

White ignorance in the education in emergencies sector

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Image: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/03/why-is-mainstream-international-relations-ir-blind-to-racism-colonialism/>

material conditions in ways that justify extraction and profit, establishing the current social order in which the assumed superiority of the Global North extends to seemingly "beneficial" international relationships (Pinar, 2017; Aron, 2008; Chatterjee, 2004; Fassin, 2002; Mignolo, 1995; Said, 1978, 2003; De B. Souza, 2009; Singh, 1998). Global acts of schooling or decolonization – which is a positive term – but I'm often criticized in the lack of appreciation for these great scholars of the past!

historically marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities or students with low socioeconomic status

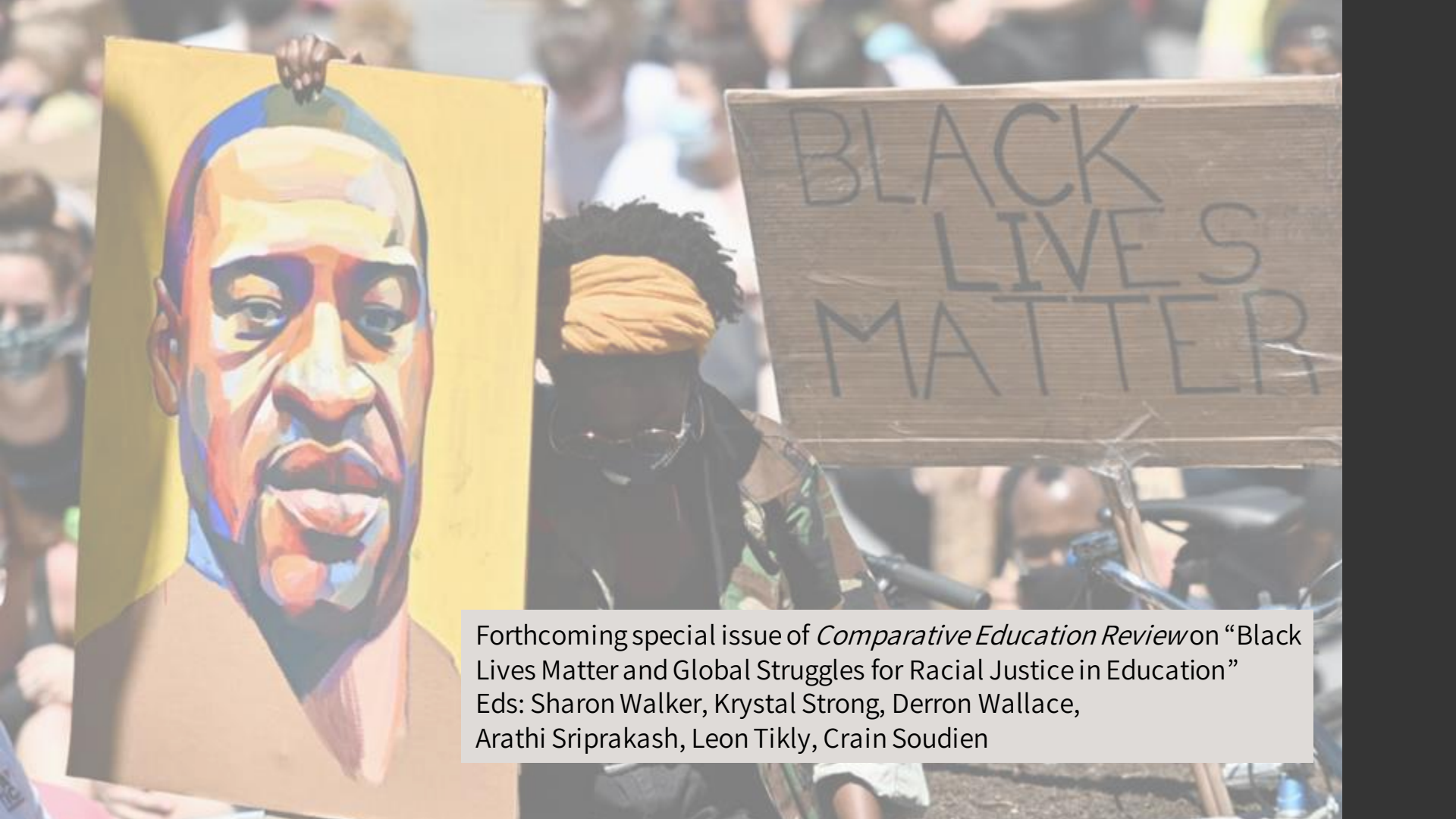
... Using new conceptions of race and international development processes, or how "these forms of racial distinction hindered new international development" (Rutten, 2008, p. 22), scholars argue that racial formations influenced how actors from the Global North currently perceive, discuss, and treat peoples within the Global South (Singh, 2014; Taylor, 2005; White, 2002).

Coloniality

Quijano and Gros (2005) reuse the term "coloniality" to incorporate how formations from colonialism have persisted into postcolonial global paradigms and power asymmetries. Scholars have referenced coloniality to argue the vital importance of considering how global constructions of race have emerged as racialized hierarchies within international development. As Benjamin Guba (2016) argues, coloniality "has been the epistemological nucleus of power that went into the making of knowledge and social relations from a Eurocentric perspective. And since ethnic-racial, hierarchical relations of power... still constitute social relations and forms of knowledge, coloniality persists even if the historical process of colonialism has come to an end" (p. 202). The colonial era constructed a racial order, comprising social hierarchies that persist within economic and social structures today, including in global education and development (Singh, 2014; Chatterjee, 2008).

As international constructed colonized peoples as inferior, it simultaneously constructed whiteness as superior. And today, as a discursive process, racial constructions include and are dependent on the superiority of whiteness, including such characteristics as morality, rationality, and knowledge. In contrast, constructions from the Global South are constructed as "Other" and lacking in such attributes.

Best to avoid references to the controversial term of "race" and keep with the more acceptable term of "ethnic" minorities.



Forthcoming special issue of *Comparative Education Review* on “Black Lives Matter and Global Struggles for Racial Justice in Education”
Eds: Sharon Walker, Krystal Strong, Derron Wallace,
Arathi Sriprakash, Leon Tikly, Crain Soudien

Race and EiE

- EiE within international humanitarian sector = contexts of armed conflict, epidemic and pandemic, forced migration, disaster
- Power inequities = need for “localization”
- Little attention to colonial legacies and race



Source: <https://simonkneebone.com/>

U.N. Faces Record Humanitarian Aid Shortfall- but Not for Ukrainians

“This is the biggest funding gap we’ve ever seen, mostly because the number of vulnerable people who need support is increasing fast,” said Martin Griffiths, chief of the U.N.’s humanitarian and emergency relief office.

That bleak overview hides a stark contrast: Money for programs to help Ukrainians has been relatively plentiful. Money for people in most other parts of the world has not.

Refugees and aid agencies alike have noted that the donor countries have shown far more concern for Ukraine’s overwhelmingly white and Christian populace than they have for people fleeing violence and deprivation in the Middle East and Africa.

The U.N. humanitarian office has asked for more than \$6 billion this year specifically to aid Ukrainians, both refugees who have fled the country and those still within it; its first Ukraine appeal raised more than the amount requested, and its second is on its way to being fully funded.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/22/world/middleeast/humanitarian-aid-gap-un.html>



Source: Chappatte in Le Temps, Switzerland

The Daily Show with Trevor Noah



A close-up portrait of Charles Mills, an older man with short, light-colored hair, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He is wearing a light purple collared shirt under a teal jacket. The background is a soft-focus, light-colored wall with some bokeh light spots.

Charles Mills (1951-2021)

White ignorance:

“Epistemology of ignorance...
White misunderstanding,
misrepresentation, evasion,
and self-deception on matters
related to race” (Mills, 1997, p.
18-19)

“both false belief and the
absence of true belief (Mills,
2007, p.16)

“a general skepticism about
nonwhite cognition” (Mills,
2015, p. 222)

“Insofar as the modern world
has been created by
European colonialism and
imperialism,
and insofar as racist
assumptions/frameworks/
norms were central to the
theories justifying white
Western conquest and
domination of that world, we
would expect white
ignorance to be global” (Mills,
2015, p. 217)

**Data
collected**

**Vertical case
study
2018-2021**



Interviews
55 Key Informants



Documents
227 publications



Websites
40 organizations

Racial erasure

“the retrospective whitening-out, the whitewashing, of the racial past in order to construct an alternative narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination”
(Mills, 2015, p. 220)

Racial erasure

Documents

“recipient ownership,” “participation of beneficiaries,” “community participation,” “localization”

Of 227 documents, 40 mentions of race within 20 documents; Closer examination, 18 of these cursory

Two documents include substantive discussion of race or racism in education (UNESCO 2011, 2018)

Interviews

“race and power and how it remains unexamined”; “nowhere even on the agenda”

“wary of using terminology that might be offensive”

“talking like, ‘Oh, well. You know, I’m German, and because I’m tall and blonde, people have preexisting assumptions about me.’ ... what you’re doing is centering the needs and the fragility of the White people in the room”

“the politicized nature of this movement...” and so “there was a complete silencing of conversations”

“It was just really challenging, and basically our anti-racism stuff just fell flat organizationally”

Denying White supremacy as a global system

“denial or downplaying of the extent of the violence and subordination of the previous epoch of formal Euro-domination, its structural and long-term shaping of systemic white advantage, and an accompanying white ‘innocence’ about the role of racial exploitation in making the world what it is today, particularly its transcontinental distribution of ‘Northern’ wealth and ‘Southern’ poverty” (Mills, 2015, p. 221).

Denying White supremacy as a global system

Documents

No discussion of White supremacy or racism as global system; mentions of racial discrimination, stereotyping, bias linked to social attitudes or “cultural norms” (e.g. “racial and religious intolerance”) or to teaching children “tolerance” or “awareness” or “respect for diversity and inclusion”

Interviews

“I think it’s from a US perspective, I think there's a lot of stuff happening, but I think it's happening because of events in the US... it's within the US perspective”

“we are a bit more aware of it here in the US because of the Black Lives Matter movement. But I would say in terms of the global organization, we haven't launched any sort of global effort on this at all”

“in the United States in particular, we've seen this happening very, very, very close to us... unfortunately, in terms of the [global education] work, I have not seen enough of that or hardly any to be quite honest”

“very American, very much focused on the Black American experience”

Neglect of racial social-structural factors

“a white refusal to recognize the long history of structural discrimination that has left whites with the differential resources they have today” (Mills, 2007, p. 28)

Neglect of racial social-structural factors

Documents

None provide substantive discussion of structural discrimination.

Websites

Of 40 websites, 25 released public solidarity statements on BLM in summer or fall of 2020; 11 acknowledged need to “do more” to address racism in the sector.

7 explicitly named systemic/structural racism or colonialism within the sector.



About ▾ Engage ▾ Tools ▾ Latest ▾

Racial prejudice, discrimination, and violence exist around the world in our communities, our laws, and our institutions. While it is uncomfortable for many of us to admit, the international humanitarian aid community is not exempt from this reality. We, the INEE Secretariat, want to speak up about these problems in our field and commit to being part of the solutions, beginning with addressing our own failings.

We recognize and acknowledge that we are a part of a global humanitarian system that, while holding good intentions for the world's most vulnerable, is implicitly colonial in nature. Because of this, the INEE Secretariat acknowledges the ways in which we reinforce and perpetuate **white supremacy culture** and institutional racism through some of our structures and actions. It is essential that we face these flaws in our systems – and ourselves – head-on and take steps, to dismantle these structures and take more inclusive and racially responsive actions to advance our mission of ensuring the right to a quality, safe, and relevant education for all who live in emergency and crisis contexts.

Neglect of racial social-structural factors

Interviews

“Every two weeks we have racism awareness discussions, we've been reading articles and discussing them. Taking bias surveys, listening to podcasts and just talking about what's been happening”

“started to come together, watch webinars on anti-racism in development... have conversations about what we can do on a daily basis and then also we started reading, like having a book club”

“So I have to say I've been extremely disappointed with our sector engaging in this. UN organizations might've kind of done it a little bit on their external comms front...”

“I think it's a lot of surface stuff”

“I think this is all bullshit”

“it can take a very tokenistic, paternalistic lens”; “We walk a fine line of tokenism, I have to say”

“I really do feel like the sector's in a moment of reckoning. And I think a lot of people have taken on the rhetoric... but they're not ready to actually make the changes necessary”

Material group interests

“the dynamic role of *white group interests* needs to be recognized and acknowledged as a central causal factor in generating and sustaining white ignorance”
(Mills, 2007, p. 34; his italics)

Material group interests and the EiE industry

“At the moment, the main process for accountability in international development... is to say, ‘Don't worry, there's somebody who looks like me in that place watching to make sure it's okay’”

“reducing the head count of White people like me sitting in the Global North in an office in London or Washington or Oslo or wherever”

“a lot of people have careers and lives and mortgages attached to this type of thing, and how easy is that going to be given up?”

“people have put millions, billions, of dollars into this industry. Still, in July, you had organizations waking up to the fact that we live in an inherently, an incessantly racist society, world... it's going to come down to, like it always does, what are the implications of the shifts that need to be made based on dollars and cents?”

“I suppose the money connects all of this together... It depends on organizations like the donor agencies that fund us, and so forth, just how committed they're going to be to this”

What next for EiE?

EiE organizations

- Name and confront White supremacy in governance and policy spaces
- Encode racial inequities in published reports
- Commit to actionable steps beyond public statements and token diversity
- Acknowledge that difficult structural changes require people and organizations to relinquish power and resources

Scholars in CIE and EiE

- Consider our own part in embodying and reproducing this ignorance through research
- Investigate racism and White ignorance in research on marginalization and inequities in global education
- Facilitate conversations between American and international educational scholarship

Thank you!

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Conceptualizing “Race”

Racial formations

“Race and racial meanings are neither stable nor consistent... but race remains a fundamental category of (dis)empowerment... a key category of inequality, of difference/identity, and of agency” (Omi and Winant, 2015, p.2-3)

Whiteness

“Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by White Folk is faulty” (Du Bois, 1920)

Coloniality

“...lays bare the asymmetrical relations of power that went into the making of knowledge and social relations from a Eurocentric perspective.” (Banerjee-Dube, 2014, p.513; also see Quijano & Ennis, 2000)

Racial capitalism

“...racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires” (Melamed, 2015, p. 77; also see Robinson, 1983)

Postcolonial/anticolonial

Alatas, 1977; Amin, 1988; Chatterjee, 1994; Fanon, 1952; Memmi, 1965; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988