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To cite this article: Jacob Henry (2020) Rethinking schooling for development in wageless times, African Geographical Review, 39:3, 240-251, DOI: 10.1080/19376812.2019.1696214

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19376812.2019.1696214

Published online: 25 Nov 2019.

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Rethinking schooling for development in wageless times
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ABSTRACT
In development discourse, schools are charged with readying the labor force for imminent job creation, which will lead to full employment. However, I argue that policy goals which aim toward full-employment are inherently inadequate given trends in the global political economy. A contradiction emerges: schools are deployed to ready a labor force for jobs which may never arrive. Using the case of Namibia, I present an immanent critique of official documents to demonstrate how states root development dreams in schooling and skills enhancement. This is at the expense of redistributive agendas which could respond to the new normal of joblessness.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 4 June 2019
Accepted 18 November 2019

KEYWORDS
Schooling; jobs; productivist discourse; development; capitalism; Namibia; education

Introduction
In development discourse, schools are often charged with readying the labor force for imminent “job creation,” which will, ideally, lead to full employment (Means, 2018). However, in this paper, I will argue that policy goals which aim toward full-employment are inherently inadequate (everywhere, but especially in the case region of southern Africa) given broad trends in the global political economy and shifts in capitalism itself. Policy aimed at expanding employment is not sufficient for much of the global population, who are structurally excluded from regularly paid wages due to the increasing financialization, automation, and the uneven spatial spread of capitalism (Ferguson & Li, 2018; Li, 2017; Ferguson, 2015; Sassen, 2014; Smith, 2011).

Yet, states continue to deploy compulsory schooling institutions – often at the behest of international organizations and multilateral entities (i.e., UNESCO, 2000; World Bank, 1999) – in order to train a workforce for labor opportunities that will likely never arrive. This is based on a ‘productivist’ theory (Ferguson, 2015) which assumes that development will occur only when poor places seize the mode of production of resources or at least get linked into the value chain of global production. Such productivist ideas have often come from both the marxist Left and the modernization Right and have often overshadowed discussions about the lopsided distribution of resources already produced.

As I review below, schools have historically been a key promoter of productivist epistemology – they teach students how to ‘produce more’ for oneself and one’s kin, not how to conceptualize a redistribution of the plentiful, but hoarded, resources already produced. Productivist ideas about increased training and skill mismatches are not a solution to the problem at hand: global unemployment – or more precisely, the difficulty of social reproduction without a wage. When the fundamental exploitative framework of capitalism – the proletarian has nothing to sell but their labor – is ruptured, the expensive and intensive effort to train a population for industrialized labor through a massive public schooling system begins to seem contradictory.
In the current discussion, I use the southern African state of Namibia as a case study to examine the tensions inherent in schooling-for-development discourse. Namibia explicitly subscribes to productivist thinking, organizing its development goals around a ‘working assumption … that increased productivity increases wages and advances development’ (Namibia, 2012, p. 28). However, Namibia is not unique in, ‘address[ing] the skills deficit alongside the need to diversify the economy … [by putting] education and training at the centre of human capital development’ (Namibia, 2012, p. vii). Nor is it the only state working toward the relatively uncontroversial development goal of creating an, ‘economic environment [which] is suitable for all citizens who are able and willing to work, and … full employment in the economy’ (Namibia, 2004, p. 72). It is this totally unspectacular development pathway combined with the potential resources (for redistribution) of a middle-income country and a generally stable political system that make Namibia an ideal case to examine this interesting policy contradiction.

I use critical discourse analysis to study the Namibian government’s major policy documents which address schooling and/or development. These documents form the foundation of the official dreams of schooling – they tell us what the state wants to use its schooling institutions to achieve. I situate these official narratives within the broader context of a global political economy defined by expulsions and wagelessness. I also attempt to work through the following contradiction: just as the chance at a waged job diminishes, schools structured to train an industrial labor force are engulfing an increasing number of people (Ferguson & Li, 2018; Kendall, 2007; Means, 2018). Following James Ferguson (2015), I will ultimately argue that ‘development’ should not be tied to training and education for job force participation and will problematize the ‘promissory narratives’ of development trajectory-thinking which claim that mass schooling will lead to mass employment and, eventually, to development (Li, 2013, 2017).

**The economic epoch: surplus and expulsions**

How does capitalism generate profit in the contemporary economic epoch? While control over the means of production is still essential to much of capital’s profit, the newest and most lucrative avenues of profiteering come from financialization and accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2007; Sassen, 2014; Smith, 2011). Financialization generally refers to ‘shifting the gravity of economic activity from “real” production (primary, manufacturing and services) to finance (investment banking, insurance, arbitrage, asset management, venture capital, currency trading and so on)’ (Mawdsley, 2018, p. 265). The newest ‘spatial fixes’ (Harvey, 1996) needed to perpetuate capital come not (primarily) from entering new markets or producing new widgets but rather by hurling into speculation and trading of securitized fictitious capital (Smith, 2011; Harvey, 2018).

Sassen (2014) and Smith (2011) both suggest that the financialization of capitalism is a major rupture in capital-human relations; the financial capitalists no longer make products which require valorization in the form of labor hours. Marx understood the value of products, and therefore the surplus value which perpetuated capitalism, to follow a general law of accumulation. According to Marx, surplus value (profit) was generated by the worker’s labor power which produced the widget in less than the socially necessary labor time. Industrial capitalism therefore can be understood as the ‘exploitation of labour driven by the need to expand the scale of production and increase productivity in order to make profit – in short, accumulation’ (Bernstein, 2010, p. 22). However, increasingly, financialized capitalism attempts to generate value from gambling on securities and dispossession through debt and financial products (Sassen, 2014; Mawdsley, 2018; Smith, 2011; Harvey, 2018, ch 3; cf. Brass, 2011). Unlike ‘real’ products which hold value in the form of dead labor and are created in industrial or artisan facilities, finance products are just stories. Since financial products are not rooted in a finite unit like labor power, they are volatile commodities which are high-risk, high-reward for a very select capitalist class (Sassen, 2014, p. 137). Financialization has led capitalism to become even more crisis-prone in later neoliberalism than it was during the industrial era (Harvey, 2018; Sassen, 2014).
Given that financialized products do not require dead labor, it is no surprise that financialized capital is rarely wage-producing (see Makhulu, 2012). In Africa, for example, the International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that 72% of the population subsists on ‘own-account’ or ‘contributing family’ labor – such activities might include selling cakes on the street or working in a relative’s millet field (ILO 2018; Namupala, 2016). The conceptual invention of ‘own-account’ allows the state to disguise the real rate of unemployment, under-employment, and the general collapse of wage labor (Phimister & Pilosof, 2017, p. 216). ‘Own-account farming’ has subsumed ‘more than half the adult rural population only in sub-Saharan Africa’ which might give the impression that individuals have found employment (Bernstein, 2010, p. 107). However, ‘the working poor of the South … pursue their reproduction through insecure, oppressive and typically increasingly scarce wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and “informal economy” survival activity, including marginal farming’ (ibid., 111).

An additional 7.2% of people in Africa are classified by the ILO as fully ‘unemployed’ meaning they have no cakes to sell, land to work, or precarious small-scale projects to partake in (International Labour Office [ILO], 2018). Other authors report similar wageless situations in South Asia (Jeffrey, 2010), South East Asia (Li, 2013), Europe (Breman and van der Linden 2014), and North America (Weis, 1990). Ferguson reminds us that ‘for a huge swath of the population, wage labor–based livelihoods are simply not going to return, and new forms of distribution are a permanent and necessary feature of the new world’ (2015, p. 19). People will simply not be ‘absorbed’ by financialized capitalism. If former periods and places were characterized by teaching people how to become workers (i.e. Thompson, 1967), then contemporary southern Africa is characterized by workers who no longer have the freedom to sell their labor (Brass, 2011; Ferguson, 2015).

Lawhon, Millington, and Stokes have recently called for scholarship which, ‘inquire[s] into the multiplicity of work ethics and the possibilities and politics of distribution … this multiplicity of ethics might well enable less alienating labour and an increase in and new forms of more fulfilling self-work’ (2018, p. 17). James Ferguson agrees. He sees opportunity emerging from post-wage spaces, writing, ‘wage slavery, after all, was never what Marx had in mind’ (Ferguson, 2015, p. 61). Ferguson helps us think through the limits that critical theory has placed on development possibilities through its productivist bias. While old theories of labor asked what benefits (like wages or crops) people could reap from the ‘stuff’ they produce, new theories are barreling toward a focus on wealth re-distribution (i.e., Weeks, 2011; van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). The new questions ask how people might demand the right to consume without directly producing capitalist value. Answering such questions will help us understand how ‘life in capitalist ruins’ can be re-imagined and value can be reconfigured in potentially radical new ways (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Tsing, 2015).

**Schooling, jobs, and the dream of development**

Rather than accepting schools as a regular part of the landscape, I begin by positioning them as abnormal and contradictory spaces. Mass schooling (institutional and compulsory for all children of a given age) is not indigenous to any society or place. Rather, it blossomed out of an uneasy relationship between social reformers and industrial capitalists in 19th century New England (Apple, 2004; Bowles & Gintis, [1976] 2011). Compulsory mass schooling was designed to supply industrial capitalism with people who understood worker ontologies. The farmers and immigrants who lived near factories but were skeptical about the upside of waged labor needed conditioning to become ‘workers’ and learn the ‘work ethic’ (Weeks, 2011). This process – what we might term epistemological proletarianization (learning to think as a waged worker) – was embedded in the everyday interactions on school grounds (Bowles & Gintis, [1976] 2011; Thompson, 1967). As manufacturing expanded outward from New England, public schools followed suit (Bowles & Gintis, [1976] 2011, p. 176).

In colonies, schools were generally less expansive but more brutal. Formal schooling was regimented and functionalist: school was used to create class structures, ‘workmen’ (Cohen,
1993), and docile subjects (London, 2003; Windel, 2009). These efforts did sometimes backfire, as many African revolutionary movements and leaders got their start in colonial schools (Amukugo, 1995; Thiong'o, 1994). After official decolonization, the Global North applied pressure through multilateral organizations and aid structures to equate ‘education for all’ with western-style formal schooling for all (Mundy, 1999).

Capital and schools have adapted in the neoliberal era but the essential purpose of schooling, flattening social topographies for capitalism and institutionalizing landscapes of disparity, remains the same (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Odora Hoppers, 2014). With this context, we can begin to critically examine mass schooling as a provincialized social technology, not a harbinger of automatic and universalized social good. The schooling institution should be understood as contradictory: it is at once a site for re-imagining development futures but also emerges out of a long service to exploitation.

**Productivist development & schooling**

The modern person places a high value on education, for himself, for his nation, but above all, for his children. Of two people, both economically deprived, one will make sure that his child goes to school, the other will take the child out and put him to work. From our point of view, the one who keeps his child in school is taking a more modern course of action. (Inkeles, 1998, p. 87)

Around the globe and throughout history, schools have been charged with a simple mandate: ready the labor force for existing employment and future ‘job creation’ (Means, 2018). It is imagined that citizens will move from school, to waged work, and finally achieve a so-called modern lifestyle. Modernization economists like Inkeles and Rostow have worked hard to instill the hegemony of the school as preparation for wages in our cultural imaginary. Former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz captures the importance of schools and jobs writing, ‘education is important—but if there are no jobs for those who are educated, there will not be development’ (2006, p. 26). Education for All (EFA) ambitions have been part of the development imaginary and global discursive commitment since the 1990 ratification of the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand. While agreements promoted by UNESCO are careful not to equate EFA with mass schooling (exclusively) for young people, the stipulations on development aid offered to help states meet EFA targets generally requires, ‘programs that supported free, quality, compulsory, and largely state-organized formal primary schooling for all children’ (Kendall & Silver, 2014, p. 249).

James Ferguson argues that this is a misguided approach under contemporary capitalism. Playing on the well-known parable of ‘teaching a man to fish,’ Ferguson wonders how, ‘being trained for a non-existent job would benefit the man in any way … it is certainly nonsense to suppose that he would, by virtue of that training, be fed for a lifetime’ (Ferguson, 2015, p. 37). Yet, popular and hegemonic programs of schooling for development – as shown below – continue to be tied to modernization ideals.

Idealized development – for many states – is defined by a productive and skilled fully, formally employed workforce and schools are often designed for (and have been historically committed to) training this industrial workforce. As mass schooling for all policies were/are gaining popularity, they must face the ruptures in the global political economy described above. Would-be workers in surplus space now find themselves expelled from the possibility of wage labor (Sassen, 2014) even if they hold increasingly impressive education credentials (Jeffrey, 2010).

**A brief context of schooling in Namibia**

When Namibia achieved recognition as an independent nation-state in 1990, the government inherited a cruel and exclusionary schooling system known as Bantu Education. The first president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, remarked of the system, ‘Bantu education is simply brainwashing the African to believe that he’s inferior to the white – to prepare him for a life of laboring for the white
baas’ (cited in Fumanti, 2006, p. 88). A top priority for the new nation-state was to annihilate the vestiges of apartheid by providing a liberatory education to all citizens of Namibia. The first World Bank loan Namibia took was aimed at improving education access as the state strove toward the global mantra—education for all (World Bank, 2004).

Yet schools have not always had such a stronghold in the territory – formal semi-centralized schooling systems did not exist in pre-colonial times (but see Amukugo, 2017). Relatively little is known about the pre-colonial education/socialization practices in what came to be Namibia; however evidence from elsewhere in southern Africa suggests that young people learned their environment holistically and were taught advanced reasoning, logic, and numeracy using engaged methods like games, riddles, and taboos (Kaya & Seleti, 2014; Matemba & Lilemba, 2015; Mawere, 2013). Missionaries established a few schools in Namibia as early as 1806, but these had a negligible impact on broader society during German colonization. The Germans did not build any government schools in Namibia, which was abnormal even for a colonial administration (Cohen, 1993). The schooling situation remained much the same for Namibia through the first decades of South African administration. However, by the 1960s educational apartheid, most notably the Bantu Education syllabus, which was in full force in South Africa had been implemented throughout Namibia (Amukugo, 1995; Cohen, 1994). Bantu Education was explicitly designed to transform Black Namibians into a steady supply of ‘semi-literate, subservient farm and house laborers’ (Dunn, 2003) for minority white colonial capital interests.

During the struggle for independence, thousands of people, especially the ‘educated and fairly westernised elite’ left Namibia for exile camps in Angola and Zambia (Akawa, 2014). Many who stayed in the school system actively supported the Struggle. Unlike in neighboring South Africa, where struggle movements were spearheaded by university students, Namibian student organizations were dominated by secondary school students – not unreasonable given that there was no university in the colony. Students boycotted exams and shut down schools in 1971 and 1988 and continuously protested poor learning conditions under apartheid (Amukugo, 1995). Teachers also went on strike in support of national labor union movements. This history is recounted to emphasize that indigenous education and radical schooling in Namibia has historically not been focused on industrialization and wage preparation.

Today, however, the methods of schooling mimic the classic industrialist schooling model described by Bowles and Gintis ([1976] 2011) and the curricular foci emphasize behaviors ‘compatible with . . . the penetration of the free-market economic system’ (Tabulawa, 2003, p. 18). Much of this is, perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the legacy of apartheid. At independence, the Namibian schooling system was one of the most unequal and restrictive in the world (O’Sullivan, 2001). Namibian schooling policy immediately rejected and reversed apartheid goals: South Africa under-spent on African education – Namibia now spends over 20% of GDP; Bantu Education mandated instruction in indigenous languages – instruction is now in English; the aim of apartheid education was to provincialize and localize Black Namibians – the schools now promise modernization (Fumanti, 2006), which has been perversely linked to wages. However, schooling does not seem to dramatically impact one’s chances of being able to secure a wage and make a living in Namibia. In fact, the official unemployment rate for those with a coveted senior secondary certificate is only slightly lower (31.6%) than those with no schooling at all (34.5%). Interestingly, the no-school group is employed at a higher rate than those with the more common primary and junior secondary certificates, albeit in low-paying work (NSA 2017, p. 57).2 Would-be workers in Namibia now find themselves barred and expelled from the possibility of wage labor even if they hold education credentials (Sassen, 2014; Smith, 2014). Tangeni Iijambo asks a provocative question:

How relevant is the western schooling that pupils in Africa receive today in contrast to what they need? Perhaps the drop in enrolment rate . . . is a clear indication that parents and children do not find western schooling relevant . . . Some scholars may ask if Africa was ever intellectually decolonised. The sobering response is probably ‘no’. (in Amukugo, 2017, p. 63).
Mass schooling is creating a growing class of educated but unemployed youths who took advantage of post-independence schooling expansion, were trained to become workers, but who now must wait for waged opportunities (see also Jeffrey, 2010; Katz, 2004).

**Namibian education policy: productivist contradictions**

The data for this study were collected from official government documents which outline education and/or development goals in Namibia. The primary documents analyzed are the National Human Resources Plan, the long-term plan Vision 2030, the 5th National Development Plan (NDP5), the National Curriculum for Basic Education, and the Education for All National Action Plan. Other, smaller documents are also included where helpful. Documents were selected for analysis after reviewing the bibliographies of key academic texts on modern education and politics in Namibia (i.e., Amukugo, 2017; Melber, 2014). Official documents which appeared in multiple bibliographies and remain influential in the Namibian education/development policy scene were included. Each document was read for themes around unemployment, wages, jobs, and education’s role in industrialization. The relevant excerpts were then re-grouped around common themes using a directed coding approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). First, I analyze how the documents frame unemployment; then I examine how full employment is presented as the primary solution to the problems of unemployment. Finally, I show how the documents prioritize productivist schooling as a method of development.

**The official assessment of unemployment**

Generally, the official discourses would seem to agree with the assessment of the global and national political economy that I have laid out so far. For example, the National Development Plan (NDP5) effectively discusses surplus populations when it conceptualizes the increasingly large proportion of wageless, working-age youth as an ‘excess labour force.’ The same document rebukes the common misconception of an automatic ‘demographic dividend’ (Namibia, 2017, p. 51). That is, even though there are many young people in Namibia, without opportunities to upend trends of expulsion from capitalism, there will not be development.

Furthermore, Vision 2030 compares workforce participation in 1970 and 1998 (during apartheid and 8 years after independence) and concludes that over this time, ‘the economy has performed dismally at creating additional jobs’ (Namibia, 2004, p. 70). One of the official documents also observes that, ‘the contribution of [many] industry [ies] to the national GDP [are] not proportional to [their] contribution to employment’ (Namibia, 2012, p. 9), meaning that sectors that contribute greatly to GDP are often non-wage producing (see also Makhulu, 2012). Unfortunately, the official documents too often attribute the decline in wages to labor regulations and unionization, not automation and nonproductive speculation.

To its credit, the Namibian government does recognize the significance of unemployment, especially among youth. In the Human Resource Plan, the state acknowledges that,

> the experience in Sub-Saharan Africa … shows that economic growth at a macroeconomic level, does not [automatically] translate into employment and poverty reduction. Namibia, for example, implemented structural reforms along the lines of macroeconomic stability, improving its growth rates during the 2000s. However, unemployment, measured in strict terms, increased (Namibia, 2012, p. 1)

This is one of the few instances from any of the official documents that demonstrates an understanding of the global milieu that Namibia and Namibian schools exist within. The texts more commonly assume that Namibia has an outweighed control over its own economy. Vision 2030 – crafted under the Nujoma administration – blames the small domestic market, agricultural unproductiveness, and ‘weak performance’ of manufacturing (Namibia, 2004, p. 70). Such an analysis does identify symptoms, but not structures. It also subtly suggests that such symptoms are almost
entirely within the state’s control. However, as James Ferguson reminds us, ‘none of the impoverished nations of the world are truly “sovereign” or “independent,” and nowhere do we find a true “national economy”’ (Ferguson, 2006, p. 65). If the document truly sought to unpack the ‘structural nature’ of joblessness, it would include an investigation into the hegemonic capitalist, neo-colonial, international milieu. Such an omission is especially glaring given Nujoma’s proclivity for invoking ‘imperialists’ as the source of some of Namibia’s lesser woes and political fractioning.

Vision 2030 admits that, ‘job-creation in Namibia has been rather luster lacking, and the structure of the labour force has not changed in line with expected trends. Instead, it has exhibited a decline in employment’ (Namibia, 2004, p. 62). The newest Development Plan (NDP5) moves beyond quantitative data, suggesting that (youth) unemployment is a social problem which may force people into crime and protest, and ultimately destabilize the state’s governance (Namibia, 2017). Official discourses also occasionally critique the practicality (but never the philosophy) of the school-to-wage-to-development ideology. Most explicitly, the Human Resources Plan outlines the presence of barriers in the transition from school to work. For instance, most unemployed youths have obtained some level of education with the majority attaining at least secondary school. There are also a number that have specialized training but still remain unemployed. (Namibia, 2012, p. 12)

This is a fairly astonishing admission for a state which, as I show below, generally unproblematically assumes that more schooling will lead – seemingly automatically – to employment.

**Official commitment to full employment**

The official development goals of Namibia are unquestionably committed to full and formal employment (Namibia, 2012). The aspirational sub-vision for employment and labor in Vision 2030 imagines a successfully developed Namibia in which:

> the economic environment is suitable for all citizens who are able and willing to work, and there is full employment in the economy, with a well-established and functioning Labour Market Information System for the effective management of the dynamics of the labour force (Namibia, 2004, p. 72).

Industrialization – in the Namibian context – would seem to require manufacturing, widget-producing, and value-adding industry. The documents all encourage the expansion of manufacturing, which would supposedly kickstart an industrial revolution (Namibia, 2012). Modernizing and industrializing will allow workers to, ‘upgrade their skills, Namibia will create jobs for its citizens in a diverse range of industries. This is indeed the formula for the nation’s long-term economic success’ (Namibia, 2017, p. xiii). What it is that workers are supposed to do with these upgraded skills in a space that is so marginal to global capitalism remains unclear.

Perhaps most surprising is that the neoliberal government of Namibia is so committed to reducing unemployment that it asks the private sector to, ‘take ownership and increase its contribution to skills development, because ultimately it is the private sector that benefits from a skilled pool’ (Namibia, 2012, p. 16). While this analysis is not incorrect – scholars have long known that capital thrives off of state subsidies, especially in training and infrastructure – Namibia’s official request for capital to take ownership is a bold and risky move that could create a barrier to capital entering the country. Such a request exhibits the incoherence of development goals that understand unemployment to be a problem in itself. Unemployment – not the lack of capacity to socially reproduce that it causes (a la Sen, 1999) – is positioned as the base problem and this leads the state to neither consider radical ideas beyond employment, nor even adhere to neoliberal free market doctrine. Even if capital was to honor the request, the actual lived problem – that people are not getting enough money – may not be addressed by employment since capitalists have little incentive to pay living wages in the modern ‘labor reserve’ that is southern Africa.
Schooling for employment in Namibia

When the official documents discuss financialization, it is often coded as ‘the knowledge economy.’ This label perfectly positions schools to provide the tools people need to be included in the global marketplace of knowledge. This is undoubtedly a familiar story. Even though UNESCO understands that, ‘an increasingly knowledge-based global economy face[s] the prospect of deepening marginalization within an increasingly prosperous international economy,’ it places impetus on states and communities to ensure that their workers are ready to compete (UNESCO, 2000, p. 14). However, such insights lead to little discussion of whether such an economy which demands a particular kind of knowledge (and not a small amount of starter capital) should simply be rejected for something else. Instead, the official documents place much agency in the hands of the state – especially the schools – to promote local capitalist solutions to global capitalist problems.

Vision 2030 steers Namibia toward, ‘a fully integrated, unified and flexible education and training system, that prepares Namibian learners to take advantage of a rapidly changing environment and contributes to the economic, moral, cultural and social development of the citizens throughout their lives’ (Namibia, 2004, p. 89). While schooling in this telling is not exclusively for workforce preparation, according to official discourse, it is important that youth are prepared for the culture of capitalism. The current curriculum seeks to encourage perseverance, reliability, accountability, and respect for the value and dignity of work; to enable the learners to think scientifically, solve problems, and reflect on and apply knowledge, skills, values and attitudes; and to develop self-reliance and entrepreneurship in preparation for the world of work and self-employment (NIED, 2009, p. 8).

Namibia is presently in the process of rolling out a new curriculum which does not seem to be any less productivist. It repeats the above paragraph, adding only that school should inspire ‘a creative, meaningful and productive adult life’ (NIED, 2018, p. 3).

Neoliberal thematics continue to shine through in the officially stated curricular goals. Students learn how to become proper workers. However, there is some internal tension between the education policy documents and development plans, like the Human Resources Plan, which calls on schools to do more. The development proposals demand that,

- education and training institutions have to include in their curriculum job searching skills acquisition. The overall goal is for students to be able to prepare curriculum vitae, identify job opportunities, contact potential employers, prepare for and go through an interview process, network, etc. These skills will allow for graduates to be better prepared to access their first job. (Namibia, 2012, p. 61).

It only makes sense for the Plan to stake development dreams in schooling policy because the problems with unemployment are often understood to be, at root, a ‘skills shortage.’ The term litters the official discourses about unemployment and schooling in Namibia even as the reality it claims is contradicted by the Plan’s own facts.

Rather than admitting that graduates cannot access the ‘first job’ because they live in a space that has been excluded from contemporary financial innovations (and even non-excluded spaces have seen a decline in traditional wage labor), Namibian policy documents obsess about skills. The above example is one version of skills shortage discourse – that the youth simply do not have the culture-of-capitalism knowledge; they do not know how to make CVs or look for job advertisements in the newspaper. There is also a deeper level of ‘skill shortage’ discourse. The World Bank, assessing Namibia, captures this perspective: ‘Skills shortage contributes to the notable decline in total factor productivity; poor local investment return; substantial domestic capital flight, low inflows of foreign direct investment (FDIs), poor competitiveness, and ultimately slow economic growth’ (World Bank, 2004, p. 1). The fantasy that there is plenty of capitalist demand for labor, if only the schools could prepare learners to a higher standard has only continued to permeate through official discourses:
To become an industrialized country, Namibia will need to address the problem of skills shortages across all sectors of the economy. (Namibia, 2012, p. 1)

With 37% of the population between the ages of 16-35 and an unemployment rate of 37% for the youth, Namibia has a large pool of young workers who can contribute to the economic transformation agenda. The challenge is that most of the youth are under-skilled. (Namibia, 2017, p. 9)

Such ideas contradict the data relayed by the very same official documents which, as demonstrated above, do acknowledge that Namibia has seen a decrease in employment opportunities per capita since independence and that the job-loss is multifaceted and structural. The ‘skills shortage’ discourse is one of the best examples of the productivist bias creating incoherence in official policy. Perhaps, instead of pursuing this productivist agenda, Namibia could strive toward what Jauch and Tjirera (2017) describe as the ‘democratic developmental state.’ Rather than promoting development and education policy that puts resources into forming ‘workers’ with ‘skills’ (which provides, at best, the indirect benefit of wages to the citizenry), the state could engage in proactive redistribution of wealth by expanding the already existent noncontributory cash grant system to reduce public need for wages (Ferguson, 2015).

**Conclusion**

The image of a fully-employed industrial labor force supported by Keynesian welfare states and the private sector seems woefully obsolete. All over the world – but especially in rural Africa – people who want to sell their labor power will become structurally excluded from waged employment (Sassen, 2014; Smith, 2011). We should undoubtedly celebrate technological advances which reduce human drudgery. However, if we do not theorize the cultural shifts and newly available social possibilities in spaces without jobs, policy makers will be ill-prepared to support people who find their livelihood pulled out from under them. The future of work and the accommodation and improvement of life without wages is one of the biggest challenges for contemporary society.

As James Ferguson ([1990] 1994) identified long ago, even development initiatives which seem to fail (i.e., schools for jobs) are ‘doing work’. Rather than accepting schools as a regular and mundane feature of the landscape, I have positioned them as abnormal and contradictory spaces of development. They are at once ‘successful’ in their proliferation and ‘unsuccessful’ in improving the quality of life for most graduates. Theorizing schooling within a jobless political economy will likely only become more important as capitalism expels more and more potential labor. Educational institutions in Africa have the chance to lead the way out of the productivist bias that has consumed so much official policy and development narratives, often originating in the West. To move beyond schooling for capitalism, schools might focus on sociality, creative temporalities, and political redistribution of wealth and power. Today’s global youth would likely benefit from unlearning worker ontologies, instead thinking through how best to live in spaces dominated by a politics of (re)distribution, whether facilitated by unconditional basic income grants or other redistributive technologies. Rather than preparing students to exist within a fanciful political economy of industrial wages, schools across the continent could help the youth and wider society imagine alternatives to the broken promissory narratives of the school-to-wage-to-development pipeline. Recall Julius Nyerere’s wise words: ‘Only when we are clear about the kind of society we are trying to build can we design our educational service to serve our goals’ (1968, p. 418). The radical potential of schooling which imagines ‘a kind of society’ beyond jobs is exciting, important, and immediately necessary given the realities of wageless times.

**Notes**

1. Ferguson is not carelessly gendering. Most development programs (Ferguson is looking at cash transfers) are currently aimed at ‘vulnerable populations’ including women, which legitimizes and traps the man as worker.
2. We should be skeptical of Namibian employment statistics, as ‘employed’ does not always correlate with popular understandings of jobs. Namibia Statistics Agency understands, ‘employed persons [to] include those persons of working age who worked for at least one hour during the [seven-day reference period ahead of the interview] as contributing family workers (formerly referred to as unpaid family workers) working in a family business’ (NSA, 2017, 25 my emphasis; see also Jauch & Tjurera, 2017, P. 164).

Acknowledgments

Mary Mostafanezhad and Hannah Tavares provide consistently good advice. A previous version was presented at the 2019 American Association of Geographers meeting, where it was discussed by William Monteith. Joseph Tanke and Alex Means provided important feedback during a presentation for the Hawaii International Cultural Studies speaker series. I have also greatly appreciated conversing with Lucy Edwards-Jauch on the topics reviewed here and Mutaleni Amutoko keeps the anti-wage fire burning.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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