

Forthcoming in *Compare: a journal of international and comparative education*.

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The erasures of racism in education and international development: re-reading the ‘global learning crisis’

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Abstract:

In this paper we argue that despite pervasive forms of racism on a global scale, the field of education and international development continues to fail to substantively engage with the production and effects of racial domination across its domains of research, policy and practice. Instead, considerations of racism remain silent, or indeed, erased, within our teaching and research, often in favour of colour-blind and technocratic approaches to ‘development’. This not only ignores the sector’s historical links to systems of racial domination but also the current ways in which the field is implicated in producing unequal outcomes along racial lines. We present a re-reading of the ‘global learning crisis’ – as the dominant discourse of contemporary educational development – to demonstrate how the framing of the ‘crisis’ and the responses it engenders and legitimises operate as a ‘racial project’ (Omi & Winant 2015). The paper offers theoretical and methodological resources with which to interrogate the field’s entanglements in systems of racial domination and challenge its erasures of racism.

Keywords: racism, colonialism, global development, sustainable development goals

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Introduction

The United Nation's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, in setting out a vision for economic, social, and environmental sustainability, emphasises the need to address inequalities not only between countries but also within them. In underlining the 'interlinkages' and 'integrated nature' of its vision to shift the 'world onto a sustainable and resilient path',¹ the agenda offers an opportunity to recognise more fully how multiple regimes of inequality are interconnected across the globe (Walby 2009). One such abiding and globally interconnected regime of inequality is racism; its division, classification, and control of people and their social, political, economic, land and epistemic rights. While there exists significant scholarship on how modern world history has been shaped by projects of racial domination (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Wolfe 2016; Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Robinson 2000), there has been a noticeable silence about the conditions of racism and its production of inequality within contemporary development studies (White 2002; Kothari 2006; Wilson 2012) and within the field from which we write: education and international development.

Silence is often thought about as an absence, and specifically as an absence that is passive. However, we see silence as active and dynamic; it is an act of erasure and misrepresentation. We draw here on the ideas of political philosopher Charles Mills (1997) who argues that racism is at the core of the social contract: it is not an exception or anomaly to an otherwise just political system. Silence or ignorance about racism, then, is *produced* and *required* by the economic, political and social systems that make up the social contract. The silence or ignorance of racism in our field, far from being a passive absence or simply referring to 'not knowing', has an *epistemology* that produces and normalises racism as a political system. This is what Mills (2015) calls an 'epistemology of ignorance'.

¹ Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

The current silence about racism within education and international development (EID) is being produced at a time which is seeing a flourishing of activism and scholarship in other fields to interrogate racism and educational inequality, including recent student- and community- led movements such as *Rhodes Must Fall*, *Why is my curriculum white?*, and *Black Lives Matter*. It is also being produced by the field against a much longer history of political struggles against racial domination by anti-colonial and indigenous activists. Furthermore, this silence structures how the field fashions and celebrates its own history. We note, for example, within this journal's reflection of the 20 Year Anniversary of the *British Association of International and Comparative Education* (BAICE), the early accounts of BAICE, including its 'pre-history', mention the influence of missionaries and colonial institutions but do not offer an explicit critique of the racial projects contained within these activities (Crossley et al. 2018; see also Takayama et al. 2017 for an appeal for comparative studies – closely related to EID – to recognise more fully its historical entanglements with colonialism). This paper, then, reflects on the implications of racial erasures in EID and offers some theoretical and methodological resources with which to inspect the field's entanglements in systems of racial dominance.

The paper begins by considering the historical orientations to racism in education and international development since the Second World War. We then turn to the notion of 'racial formation' (Omi & Winant 2015) to discuss how it can train our attention to the ways in which racism is produced through social, cultural, economic and political forces across temporal and spatial scales. In the second part of the paper we use these theoretical reflections to interrogate current development discourses of the 'global learning crisis'. Through an analysis of the 2018 World Bank report *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* we show how the moral panic of the 'crisis' has been used to narrowly define problems and solutions in education – none of which attend to the articulations of racism in the production of educational inequalities. We argue that through this racial erasure, technoscientific approaches to educational interventions are seen as the rational option for 'development', while systems of domination are able to remain uninterrogated and are thus kept in place. In the concluding section, we turn to reflect on how the field can address its racial erasures.

Racism and global development

The silence we identify is part of an ongoing struggle over the significance of racism in the formation of global development agendas. Notions of race and racism have been, in fact, central to the post-war development project. The founding rationale for the United Nations and its agencies after the Second World War was to develop a 'new' global humanism to guard against a return to the horrors of Nazism and its biological racism (Myers et al. forthcoming). UNESCO's Statements on Race in 1950, 1951, 1964 and 1967 signified a transition in scientific 'race thinking' – from race being determined by biology to it being informed by culture (Lerner 1981). In 1960 UNESCO adopted the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* which acknowledged the crucial role of education in ensuring equality of opportunity for members of all racial, national or religious groups. UNESCO recognised apartheid as a crime against humanity in 1966, and its *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* in 1978 set out expectations for media, law, international economic relations and education to address racial prejudice and inequalities. It was only in 2007 that the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was adopted, after twenty five years of formulation and sustained Indigenous activism, and despite the initial exclusion of Indigenous representatives from the drafting process (Melamed 2011).²

On education, the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* makes clear the responsibility of states and 'the entire teaching profession' to see that the 'educational resources of all countries are used to combat racism' (Article 5.2, UNESCO 1978). At the programmatic level, UNESCO and its national commissions have initiated numerous educational campaigns and cultural activities to address issues of racial discrimination and xenophobia, particularly through the lens of 'intercultural dialogue'³. UNESCO has, for example, sought to implement peace and human rights education and global citizenship education globally and has produced an array of curriculum resources and

² It is not insignificant that four settler colonies - Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States – initially voted against this UN Declaration. The Declaration's emphasis on the land rights of indigenous peoples were seen to pose a threat to white territorial occupation (see Melamed 2011).

³ See, for example, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/intercultural-dialogue>

educational programmes to facilitate teaching about slavery, the holocaust and other racial violences.⁴ But an approach largely premised on liberal interculturalism, or what Melamed (2011, p.xiv) calls ‘the benevolent rationalising of liberal orders’, has meant that such interventions often fail to materially address the enduring effects of colonialism and the structural conditions of racism.

As historical work has shown, racial hierarchies of empire have been adapted into rather than abandoned by the UN’s vision of cosmopolitan internationalism (Sluga 2010, Brattain 2007). Amrith and Sluga (2008) argue that the ‘egalitarian language’ of the UN had ‘no way of acknowledging and dealing with the very real inequalities – political, economic, racial – that persisted and deepened in the post-World War II period’ (260). On UNESCO’s Statements on Race, scholars have traced how such internationally coordinated work did not mark an end to race as a scientific concept or to racism within science (Selcer 2012). Such historical analyses of the shifting discourses of race illuminate how ‘permissible narratives of difference’ condition what appears and what is erased within past and present understandings of ‘development’. (Melamed 2011, p.14). Indeed, as our discussions show, the presumed neutrality of ‘science’ continues to be enrolled into global race-making projects of contemporary development as part of the current ‘silence’.

Debates about the global significance of racism have taken place through the World Conferences Against Racism (WCAR) convened by UNESCO in 1978, 1983, 2001 and 2009 – and the heated political controversies of these meetings (for example, contestations about reparations for slavery, the right to self-determination, and casteism as racism) reveal the ongoing struggle over defining and tackling racism at a global level (Baber 2010). What role should global institutions play in addressing racism? On the one hand, racial inequality is contextually specific – often enacted at national and sub-national scales. On the other hand, racism is a global formation, shaped profoundly by European colonisation’s production of a ‘global colour line’ (Lake & Reynolds, 2008) and the racial contract of white supremacy that extends beyond

⁴ See for example, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/dakar/education/learning-to-live-together/>; <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/networks/global-networks/aspnet/flagship-projects/transatlantic-slave-trade/new-ideas-for-teaching-tst/>; <https://en.unesco.org/themes/holocaust-genocide-education/resources>;

national borders (Mills 1997).

Within nation-states one can point to different educational strategies aiming to promote inter-cultural dialogue, multiculturalism and peace, and improving learning outcomes for disadvantaged groups of learners. But research on these issues often say little about how the nation state – much like empire – relies on the maintenance of indigenous territorial dispossession and the management of racialised Others. That is, the concept of race is imbricated in projects of national development as much as it has been in global development. Such ‘multi-scalar’ productions of racism are seen in the recent expressions of hard-edged ethnonationalism across the globe, for example through the rise of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and communal violence that is being variously legitimised through nationalist politics across the global north and south.

We argue for a revitalised, explicit and central analysis of racism within global development. This does not mean that racism is monolithic or immutable, but that there needs to be a globally-connected commitment to tackling contextually specific formations of racism. The ‘leave no-one behind’ discourse of the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework registers the possibility for a global anti-discrimination agenda, but its operation through neoliberal developmentalism obfuscates systems of racial domination (Weber 2017). For example, within education, SDG4 on inclusive and equitable quality education has led to greater focus on ‘teacher quality’ and ‘learning outcomes’, but work under this banner by and large continues to overlook – and thus fails to address – the complex, interconnected politics of racism upon which both ‘quality’ and ‘outcomes’ might be contingent.

This perhaps should not come as a surprise. As scholars have argued, contemporary EID agendas are constituted through the ‘new imperialism’ of global capitalism (Tikly 2004; see also Harvey 2003). Formerly colonized nations have been rendered as part of a ‘global periphery’, to be enrolled in the project of ‘development’ by the interests of the global elite (Tikly 2004, 176). Educational research and policy agendas are shaped by the political and military strategies of states, as well as by transnational flows of economic power. As Jodi Melamed (2015, p.77) explains, drawing on Cedric Robinson (2000), racism enshrines the ‘unequal differentiation of human value’ that capitalist

processes of expropriation and accumulation *require*. Put simply, ‘capitalism is racial capitalism’ (Melamed 2015, p.77), and arguably mass education plays a major role in differentiating human value given its role in filtering and sifting both knowledge and people.

There is a clear need for the international development community to speak out about how our own research and practice is implicated in political systems of racism. The Boards of multilateral organisations and the constitution of various ‘epistemic communities’ that shape and legitimise global development research and policy, for example, are themselves not insulated from the politics of race (Haas, 1989; see Sukarieh & Tannock forthcoming for a discussion of the geopolitics of academic research partnerships; see also analyses of racism in peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention in Razack 2004 and Ali 2010). Appeals for the field to be more ‘inclusive’ and ‘diverse’ – especially in our own epistemic communities (such as our teaching and research) – are often problematic as they celebrate the kindness and generosity of dominant groups towards the Other whilst maintaining the very relations that produce domination.⁵ Here we suggest it is important to consider both the epistemic and material violence of ‘inclusion’ in our work (not least because inclusion is often framed as benevolence). The discourse of ‘inclusion’ has been used, for example, to incorporate indigenous peoples into dominant education systems and social institutions more broadly which has had violent consequences. It has been used both historically and presently to deny indigenous knowledges and ways of life, and it has normalised the continued territorial occupation of settler-colonies (see Wolfe 2016). Within the field of EID, discourses of inclusion and diversity arguably co-opt a more radical politics of reconstruction: a politics in which ‘development’ is framed around principles of redistribution and reparation rather than through principles of incorporation.

Against the pervasive silence, we argue that policy and research interventions in EID cannot be unhooked from political systems of racism or be seen in neutral ‘colour-blind’ terms. After all, past and present racisms – along with other regimes of inequality such

⁵ Relatedly, we note that methodological literature on researching the Other often re-centre white experience and reproduce tropes of white ‘vulnerability’ despite conditions of white domination (See, for example, Muller and Trahar 2016).

as heteropatriarchy, classism and ableism – underlie the unequal allocations of educational resources and opportunities. UNICEF recently estimated, for example, that approximately 25 million children are out of school in conflict affected areas from South Sudan to Afghanistan to Palestine (UNICEF, 2017a, 2017b). The roots of these conflicts are complex and multifaceted but much analytic work in EID doesn't trace these systematically in terms of racism and ethnonationalism in which colonial violence, dispossession, and 'divide and rule' logics have an active legacy (see for example Prunier 1998). As commentators have pointed out, schools have been Janus-faced in relation to ethnic conflict, both complicit in its perpetuation and seen as a key means for conflict resolution and peace building (Bush and Salterelli 2000; Novelli 2010).

Indeed, this tension of education – how it simultaneously holds the capacity for progress and violence – needs to be an always-present aspect of EID research and policy, specifically in relation to systems of racial domination (Rudolph et al. 2018). For example, migration and forced displacement is calling for new educational responses, and the inclusion of minoritized populations in mass schooling systems illuminates how education can operate as a 'border regime' (Dyer 2018). Having fled war and persecution, refugees can face discrimination in the education systems of countries of transit or settlement, including inadequate resourcing, hostile environments, and a failure to recognise the status and value of their cultures, languages and identities (Roy & Roxas 2011, Sidhu & Naidoo 2018, Uptin et al. 2012). Racism is also sustained through the epistemic logics of formal education systems globally (Rudolph et al. 2018). This takes many forms from a failure to recognise indigenous knowledge systems, to a persistent Eurocentric bias in formal curricula, and language of instruction policies that favour 'global' (read colonial) languages (see for example Brock-Utne, 2007; Desai, 2016; Trudell, 2007).

The discrimination, exclusion, and violence that young people and communities experience due to racialised markers of ethnicity, religion, linguistic identity, nationality and caste are significant but are rarely captured by the discourse of measurement that dominates current global development research and practice. Moreover, we need to be attentive to how metrics of educational inequality categorise and classify groups in ways that can produce and reify racialised difference. For example, scientific racism is

arguably being remade through genetically-infused research in education (Martschenko et al. 2018, Gillborn 2016). We also note the long shadow of scientific racism and eugenics that continues to influence thinking around population control (see, for example, Wilson 2012). Notions of 'culture' too continue to be used in essentialised ways to racialise groups and naturalise differences in educational performance (Gillborn, 1995; Malik 1996). That is, 'culture' can be a tool with which development researchers explain the 'under-development' or deficiencies of specific groups, as if culture itself is untethered from histories of domination (Narayan 1998).

The presence of racism is so pervasive that the silencing of it within the field of education and international development begins to sound deafening.

Theorising racism in education and international development

There are numerous theoretical resources which the field of education and international development can think with to address its erasures of racism. Here we reflect on the now classic contributions of sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015) and their concept of 'racial formation'. They demonstrate that while there is no biological basis to 'race', the idea of 'race' is constantly produced and filled with meaning through social processes. As Omi and Winant explain, race has no fixed meaning, rather it is 'constructed and transformed socio-historically through the cumulative convergence and conflict of racial projects that reciprocally structure and signify race'. (2015:128). They offer the concept of 'racial formation' – the 'sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed' (2015: 109) – to consider how racial dynamics are formed and sustained, and with what effects. These processes take place at the point, or 'crossroads', where racial significations meet with ever shifting social structures and institutions (2015: 124).

For Omi and Winant, the ideological and practical 'work' of articulating this connection is achieved through 'racial projects', which are, to some degree, present in every identity, institution and social practice. Racial projects simultaneously interpret, represent or explain racial identities and meanings within particular discursive and ideological

practices, whilst organising and distributing resources (economic, political and cultural) along racial lines. These projects are dynamic in that they can conflict, converge, and are contested across scales – from global policy-making to the actions of nation states and the practices of institutions and civic-based movements and actors. Also, they do not operate discretely, instead they reciprocally interact with other racial projects to reproduce or subvert current systems. Subversion suggests that not all racial projects are racist, for example, the struggles over racial significations within Indigenous rights, civil rights and anti-colonial movements. Rather, a racial project can be defined as being racist if it *'creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities'* (2015:128). This brings us to ask: what have been the racial projects involved in efforts to create and govern subjects, and reorganise and distribute resources, in the name of 'development'? What racial projects in our field uphold or produce structures of domination?

An analysis of racial projects and racial formations in the field of EID allows for a deeper ontological understanding of racism as a set of social relationships embedded across the different domains, institutions, and sites of our work. Racial formations can be conceived as occurring through the social relationships between groups of actors engaged in different racial projects. Thus, when we consider the extension of racial meaning across social relationships, it is possible to talk about a racialised division of labour within the economy as well as a racialised polity and civil society, for example. Put simply, racial projects can operate and interact across scales: within our classrooms, our policy-briefs, 'our' field-sites; within our hiring practices, our research partnerships, our allocations of resources. Such an analysis stands in contrast to approaches that see racism as simply a consequence of dynamics within the cultural domain (as in the 'clash of civilisations' thesis), or as the isolated hate crimes of individuals.

The idea of racial formations also offers a counter to reductive uses of 'race' or its proxies within social research and policy. This is particularly important in our field, given that metric-based developmentalism renders 'target' social groups as empirical categories: essentialised entities of gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and so on (Unterhalter 2017; Languille 2014). While the category of 'race' is rarely used directly within education research, *racial* categories frequently appear via ethnicity, nationality,

caste, linguistic background, religion, culture and other classifications of ‘group difference’ within analyses of educational inequalities. Given ‘the “work” essentialism does for domination, and the “need” domination displays to essentialize the subordinated’ (Omi & Winant 2000, 206), there is a need to consider more critically the production of racial categories within metric-oriented development research. Categories of race may become more visible through the desire to measure learning inequalities, but *racism* – its social, political, and economic conditions – can continue to be erased.

Indeed, while much has been written on the implications of neoliberal developmentalism in education (see for example, Robertson et al., 2008 for a review of this literature), it has been less common to see sustained inquiry into the ways these politics contain and produce racial projects. Neoliberalism, usually understood as a class project in education, is also a racial project. This has been demonstrated, for example, in Omi and Winant’s (2015) analysis of racial formations in the US in which both neoliberalism and neoconservatism operated together politically and economically.⁶ Melamed (2011) explains the economic requirements for racism:

‘the emergence of a global order through a world-embracing system of capitalism, nation-states, colonies, and imperial rule was able to constitute itself as a global social structure only to the extent that it was racialised’ (p.7).

She goes on to suggest, ‘the primary function of racialization has been to make structural inequality appear to fair’ (p.13). Understanding, then, the dynamics of educational exclusion and inequality in contexts of neoliberal marketisation, as much critical work in the field attempts to do, also requires attending the ways in which neoliberalism works *as part of* global and national racial projects (for example: states’ legitimisation and maintenance of settler occupation; ethnonationalist projects of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence; and, as we discuss in this paper, erasures of racism by powerful global actors in development).

⁶ Omi and Winant argue that neoliberalism in the United States of America emerged under Reagan from a conservative backlash to the gains of the civil rights movement (under Thatcher it was associated with a critique of the gains of the anti-racist movement in England). Neoconservatism in the US since the 1980s, they go on to explain, has been supportive of neoliberal economic policies on the grounds that it put a brake on the ‘undeserving poor’ (read, Black populations) from receiving state welfare support.

We suggest, then, that the idea of racial formation can be a methodological orientation for the field to think with, in order to ‘unlock the power relations inscribed within it, that operate through race but are by no means contained by it’ (White, 2006: 58). This does not imply a fixed or universal schema of racism. Indeed, Omi and Winant’s work emerged from the specific histories of racial formations in the United States, and as Mara Loveman (1999: 895) warns, ‘asserting the unique ontological status of “race” may actually undermine attempts to improve the understanding of the operation and consequences of “race”, “racism” and “racial domination” in different times and places’. The task for our field is to connect the ways in which racial domination is formed and contested both in the specific temporal and geopolitical contexts of our research, *and* through the broader architectures of global governance that make such research on ‘development’ legible.

Indeed, it remains a matter for empirical inquiry to understand the detailed workings of racial formations in specific contexts.⁷ Wacquant (2010) reminds us of the need to embrace thick sociological accounts of the social relations, categories and power structures instituted by the ‘outworking’ of neoliberal ideologies and technologies of exploitation. But we can begin to see how the articulations of racism are far from being ‘side’ concerns of the field. On the contrary, the imaginary of race is at the core of the sector and its sites of practice, constituting its narrative and playing out in material ways through the priorities, allocations, and governance of international development (White 2006). We demonstrate this below with respect to the ‘global learning crisis’, tracing how its erasure of racism is, itself, a racial project.

The ‘global learning crisis’

In 2013, in the lead up to the Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO published a report called *The Global Learning Crisis*. In it, a ‘crisis’ in education is named: ‘despite increased enrolments, an estimated 250 million children cannot read, write or count

⁷ Goodnight (2017) offers a rare analysis of the ‘translations’ of critical race theories within comparative and international education research, examining the methodological affordances of CRT for understanding casteism (and its intersections with other regimes of inequality) in Indian education.

well, whether they have been to school or not' (UNESCO 2013, p.2). The issue of improving the quality of education, not just access to it, had been debated for decades, acknowledged not least through the 2005 Education For All Global Monitoring Report *The Quality Imperative* (UNESCO 2004). But the language of crisis offered a new sense of urgency, and legitimacy, with which development actors and institutions were able to chart their courses of intervention. The 2013/4 Global Monitoring Report *Teaching and Learning: achieving quality for all* (UNESCO 2014) dedicated significant discussion to 'the learning crisis', including the substantial economic implications of low rates of return, and an emphasis on supporting 'quality teachers' to 'solve the crisis'. Learning goals and indicators have now been introduced into the 2030 framework for Sustainable Development. As SDG 4.1 states: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

The discourse of 'crisis' can present itself as uncontestable: of course, one cannot argue *against* learning in schools. However, the discourse obfuscates its own politics – how the 'crisis' came to be and what sorts of concepts of and responses to learning it renders intelligible and possible. Indeed, the 'global learning crisis' has been accompanied by a proliferation of learning metrics tools, assessment programs, and an industry of research and consultancy (for example: the OECD's PISA for Development; The Global Alliance to Monitor Learning; the Brookings Institute's Assessment for Learning programme; and the ESRC-DFID partnership that committed £20 million to commission research on 'raising learning outcomes'). The World Bank has expressed interest in developing a 'global learning metric', with the argument that 'the learning crisis' is often hidden – but measurement makes it visible' (WB 2018, p.91). There appears to be an almost feverish response to generate more data, more metrics, and more science on 'learning' in order to solve the 'crisis'. We are told, in a statement that all but dismisses the expertise of educators at the chalk-face: 'to take learning seriously, start by measuring it' (WB 2018, pg. 57). The hubris of contemporary development discourse in the age of measurement positions data as able to save the assumed march of history: 'data analysis needs to inform practice, rather than simply describing the state of affairs *once it is too late* and inequities have become entrenched' (Rose et al. 2018, emphasis added).

Indeed, despite the bustling and costly production of data on education – by elite actors in powerful development industries, often in the global north – we note the production of silence (or, as Mills puts it, ignorance) that denies racism as a matter of relevance to the ‘global learning crisis’. We go as far as to suggest that this production of silence is indicative that the ‘crisis’ operates as a racial project, since by eliding race, racism is normalised. As White (2006, 65) argues, the constitutive fiction of development ‘turns on its own erasure’. In other words, the production of, and response to, the ‘global learning crisis’ is able to legitimately work through colour-blind and technocratic approaches that erase histories of racial domination. An uncomfortable, and thereby important question to ask, then, is why is this so?

Consensus and erasure

In what is regarded a founding study on the theory of ‘moral panic’, Stuart Hall and his colleagues (1978) identify the consensual quality of ‘crisis’ discourse; its appearance ‘to talk “with one voice” of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions’ (Hall et al. 1978, p.16) in order to shore up specific renderings of ‘problems’ and justify methods of containment. To unpack the contemporary discourse of the ‘global learning crisis’ which is shaping a consensus around the research and policy priorities of education and international development, we analyse how the concept of crisis has been mobilised by the World Bank in its 2018 *World Development Report*.

Called *Learning to Realize Education’s Promise*, the World Bank’s Report constructs the ‘learning crisis’ through what seems to be an impressively forensic account of education systems and their economic returns, globally. It was the first time that education was taken as the principal focus in the Report’s 40-year history of annual publication. The publication calls for immediate action to ‘escape low learning traps’, through evidence-based approaches and innovations. Significantly, it emphasises ‘alignment’ as a goal for development: ‘learning outcomes won’t change unless education systems take learning seriously and use learning as a guide and metric’ (p.16). It even suggests a mantra for this process of incorporation and consensus-building - *all for learning* – and three

strategies for development research, policy and practice to achieve it: assess learning, act on evidence, and align actors.

It is particularly significant to note that the World Bank has positioned the crisis of learning as both a moral and economic problem. As Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group, reflects in the forward of the Report:

This is a moral and economic crisis that must be addressed immediately. This year's Report provides a path to address this economic and moral failure (WB 2018, p.xi).

Despite the 'failure' of post-war international development, to which Jim Yong Kim alludes in his opening remarks, the crisis discourse enables the World Bank to defend system-wide alignment to its visions of learning as the natural 'path'. Within the Report, there is neither systematic recognition of how racism is articulated within the 'learning crisis', nor single mention of the field's imbrications with colonialism, and yet solutions to the 'learning crisis' are constructed as both morally and economically irrefutable.

Indeed, as Salim Vally comments on the Report,

For those of us in Africa, some acknowledgement at the very least, of the World Bank's historical complicity through the devastation wrought by structural adjustment, the support for user fees, large class sizes, the discouragement of higher education, and caps on the salaries of teachers would show not just mere contrition but would signal an openness to learn from the mistakes of the past. (Ginsburg et al. 2018, p.283).

Examining the World Bank's 'learning crisis' discourse for what it renders visible and invisible reveals how it erases racism and other relations of social domination in its understanding of educational inequalities. The Report defines the learning crisis as having four 'proximate determinants': learner preparation, teacher skills and motivation, the availability of relevant inputs, and school management and governance (WB 2018, p.78). These 'immediate' determinants – or 'those most directly linked to learning outcomes' – are then rationalised as key sites for intervention (p.78). While this framework recognises that proximate determinants 'are themselves the result of deeper determinants', the 'crisis' is not able to systematically name nor address these 'deeper' issues. As such, structures of social domination, of which racism is one articulating force, are erased from both the conception of, and solution to, the 'global

learning crisis’.

Reflecting current interests in ‘systems thinking’ in education and international development (cf. Pritchett 2015), the Report acknowledges that there are ‘technical and political factors’ which make educational systems ineffective. These include competing interests of actors in the system, patronage, and rent-seeking behaviours, and other so-called ‘unhealthy politics’ (p.189). Absent here is a theory of power that is able to address the *relationality* of these social processes across scales, as so usefully offered by theories of ‘racial formation’. Tucked away in a discussion on ‘vested interests’ is the acknowledgement that ‘education systems can be used by dominant ethnic groups – especially in multilingual or multireligious societies – to promote their positions while suppressing minorities’ (p. 190). What remains unclear is how the World Bank’s emphasis on ‘alignment’ of interests, or for that matter, its focus on measuring ‘learning outcomes’, would address this significant issue, and indeed one that applies as much to the ‘global north’ as it does to the ‘global south’. As Silova (2018) argues, the Report ‘portrays “developing” countries as trapped in an endless loop of poverty, corruption and backwardness, while positioning Western countries as examples to emulate’. Without a relational analysis, the ‘vested interests’ of white curricula in the global north, as just one example, are not made visible as ‘problems’ within the global learning crisis framework (cf. Bain 2018). The production of racism in and through schooling is able to be erased from issues of ‘learning’. This fails to recognise the racial formations which education is enmeshed in globally.

Indeed, a telling example of the absence of relational thinking within the Report, despite its language of ‘systems’, is that structural inequalities are separated out from the ‘proximate determinants’ of the learning crisis in a textbox called “Education can’t do it alone” (p. 44). It is the only place within the Report that discrimination is mentioned explicitly. But this is in reference to the reduction of educational ‘returns’ for specific groups in the labour market, rather than an analysis of discrimination within educational processes themselves. Thus, while the Report insists ‘educational systems do not function in a vacuum’, its concept of ‘learning’ appears to do just that. Indeed, despite longstanding arguments by educationists that learning and pedagogy need to be understood as social processes (Alexander 2015; Barrett 2007, Sriprakash 2011), the

'learning crisis' discourse has entrenched functionalist rationalities in its concept of learning outcomes, and appealed to the 'neutrality' of scientific frameworks to understand how learning happens. How the market or science can interrogate, rather than service, complex systems of social domination is side-stepped through the 'crisis' discourse.

Indeed, the contradiction of the learning crisis discourse is that it recognises that 'poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability and location explain most remaining schooling disparities' (p.60), yet moves its focus away from social, economic, and political forces that produce such inequalities. The 'learning crisis' in the World Bank Report centres approaches that depoliticise both educational processes and the production of educational inequalities. For example, alongside the techno-rationalities of global measures of 'learning outcomes', the Report shows interest in cognitive neuroscience and the 'biology of learning' for addressing learning and skills formation (p.68). Such appeals to technoscientific solutions might appear to be neutral, or even 'colour-blind', but as critical race scholars and others have shown, technoscientific practices have normative and political dimensions which can coproduce racial classifications (Benjamin, 2016; White, 2006). Gilles et al. (2016, p.221) argue, 'social science instruments and techniques are constitutive, bringing the object of study into view, categorizing and shaping how it is thought about and known'. There is an urgent need, we suggest, to reflect on the racial projects involved in *knowing* the 'global learning crisis' in the context of the rising influence of neuroscience and biology.

Conclusion

Operating through the logics of neoliberal developmentalism, racial erasure in the 'global learning crisis' enables research, policy and practice in EID to do a number of things. It enables the field to ignore the colonial present, or treat it as background 'context' rather than as constitutive analysis; the active legacies of violent theft and control of lands, bodies, labour and resources through European colonialism that produce educational 'crises' often disappear in our analytic work. Racial erasure in the learning crisis discourse also enables the field to naturalise the 'global south' as a site of

'crisis' and thus intervention, while simultaneously de-linking the 'global north' from the production of learning inequalities, including racial formations of white supremacy. The 'colour-blind' market logics of neoliberalism enable the racial projects of (ethno-nationalistic) states to remain unaddressed by the development field. And, it enables the field to eliminate or deem irrelevant the epistemic resources that challenge its forms of knowledge or its desire for normative 'alignment'. For example, analyses of racial formations and the articulations of racism within education systems are simply bracketed off from the 'problems' of global development. As such, the World Bank's discourse of the 'learning crisis' operates through an epistemology of ignorance. The irrefutability of the 'crisis' and its solutions in data, metrics, and science – propped up by academic research industries – permits such racial erasures.

Thus, we have attempted to point to the ways in which the discourse of 'the global learning crisis', as circulated by a powerful and dominant entity the development sector, operates as a racial project. This project works through a silencing of, and unhooking from, the racial formations of its own production: the historical and social struggles of, for example, colonial exploitation, racialised exclusions, and ethnic violence, which produce educational 'crises'. This is a silence which is neither passive nor benign. Instead, it is active and dynamic as it erases the political systems of racism from the discourse, policy and practice of 'development'. In fact, we suggest that the silence is deeply lodged in, and required by, hegemonic industries of development to depoliticise and ultimately sustain our work.

The 'global learning crisis' has arguably become the dominant frame through which research and policy in education and international development is now perceived, but our analysis hopes to inspire interrogation of the other ways in which our field achieves its 'work' of racial erasure. What makes development projects, such as the discourses surrounding the global learning crisis, go unnoticed as racial projects? We urge critical reflection on how research, policy and practice in EID comes to function, relatively unimpeded, through colour-blind and technoscientific approaches. We challenge 'common sense' responses development 'problems' and 'crises' which are narrowly defined, devoid of sociohistorical context, and operating as if separate from political systems of racism.

After all, such racial erasures keep systems of domination in place, and often under the guise of progressive intent. We find it deeply troubling, for example, that critical race theories and historical inquiry more broadly are all but absent in the curriculum of EID university courses. Reflecting on our own experiences of masters-level programmes in elite institutions in the UK, the next generation of development policy actors and researchers are often being trained with little understanding of the various racial formations that have shaped both the field and the specific development contexts being studied. Arguably, this lack of historical reflexivity and knowledge of ongoing anti-racist, anti-colonial struggle is how the field reproduces itself. The ascendancy of economics within such programmes, for example, creates a narrow lens through which education and development is understood, and this bolsters powerful research and policy industries (such as those linked to the measurement of learning outcomes as part of the 'global learning crisis') where the careers of elites can be advanced. The exclusion of people of colour – often students and noticeably professors – in EID programmes in the 'global north' is yet another articulation of racism that too often remains unspoken in the field. We have a duty to engage critically and openly with the damaging nature and effects of racism in all its forms. This is not a question of capacity but of will.

We contend, then, that the sector can no longer side-step the systematic ways in which racism is articulated through its practices, whether in the name of progressive politics ('inclusive education') or by invoking efficiency or neutrality ('what works', 'evidence based practice'). Arguably, the first challenge lies in acknowledging the racial projects through which the field operates, rather than perpetuating the absence of historical reflexivity and its colour-blind myths, or relegating matters of racism to 'specialist' inquiry that are bracketed off from the 'core activities' of the field. This is to acknowledge the ways in which racial formations have profoundly shaped the educational contexts in which we work. We also call for rigorous debate about the ways in which the theories, measures, tools, and approaches that we use to understand educational inequality enable us to see or *not see* racism. This is to identify the epistemological means of racial erasure. The material conditions of our field require constant scrutiny too; who does what work, where, and under what conditions, and how do these arrangements permit a notion of global development that is blind to

systems of racial domination?

The question remains whether an anti-racist politics can be built *within* a field whose own history cannot be separated from the histories of European colonialism, new imperialism and racial capitalism. Given the co-option and even marketisation of radical politics by institutions as a strategy of silencing and control (see for example, Sisters of Resistance 2018), and the use of 'anti-racism' as a means to secure geopolitical interests rather than as an end in itself (see Melamed 2011), we must learn from anti-racist struggles that operate outside the domain of development, as post-development theorists have asked us to imagine. Writing from within the field, and presumably to many readers who are similarly located, we invest hope in our collective responsibility to come to know and challenge our own 'epistemologies of ignorance'. Challenging these racial erasures demand us to turn towards the field's complicity in systems of racial domination so they can no longer be ignored. This is our learning crisis.

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