

Porque é que a Classe é Importante: Raça e Classe na Educação de Adultos na África do Sul

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RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o papel do conceito de classe nas práticas e na pesquisa em educação de adultos na África do Sul sob o apartheid e na era pós-apartheid. Historicamente, a educação de adultos dirigiu-se à classe trabalhadora negra e às comunidades negras oprimidas em geral. Na era pós-apartheid, as correntes de resistência na educação de adultos mantiveram-se, mas mudaram o foco para as desigualdades e opressões para além da classe social, como no caso da raça e do género. Grande parte da literatura sobre educação de adultos mostra relutância em abordar o conceito de classe e, em muitos casos, a classe já não é a principal categoria de análise. O artigo discute os recentes debates sociológicos sobre raça e classe e argumenta que eles são relevantes para a educação de adultos como um campo de práticas e de investigação. O artigo argumenta que a classe continua a "importar" se a educação de adultos concretizar o seu potencial de contribuir para a transformação socialista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

África do Sul; classe operária; educação radical de adultos; transformação social; reprodução social; teoria social.

SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 01,

2024, PP 13-36

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Por Qué importa la Clase: Raza y Clase en la Educación de Adultos en Sudáfrica

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RESUMEN

Este artículo revisa el papel de la "clase" en la práctica y la investigación de la educación de adultos en Sudáfrica bajo el apartheid y en la era posterior al apartheid. Históricamente, la educación de adultos estuvo orientada hacia la clase trabajadora negra y, en general, hacia las comunidades negras oprimidas. En la era posterior al apartheid, las corrientes de oposición en la educación de adultos continuaron, pero cambiaron el enfoque hacia las desigualdades y opresiones distintas de la clase, como la raza y el género. Gran parte de la literatura sobre educación de adultos muestra renuencia a comprometerse explícitamente con el concepto de clase y, en muchos casos, la clase ha sido desplazada como categoría principal de análisis. El artículo revisa los debates sociológicos recientes sobre raza y clase y argumenta que estos son relevantes para la educación de adultos como campo de práctica e investigación. El artículo argumenta que la clase sigue "importando" si se quiere que la educación de adultos se dé cuenta de su potencial para contribuir a la transformación socialista.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sudáfrica; clase obrera; educación radical de adultos; transformación social; reproducción social; teoría social.

SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 01,

2024, PP 13-36

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25749/sis.30666

Why Class Matters: Race and Class in Adult Education in South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

This article reviews the role of class in adult education practice and research writing in South Africa during both the apartheid and the post-apartheid eras. It shows that historically and particularly under apartheid, a large part of South African adult education practice and research took a position in opposition to colonialism and apartheid. At various points in history and in different ways, adult educators saw themselves as change agents in challenging and transforming the racist, oppressive and exploitative social system that had entrenched itself in South Africa by the 20th century. In adopting this oppositional role, adult education as a field was historically orientated towards the black working-class and to oppressed black communities more generally. Race often served as a proxy for class, but equally, adult education initiatives and the writings on adult education were frequently guided by an explicit class perspective.

In the post-apartheid era oppositional currents in adult education practice and research have continued but have shifted focus to inequalities and oppressions other than class including racism and coloniality in education, gender oppression and the impact of the environmental crisis. In many cases, class has been dislodged as the primary category of analysis. In the research literature, a serious conceptual engagement with the notion of class – how class intersects with race, gender and other forms of oppression and how education often serves to reproduce these social inequalities – has not always been evident, nor its implications for theory and practice fully explored. This is despite the existence of longstanding debates in the sociological literature around how to theorise the shifting articulation between race and class in the South African context.

The article reviews recent theoretical debates in the international and South African sociological literature on class, its intersections with notions of race and gender and analyses of the changing face of social inequality. We put forward an argument as to why class 'matters': why it is important that adult education practitioners and researchers pay attention to analysing class and its relationship with other social categories such as race or gender, and that we critically acknowledge not only the transformative power but also the social reproductive power of education. We conclude by arguing that if we are to successfully challenge the devastating path on which global capitalism has set humanity, class still 'matters' and that as adult educators we need to reassert class at the centre of our intellectual work and practice.

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HISTORICAL PRACTICES AND STUDIES OF CLASS AND ADULT EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

As noted above, historically a large part of South African adult education practice and research adopted a radical educational approach in opposition to colonialism and apartheid. This radical tradition will be considered by focusing on four major educational currents: left wing party education, the Black Consciousness Movement, workers' education and community education.

LEFT WING PARTY-POLITICAL ADULT EDUCATION

The literature on the early history of radical adult education in South Africa shows that it was the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) that developed the earliest educational challenge to the ruling racist ideology and cheap labour system in South Africa.

Adrienne Bird (1984) recounts how the discoveries of gold and diamonds in South Africa in the late 19th century saw an influx of skilled artisans from Britain and British colonies, bringing with them traditions of exclusionary craft unionism. In the early 20th century, they fought a series of bitter battles with mine owners aimed at resisting attempts to circumvent artisanal bargaining power by employing larger numbers of black, semi-skilled workers. A major strike by white workers in 1922 was brutally suppressed, but in its aftermath, legislation was passed to protect white workers' exclusive access to skilled work while at the same time institutionalising and bureaucratising their trade unions. From the outset of industrialisation in South Africa therefore, a defensive, racial consciousness on the part of white workers excluded them from becoming part of broader working-class struggles against apartheid and capitalism.

Bird's (1984) research foregrounds the role of the CPSA in the night school movement that emerged alongside the growth of the African working-class. She shows how some white workers, influenced by left-wing socialist ideas, broke away from the established South African Labour Party in order to focus their energies on organising and conscientizing black workers. They initially formed the International Socialist League and then, in 1921, the CPSA. Through the establishment of night schools, the CPSA attempted to recruit and systematically train black working-class leaders. Very little is known about the curriculum and pedagogy of the party schools other than a brief description by the activist and adult educationalist, Edward Roux: "We taught reading, writing and simple arithmetic and held occasional lectures and debates on general topics of working-class interest" (cited in Bird, 1984, p. 196). It was from such schools that some outstanding trade union leaders such as Moses Kotane and Gana Makabeni later emerged. The early successes of the Party in promoting class consciousness amongst black workers were hampered by internal conflicts and Stalinist-led purges in the early 1930s, but Lucy Alexander's (1989) biographical research on Roux shows that even after being expelled from the CPSA, he continued to offer black workers political education through a workers' newspaper and nights schools in Cape Town.

There is a gap in the historical research literature on adult education coinciding with the period of the 1950s and 1960s, when major black political organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-African Congress (PAC) and the CPSA, and trade unionists affiliated to the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU)

were banned and retreated into exile[2]. With the re-emergence of organisations linked to the Black Consciousness Movement in the mid- to late 1960s, the mushrooming of a new, independent trade union movement in the 1970s and the growth in broader community struggles against apartheid in the 1980s, so the historical research on adult education was reignited. The field of adult education in South Africa has often been the terrain of ideological contestation over whose interests and whose vision would determine and guide the building of a future society. These three movements – while all committed to bringing an end to apartheid in South Africa – held different ideas on what basis the unity and solidarity needed to achieve this end, should be built.

THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

There is a significant body of research on the role of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in bringing the philosophy and practices of Paulo Freire into adult education in South Africa via the establishment of adult literacy programmes (Naidoo, 2016; Nekhwevha, 2002; Vally et al., 2013). Freire's broad categories of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' dovetailed well with the BCM's prime concern with the liberation of the black oppressed majority in South Africa. Freire's emphasis on the necessity of overcoming the 'domesticating' psychological effects of racial oppression spoke to the BCM's belief in the necessity for black people to liberate themselves psychologically from internalised racist notions of white superiority as a pre-requisite for broader, national liberation. Both drew on the concept of developing critical consciousness to create the agency necessary to act upon and change the world.

It is clear from the writings of the Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, that the ideology of BCM foregrounded race or black identity rather than class as the basis for the development of active resistance to the apartheid state. Some biographers of Biko such as Mangcu (2017) have argued that Biko was critical of Marxism on account of its 'rationalist epistemology' and for ignoring the psycho-cultural dimensions of black people's historical experiences. Others however, including the leading educational theorist, Neville Alexander, argue that by 1976, the BCM had come to recognise class interests, rejected capitalism and adopted an anti-imperialist stance (cited in Motala & Vally, 2017, p. 139). Becker (2018) too maintains that Biko's ideas shifted in the years just prior to his 1977 murder by apartheid police, and that there was significant cross fertilisation of ideas between Biko and his contemporary, Rick Turner (assassinated only four months after Biko's murder), whose anti-capitalist notion of participatory democracy strongly influenced the re-emerging black trade union movement in the 1970s. It has been argued that similarly to the American black civil rights activists who gravitated towards class politics in the 1960s, the induction of the graduates of the 1976 student uprisings into the workplace exposed them more directly to the class dimension of national oppression beyond the racial experiences of school and township and pushed them closer to a Marxist political trajectory.

[2] There is evidence however of continued political education into the 1950s and 1960s under the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) (Drew, 2023).

RADICAL WORKERS' EDUCATION

In early 1973, a wave of strikes in Natal marked the resurgence of the non-racial trade union movement that had been suppressed in the 1950s and 1960s. In the aftermath of these strikes the unions that established themselves and that grew throughout the 1970s developed an increasingly coherent and self-confident working-class view of the world. Even so, there were significant ideological differences and contestations over how, and on what basis working-class solidarity was to be built.

There is a wide body of literature on the history of the workers' education initiatives that developed alongside the labour movement in the 1970s and 1980s and thereafter (Andrews, 2003; Cooper, 2020; Cooper & Hamilton, 2019; Ginsberg, 1997; Maree, 1985; Seftel, 1983; Vally, 1994). It was on this terrain that some important ideological contestations were fought out. Some saw the role of workers' education as developing the political consciousness of workers in order to counter the danger of trade union 'economism'; others saw its role as providing a broad, general education to black workers who had never had access to education opportunities; yet others argued that workers education should prioritise building factory-floor leadership and be tightly linked to organisation building (see Cooper et al., 2002, pp. 115-116 for more detail). It was the last position that ultimately became dominant within the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), the largest grouping of unions by the end of the 1970s.

In contrast to the Black Consciousness-aligned trade union federation of that time (Congress of Unions of South Africa - CUSA), FOSATU was explicitly committed to a class politics. Its leadership (largely white, intellectuals in the earlier stages of its development) had been influenced by a new generation of 'revisionist' historians who – in contrast to earlier, liberal historians – adopted a class analysis which argued that apartheid was functional to capitalist accumulation. FOSATU's emphasis was on developing the organising and negotiating skills of a layer of shop-floor worker leaders and as a result of this, the federation was accused by some of being syndicalist (it was labelled 'workerist' at the time), as opposing a political role for trade unions and being focused exclusively on factory-floor issues. However, Byrne's (2014) study of FOSATU concludes that the ideological underpinnings of FOSATU's education programmes were essentially Marxist in orientation. She argues that its foregrounding of class was aimed at challenging the prevalence of Black Consciousness ideas as well as the growing support for the ANC which it saw as privileging nationalism over class. Byrne argues that FOSATU viewed trade union organisation and education as a catalyst for the development of working-class consciousness; its position was that apartheid capitalism could only be challenged via workers' power and that power could only be built from the 'bottom up' through workers' control and worker democracy.

By the early 1980s, FOSATU and other trade union leaders and activists were beginning to play an increasingly influential role in the rise of mass, community struggles across South Africa and in shaping the ideological orientation of these struggles. Trade unionists brought to community organisations the traditions of participatory democracy, accountability, working-class leadership and mass action as well as a critique of capitalism and a growing vision of a transformed socialist society. At its 1982 congress, FOSATU made an explicit bid to assert its political role through a call for the establishment of a Workers' Party:

> Workers need their own organisation to counter the growing power of capital and to further protect their own interests in the wider society. However, it is only workers who

> can build this organisation, and in doing this they have to be clear on what they are doing… This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters. (cited in Callinicos, 1988, p. 95)

A series of articles in the FOSATU newspaper *FOSATU News* on the birth of the Workers' Party of Brazil and Solidarity in Poland helped to popularise the idea of struggling for a similar development in South Africa. This thinking was seen as a challenge to the political leadership of the ANC, SACP and SACTU and elicited strong criticism[3] .

After FOSATU merged with other groupings to establish a giant new federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985, the political intent of workers' education became even more strongly identified as being a socialist alternative to apartheid capitalism. At COSATU's first national education conference, its General Secretary argued that worker education (in opposition to bourgeois education) should:

> build worker control, collective experience and understanding, deepening working-class consciousness. Education should ensure fullest discussion amongst workers thus building democracy. Education is a weapon for shaping mass struggles of the present and the future of our class. (COSATU, 1986 cited in Cooper et al., 2002, p. 122)

Further below, we explain how the South African Communist Party's (SACP)[4] two stage theory of revolution was presented as a bridge to socialism, temporarily foreclosing the immediate possibility of the emergence of a workers' party. By the late 1980s the radical, explicitly Marxist and socialist orientation of workers' education was already being overtaken by a very different politics. Negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid regime and decisions taken from above to accommodate the interests of the predominantly white capitalist class would ultimately succeed in substantial muting of this ideological orientation in the mainstream politics of the post-1994 democratic era. However, the idea of an independent working-class ideology never disappeared; it was only temporarily suppressed, as can be seen by renewed calls to establish a workers' party following recent divisions and realignments within the labour movement in the third decade of democracy.

Before turning to these post-apartheid developments, some attention needs to be given to the growth of popular education struggles and the vision of 'People's Education' which gained popularity amongst working-class communities in the 1980s.

MASS COMMUNITY STRUGGLES AND PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

> From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the concept of People's Education (PE) captured the imagination of many South Africans… [it] promised liberation from the effects of unequal and disabling education system and was seen as providing the basis for a future

[3] In response to the speech at the FOSATU 1982 Congress calling for the establishment of a Workers' Party, the ANC, SACTU and the Communist Party attacked FOSATU leaders for 'being divisive' and warned that it would sow confusion and division if it "set up a new workers movement in competition with or alongside the still living Communist Party" (Callinicos, 1988, p. 76).

[4] The CPSA changed its name to the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1953, after it had been banned in 1950 and forced underground.

education system in a democratic South Africa. (Motala & Vally, 2002, p. 174, cited in Cooper & Luckett, 2017, p. 21)

'People's Education for People's Power' emerged out of the school boycott movement and education crisis of the 1980s. The period between 1982 and 1984 was a period of popular insurrection, with massive stayaways organised by the trade union movement and civic associations and with calls by the United Democratic Front (UDF) to 'make South Africa ungovernable'. Under the UDF slogan 'liberation first, education later', the school boycott became a key element of this struggle (Motala & Vally, 2002, p. 180). In response to the widespread boycotts, a National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) was established to bring together students, parents and teachers to address the education crisis, and it was in this context that the notion of 'People's Education for People's Power' began to be popularised.

People's Education was a deliberate attempt to move away from reactive protests around education to develop a counter-hegemonic education strategy that might also contribute to laying a basis for a future, post-apartheid South Africa (Kruss, 1988). The NECC urged students to return to school and to use the spaces offered to build alternative governance structures and curriculum. Influenced by ideas from within the trade union movement, emphasis was placed on democratic control of education by students and parents and representative structures in the community were set up to review curriculum and pedagogic practices and promote the development of alternative teaching materials.

This People's Education Movement reflected the political ideology and practices that had come to dominate and guide the mass anti-apartheid movement by the mid-1980s in South Africa: non-racialism, radical democracy, supporting the broad, social democratic demands of the Freedom Charter, and building a broad, cross-class popular front to bring a final end to apartheid. However, in building this broad-based front, class was backgrounded and 'alliances' were foregrounded. While People's Education represented a radical democratic vision of a future education system, its populist orientation was a harbinger of the tripartite politics that would come to dominate the new, post-apartheid state led by the ANC in conjunction with its alliance partners, the SACP and COSATU.

POST-APARTHEID ADULT EDUCATION PRACTICE AND RESEARCH – BACKGROUNDING OF CLASS

This article has given considerable space to the history of South Africa adult education under apartheid where a major portion of this practice – and research writing on these practices – was oppositional in character. It has done so in order to show that in adult education practice and research, issues of class were prominent, particularly in traditions of radical workers' education. In the case of the Black Consciousness Movement and the movement for People's Education, class was backgrounded in favour of notions of 'black identity' and 'the people' respectively, but these movements were nevertheless based in and driven forward by black working-class communities.

The transition to democracy in South Africa needs to be understood as taking place at a particular moment in world history. Internationally, the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and its satellites disoriented working-class representatives in labour

movements and political parties. Among many on the left, it led to an outright rejection of Marxism as the theoretical expression of the ideas of socialism (Boughton, 2006). Trade unions, as one of the key organisations representing the interest of the working-class, seemed no longer anchored by a vision of an alternative socialist society. According to Taaffe (2015, p. 27) the "discrediting of socialism represent(ed) a major ideological and political defeat for the working-class" and with this defeat, the notion that 'there is no alternative' led to little resistance to the neoliberal restructuring of the global capitalist economy. In academia, postmodernist ideas of which identity politics is an offshoot, gained traction. Postmodernism's emphasis on knowledge and culture understated their roots in the material conditions of capitalism. It was against this backdrop that the political settlement leading to South Africa's transition to democracy was reached. Barely two years into the new democratic dispensation the ruling ANC adopted the neoliberal GEAR policy in 1996 that was to introduce privatisation, outsourcing and austerity measures that prioritised paying off South Africa's debt over social spending and investment in public infrastructure.

In the post-apartheid era, new forms of oppositional adult education practice and a new body of critical research have emerged. The latter includes studies of popular education practices in community struggles and social movements, accounts of the resurgence of university students' and women's struggles, concerns around the urgent need for education around environmental issues, critiques of state adult education policies and attempts to reclaim radical traditions of workers' education. Each of the historical traditions traced earlier have continued in one form or another, but in many of these initiatives and associated research, class as a specialised concept and tool of analysis has been further backgrounded.

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND STUDENT PROTESTS

Between 2015 – 2016 there was an explosion of student protests across South African universities which popularly became known as the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement. The thrust of the #FMF protests was against a hike in student fees as well as the incremental privatisation of university education.

While protests against financial and academic exclusion had become an annual ritual at the historically disadvantaged institutions of higher learning, #FeesMustFall was the first protest that drew in students from historically advantaged institutions, facilitating the building of a united student movement. Furthermore while the #FeesMustFall movement began around financial and academic exclusion of students from primarily working-class backgrounds, on some campuses it also popularised the plight of outsourced workers by promoting an #EndOutsourcing slogan on social media. These mass protests not only defeated the proposed tuition fee hikes but also inspired confidence in workers to continue their struggle with the support of students and academics. Workers won some concessions on insourcing in some institutions (see Hamilton, 2016 for more detail).

However, the major focus of the student protests was that of black identity. Gillespie and Naidoo (2019a, p. 192) describe the protests as "explicitly black student mobilizations against a pervasive anti-African and antiblack higher education landscape". The #FeesMustFall movement also encompassed a critique of the Eurocentrism and 'whiteness' of South African universities and the demand for decolonisation of higher education. #FeesMustFall marked a significant revolt by a new generation of 'born-frees'

against the neo-liberal, post-apartheid South African state. Student activists critiqued the ANC by retrieving the political traditions of the Pan African Congress and Black Consciousness Movement and "through their work on the politics of racial subjectivity, their insistence on blackness as a mode of refusal of the assimilationist project presented to them by the ruling elite" (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019b, p. 226). Students' emerging ideology also asserted the principle of intersectionality which combined black identity politics with feminism and gender politics.

POPULAR EDUCATION, FEMINIST AND ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The Peoples Education movement has continued perhaps most clearly through South Africa's popular education practice and research. A recent collection of articles on Popular Education shows how adult education's historic anti-apartheid focus has shifted to new terrain: peace education, food security, demands for access to state information, local environmental justice, and access to health and treatment (von Kotze & Walters, 2017). Also In recent years and echoing the international literature on social movement learning are a number of research studies which explore the relationship between popular education and South African social movements. These include studies of the Treatment Action Campaign that mobilised communities for free access to HIV/Aids treatment in the 1990s and early 2000s (Endresen & von Kotze, 2005), the movement of shack-dwellers, Abahlali Basemjondolo (Harley, 2012) and Ismail's (2015) case study research on women's agency within the Victoria Mxenge Housing Development Association.

One important strand of oppositional education in South Africa and elsewhere is represented by feminist popular educators who have challenged patriarchy and the 'triple oppression' of working-class black women. While adult education within women's organisations has a long history in South Africa, the theory and practice of feminist adult education really burgeoned from 2000 onwards. Manicom and Walters (2000 and 2012) take up the themes of the feminisation of poverty, critiques of development discourses, structural adjustment programmes and the rise of neo-liberalism, and the role of women in development. Walters and Butterwick study (2017) reflects more strongly the growing influence of intersectionality on feminist thought. This book chapter critically explores how solidarity can be built in the context of multiple oppressions where race, gender, geography, age, language, sexuality and physical ability are no less central than class exploitation.

Feminist adult education has taken an ecological turn in recent years. Walters, von Kotze, O'Neil, Burt, February and Clover (2022) have made a call for adult education to develop 'eco-literacy' through climate justice education. There is an implicit acknowledgement of the class dimensions of the climate crisis and the authors also critique global capitalism although concern about those most strongly affected is expressed in terms of 'poor and marginalised' rather than explicitly in terms of class. Once again the influence of intersectionality is visible in the argument of the 'relational entanglement of economic breakdown, capitalism, colonialism, racism and patriarchy' and the call to forge 'eco-literate alliances'. Von Kotze and Walters (2023) challenge Western world views and draw on African examples to emphasise the importance of recognising the validity of multiple knowledge systems.

An earlier section of this article illustrated how, by the 1980s, workers' education within the heart of the independent trade union movement had assumed a radical, explicitly Marxist and socialist orientation which foregrounded the political role of the working-class in leading the struggle to defeat racial capitalism.

A number of studies (Allais, 2021; Cooper, 2020; Cooper & Hamilton, 2020; Vally et al., 2013; Webster, 2021) have shown that the radical, transformative tradition of workers' education has survived into the post-apartheid era in some sections of the labour movement and its associated educational organisations. Nevertheless, there has been a steady move within the trade unions towards formalising and accrediting worker education and it has been argued that this has seriously undermined critical traditions of workers' education within the labour movement. These critiques will be dealt with later in this paper, but here, mention must be made of attempts to revitalise radical traditions of workers' education.

One example, *Renewing Workers' Education: A radical alternative vision* (Cooper & Hamilton, 2020) draws on a range of authors with deep experience in labour and education. This collection of essays aims to reinvigorate radical traditions of workers' education via interpretations of the current conjuncture, retrieving the historical vision of worker education and rethinking how the productive possibilities of Marxism could assist in that task. A number of contributions show how some of the most innovative work in workers' education in the third decade of the 21st century is happening amongst organisations *outside* of the established trade union movement and amongst the increasing numbers of casual, informal, temporary and other precarious workers engaged in work created by new forms of capitalist production (Bonner, 2020; Hlatshwayo, 2020; Pillay, 2020).

The discussion above of post-apartheid adult education research and practice in South Africa has sought to show that while traditions of oppositional adult education have continued into the post 1994 era, there has been a gradual but increasing backgrounding of class as a political and conceptual category in favour of a greater focus on black identity, gender, sexual orientation and other categories. Within some spheres of popular education such as feminist pedagogy and ecological education which do retain some focus on class, there is nevertheless a conceptual vagueness or lack of specificity as to what is meant by the notion of class and a lack of distinction between the concepts of oppression and exploitation. Even within workers' education, the radical, political consciousness-raising work and vision of a socialist future of earlier times has dimmed. We argue that there is an urgent need for conceptual clarification in radical adult education in South Africa as to who will lead the struggle for transformation, and a renewed focus specifically on class.

Foregrounding class does not mean being 'class reductionist' nor ignoring other forms of oppression. But equally, a theoretical pluralism that is premised on the notion that race, gender, class and other oppressions are 'separate but equal' fails to adequately explain the material roots of oppression and avoids the issue of how different forms of oppression and exploitation articulate with one another in historical and geographically specific ways as well as which is more socially determinant than others. In exploring the relationship between different forms of oppression and exploitation, we could fruitfully draw on some of the debates in the international and post-apartheid South African sociological literature on the changing articulation between race and class.

THEORISING CLASS AND RACE

Robinson, Rangel and Watson (2022) argue that the triumph of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s "found its philosophical alter-ego in post-modernism/post-structuralism". From the early years of the 21st century however, along with intensified immiseration and insecurity of the working-class and the poor particularly in the global south as well as increasing environmental devastation, critiques of global capitalism have reasserted class as a central category of analysis. Kelsh (2010) emphasises how the Marxist concept of class has the power to analyse and explain the existing and inequitable structure(s) of ownership and power in society and thus produce reliable knowledges capable of guiding practices that aim to restructure society as equitable, as able to promote the free development of all humans. She argues that this knowledge equals class consciousness and enables a radical praxis of critique to transform society (Kelsh, 2010, p. 1).

Many have tried to retheorise the changing class structure in the context of globalisation in such a way as to reconceptualise class in relation to other key social categories such as race or gender. The leading social geographer, David Harvey (2005) has recognised the multiple empirical realities beyond class structure that impact on social inequality. However, while he sees the emergence of local-specific politics informed by a variety of concerns over race, ethnicity, gender, ecology and sexuality as progressive, he argues that their proliferation is ultimately dangerous because of their tendency to fragment what should be a unified struggle against capital. Burawoy (2013), who has written extensively on labour organisation in Africa, also incorporates economic, political and ideological aspects into his concept of production but nevertheless continues to regard class as the basic principle of organisation of contemporary societies.

In South Africa, debates have been more focused around the question of how to conceptualise the shifting articulation between class and race. Left-wing political theorists and activists have long accepted that race and class are intricately interwoven but have disagreed on the nature of this relationship, which of these social categories are most salient and how this should shape the strategy and tactics of social struggles for transformation.

For example, the relationship between race and class in South Africa was historically conceptualised as 'The National Question'. In the late 1960s, the South African Communist Party adopted the colonialism of a special type (CST) thesis which argued that South Africa was a peculiar colony characterised by the existence of two political societies: a highly developed white capitalist community with imperial links, and a subjugated African polity that existed as a colony of the former. It adopted a 'two-stage' theory of social change which held that the struggle for socialism could not be advanced outside the broader movement for national independence. Its notion of the National Democratic Revolution required Marxists to form alliances with multiclass formations agitating for national liberation (such as the ANC). According to this logic, the emergence of a black bourgeoisie would be seen as a progressive step towards de-racialising capitalism[5]. This view underwent a major challenge when scholars such Wolpe (1972) developed an alternative Marxist interpretation of apartheid, arguing that the CST thesis failed to adequately link racial superiority to the socio-economic power structure and capitalist mode of production that reproduces it. Wolpe critiqued the two-stage theory as mechanistic and linear because it assumed that the establishment of a democratic,

[5] After 1994, the SACP abandoned its CST thesis. Cronin and Mashilo (2017) argue that CST is no longer relevant to South African society, although questions of race, nationality, ethnicity and identity remain crucial.

non-racial polity would reveal the fundamental exploitative class relations in society, thus leading automatically to a second, socialist phase of revolution.

The transition to democracy has seen a revisiting of 'the National Question' (see for example, Webster & Pampallis, 2017) and the emergence of critiques of the longer-standing Marxist analyses of South African capitalism. Some, for example Greenstein (1993), have argued for the need to recognise a multiplicity of factors beyond class that shape social action, while Mabasa (2019), writing on post-apartheid racism, also questions some of the fundamental assumptions of orthodox Marxism and proposes a 'democratic Marxist interpretation' which draws from black and global south Marxist traditions which highlight historical specificity. In contrast, others have argued for the continuing relevance of classical Marxism: they critique the South African democratisation process as involving an elite pact which has accommodated the emerging black middle class into existing economic structures dominated by white capital. For example, Van der Walt (2013, pp. 7-8) argues:

> That the ANC is a bourgeois-bureaucratic black nationalist party; that is, that represents primarily the interests of both the emergent black capitalists and of the (largely black) state managerial elite: top officials and politicians, judges and military leaders … Its black nationalism entails, first, the ideological myth that all blacks, regardless of class, have a common interest; second, a practical stress on the primary interests of the black elite, through a concrete programme of elite empowerment…

Empirical research confirms that a class-based analysis remains central to any understanding of inequality in South Africa. Southall (2016) shows that there has been a significant expansion of the black middle class in South Africa. These findings are extended by detailed empirical data offered by Crankshaw (2022) who shows that the metropolitan area of Johannesburg has seen the emergence of a new black-educated, clerical-service worker occupational grouping as well as increasing desegregation of the high-income, previously white neighborhoods in the northern suburbs of this city. These statistics show that the fastest growing gap in equality is among black South Africans. This internal class differentiation within black communities has important implications for understanding the framework of political possibilities in a future South Africa and suggests that struggles based on the leadership of the working-class are paramount to achieving socialist transformation.

South African labour sociologists continue to foreground class while acknowledging some fundamental shifts in the nature of the class-race structure. Internationally, labour sociologists have grappled with the changing nature of social inequality under late capitalism. Standing (2014) argues that there has been such a degree of class fragmentation that older bloc concepts such as the capitalist class and working-class are no longer fit as explanatory concepts. He introduces a seven-tier schema of class categorisation in the modern era which includes the notion of the 'precariat'. Webster (2011) acknowledges the usefulness of some of Standing's categorisations (particularly that of 'precariat') for the South African context but argues that some categories (such as casual labour) are not new and that many of the tiers identified by Standing do not constitute distinct classes. He argues for the continued relevance of the industrial working-class while arguing that the nature of their traditional trade union organisations need to be rethought in order to develop alternative forms of worker organisation that can bring together wage labour and precarious labour in an alternative economic development path.

What relevance do these debates have for adult educators? While acknowledging inter- and intra- class fragmentation under neo-liberal capitalism as well as the salience of struggles related to race, identity, gender, alternative knowledge systems, ecology and sexual orientation, it remains important to keep class in the foreground of adult education research and practice. Its importance is heightened in the context of post-apartheid South Africa where significant internal class differentiation amongst black communities has taken place. A key question that should constantly confront adult education theorists and practitioners is: Does our work impart knowledge that exposes the inequalities and contradictions of society and raise consciousness to contribute to the struggle to transform society? Or does it contribute to the reproduction and further consolidation of social privilege and the power of the wealthy? It is to this question of the power of education to reproduce social inequality and power differentials that we now turn.

THE REPRODUCTIVE POWER OF EDUCATION

Alexander (2009, p. 7) wrote:

> Only reformist-minded educational theorists deny that, left to itself, the (education) system necessarily reproduces the fundamental class (and associated racial, gender and other) inequalities that characterise all national capitalist economic systems. South Africa is no exception in spite of all claims to the contrary made by the ruling party and its intellectual apologists. Here, as elsewhere in the global capitalist system, a sector such as education is tightly controlled in the interests of capital, despite the resistance and counter-hegemonic efforts of students, teachers and communities. Education is embedded in class relations, and reflects, reinforces and replicates the tendency of capital to produce and reproduce inequality.

As noted earlier, within the first decade of being in power, the post-apartheid state introduced a range of new legislation aimed at reforming the apartheid education system. This involved the introduction of a new National Qualification Framework (NQF), the overhaul of qualifications and the restructuring of the post-schooling sector including higher education, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college sector and Adult Basic Education which has more recently been incorporated into a new Community College system. There has also been a barrage of skills development legislation making it compulsory for economic enterprises to pay an annual 'skills tax' as an incentive for workplace education and training.

There have been many general critiques of the state's new education policies (Allais 2007, 2014; Muller, 2000; Vally & Motala, 2014). In addition there have been specific critiques of the state's adult education policies although many have focused on the neglect and marginalisation of adult basic education, the lack of state-allocated resources to adult education or its failure to equip adults with appropriate skills for the global economy. These critiques have been limited by their failure to take into account long-established theories in the sociology of education of the power of education to reproduce and perpetuate class inequalities (see Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983).

There are some important exceptions however. For example, Aitchison (2003, p. 47) argues that South African adult education (particularly in higher education) has been "captured by globalizing conceptions of education and training". Baatjes (2003, p. 189) not only critiques the marginalisation of Adult Basic Education (ABE) but also argues that the societal exclusion of illiterate adults which formed a historical basis of the apartheid cheap labour system continues under the new market-driven, neo-liberal, post-apartheid state whose policies are "congruent with the global economy that demands highly-skilled and competitive labour". In an edited collection on *Education, Economy and Society*, Vally and Motala (2014) critique the human capital theory (HCT) that underpins the post-apartheid state' skills discourse. In the same collection Wedekind (2014) and Baatjes, Baduza and Sibiya (2014) make similar arguments in relation to the vocational college sector reproducing the racially segmented labour market.

Some of the literature on the #FMF student movement also acknowledges the role of higher education in reproducing not only structural racism but also the existing class-based social structure. Gillespie and Naidoo (2019b) show how the student movement developed a critique of the assimilationist project of the post-apartheid state which chose:

> the strategy of inserting black people into the existing social architecture and fast-tracking them through employment equity legislation into middle-class jobs. For this strategy of creating a black middle class, university education was a crucial factor as a vehicle for professionalization and upward mobility in an existing class-stratified society. (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019b, p. 191)

What of other historically oppositional traditions of adult education? We argue that there is a danger that a lack of a class perspective as outlined in the previous section of this article could leave *apparently* critical, transformative adult education work vulnerable to being co-opted into reproducing structural inequality. Von Kotze, Walters and Luckett (2016 hint at this in their study of a range of South African organisations claiming to engage in popular education. They found that while many popular education initiatives implicitly focus on the working-class in the sense of poor, marginalised communities, not all of them reflect an orientation to radical social change. Of twenty-eight organisations all identifying themselves as part of traditions of popular education, they note that:

> While 'traditions' suggest continuity of norms, beliefs, practices and concerns handed down through generations of educators, we detected a shift in orientation and purpose in current practices. Partially, shifts and changes reflect the altered South African politics in the post-Apartheid era. Partially, they reflect global changes and constraints imposed by neo-liberal economics in which corporations rather than governments are inclined to determine priorities. We note that the orientation towards collective action seems to have given way to personal-political development agendas. (von Kotze et al., 2016 pp. 7-8)

Ironically, it is the labour movement's own education – historically that field of adult education most strongly committed to a working-class perspective and radical social change – that appears to have most clearly been (as Aitchison, 2003 puts it) 'captured by globalizing conceptions of education and training'. In the 1990s labour leaders supported and drove through new education and training policies which promoted competency-

based learning, multi-skilling and flexible specialisation of a highly skilled labour force on the assumption that such policies would provide access to skills development for all workers (Cooper, 1998).

The trade union movement has also made serious moves towards the institutionalisation, formalisation and professionalisation of trade union education, including the development of formal trade unionist qualifications. Initially there was a contentious debate around the pros and cons of formally accrediting a trade union qualification. Those trade unionists pressing for formal accreditation argued that it would enhance both the quality of union training and the value placed on it, would help to build organisational capacity, would provide recognition of the skills and knowledge which workers already possess as well as provide access to qualifications that could facilitate mobility in their jobs. Those opposed argued that it contradicted the collective spirit of workers education, could lead to greater stratification amongst workers, could compromise workers control over their own education, and lead to the loss of the distinct political identity of workers' education.

There have been relatively few critiques from within the trade union movement itself of the labour movement's post-1994 involvement in new skills development policies although there have been critiques from those closely allied to trade union education. For example Allais and Byrne (2002, pp. 5-6) argue that "… the labour movement's engagement in training has been the result of buying into a myth that says there is no alternative [to global competitiveness] and the training discourse is part of propping up that myth." Similarly, Cooper (2020) has argued that:

> the labour movement's approach to post-apartheid workplace training … represented a significant political and ideological departure from earlier, radical traditions of workers education … (Its) adoption of what is essentially a human capital approach to skills development is both a cause and an effect of the growing weaknesses of workers' organisations and workers' education in the post-apartheid era. (Cooper, 2020, p. 159)

The growing weaknesses within the labour movement are related to the shrinking of unions' historical membership base amongst blue-collar workers, the relative growth of white-collar occupations in the finance, service and state sectors and alongside that, a mushrooming of numbers of outsourced and casualised labour and rising unemployment. The labour movement's political role of social partner to the state and capital has had demobilising effects, with a growing gap between leadership and membership and the weakening of internal democracy. (For more detail, see Cooper, 2020, pp. 151-159).

The black working-class has been at the receiving end of harsh austerity measures and contraction of the South African economy. The 2008/9 global financial meltdown led in South Africa to what the then General Secretary of COSATU, Zwelinzima Vavi, referred to as a 'bloodbath' of job losses with over million workers thrown into unemployment in the recession that followed. In 2012 the Marikana massacre in which 34 mineworkers were killed by state police was itself a result of the squeeze on mine owner's profits which they (as employers elsewhere) sought to recover from undermining the wages and conditions of mineworkers. As Hamilton (2022) explains, Marikana's historic significance is that it exposed the fault lines between two epochs in the post-apartheid era, the first epoch being the harbouring of illusions about the ANC and bourgeois parliamentary democracy and the second, the breaking up of those illusions and of the tripartite alliance. The latter was expressed in the expulsion from COSATU of the National Union

of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), its second biggest affiliate, because it refused to support the ruling party in the 2014 election. Subsequent breakaways to form the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) and continued loss of membership have further weakened what was once the continent's most powerful federation.

CONCLUSIONS

Marxism is an epistemology, an ontology, a methodology as well as a guide to analysis and action. As theory, it must necessarily be abstract and 'universal'; but capitalism and class never exist in the abstract – they are always deeply embedded in specific histories and class struggles alongside other oppressions. As Robinson et al. (2022) have noted, "The universal is always and only manifest in the particular". Historians and sociologists have shown how race was an essential tool for the development of capitalism in South Africa and understanding South Africa as racial capitalism must have important implications for our analysis of and for the practice of adult education. For example, in a context where knowledge of pre-1994 society is sorely lacking amongst young adults in particular, one key element of adult education curriculum should be the building of *historical* understanding of the particular development path of both colonialism and capitalism in South Africa, as an explanatory framework for why our non-racial democracy remains deeply exploitative and unequal.

Internationally over the first two decades of the 21st century, important contributions to Marxist perspectives on adult education have been made (see Allman, 2010; Boughton, 2006; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Choudry, 2015; Holst, 2019; Kane, 2014). However, much of the post-apartheid writing and practice of adult education in South Africa has shifted the focus to inequalities and oppressions other than class: black experiences of racism, gender oppression, and the impact of environmental degradation. While these continue the traditions of oppositional adult education of the pre-democracy days, they dislodge class as the primary category of analysis. This is not to argue that these oppressions – many based on the 'politics of difference' – are not important. As Robinson et al. (2022) have argued, capitalism created these differentiations as mechanisms of social control as well as super exploitation: "'race' and white supremacy were two of capitalism's world-historic productions vital to the organization of its worldwide circuits of exploitation and accumulation".

Some of the post-apartheid research and practice of adult education – particularly that of Popular Education – have continued to orient themselves towards the poor, the marginalised and the dispossessed. But in the absence of conceptual clarity in relation to class and a theoretical appreciation of its significance as an analytical category, these are vague categories which do not offer us a clear way forward. Efforts to revive traditions of radical workers' education do reassert the central significance of a class analysis and class struggle and call on workers' education to act as a force to challenge the hegemony of capitalist ideology. But these sit uncomfortably and in contradiction to the labour movement's wholesale 'buying in' to a human capital-driven formal education and skills development system which works to reproduce the class structure and ideological hegemony of capitalism.

We agree with the Marxist intersectionalist, Bohrer (2019, p. 14), that class exploitation is central to understanding capitalism and that oppression in the form of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and others form interlocking and mutually reinforcing circuits. However, as Foley (2019) suggests, intersectionality can describe the effects of

multiple oppressions, but it does not offer an adequate *explanatory framework* for addressing the root causes of social inequality under capitalism. In the context of a South Africa where significant intra-class differentiation has occurred within the previously oppressed black majority, where unemployment sits at least at 50% of black South Africans, and where millions live in shacks with no electricity or running water, we cannot but put class at the forefront of our analyses and strategies for transformation.

A theoretical pluralism that fails to recognise the centrality of class is in danger of erecting barriers between different victims of oppression rather than uniting them. Despite South Africa's reputation as 'protest capital of the world', in the last few decades, workers' and community struggles have been deeply fragmented, exposing an inability to unite into an oppositional movement capable of seriously challenging the neo-liberal policies of the ruling ANC government. It is a false notion that a solution to any one form of oppression can be found separately from that of class exploitation. As Robinson et al. (2022) note:

> Ethnic, racial, gender and sexual oppression are not tangential, but constitutive of capitalism. There can be no general emancipation without liberation from these forms of oppression. But the inverse is just as critical: all the particular forms of oppression are grounded in the larger social order of global capitalism that perpetually regenerates these oppressions.

Moreover, although the balance of forces between classes may have changed enabling exploitation to be intensified, the essence of the relationship between the classes has not changed. The majority of workers during capitalism's historical ascendancy are not much different from today's equivalent of a 'precariat' (Standing, 2014). All the gains that workers won over centuries had to be bitterly fought for.

Class analysis and class struggle continue to 'matter' if adult education is to realise its potential to contribute to the socialist transformation of society. Class matters because among all the identities which inhere in the working-class, it provides the most effective vehicle through which to mobilise for the maximum unity across all the intersections of race, gender, nationality and against capital to achieve this goal. While describing the different forms of oppression and exploitation is important, it is even more critical to know and understand their causes if – as Marx reminded us – the point is to change society.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Individual contributions to this article are as follows: Conceptualisation, Hamilton and Cooper; Methodology, Hamilton and Cooper; Formal Analysis, Hamilton and Cooper; Resources, Hamilton and Cooper; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Hamilton and Cooper; Review and Editing, Hamilton and Cooper.

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Received: March 30, 2023

Revisions Required: September 8, 2023

Accepted: December 18, 2023

Published online: February 29, 2024