



# Whiteness as futurity and globalization of higher education

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## Abstract

Amid growing debates about globalization of higher education (HE) reproducing inequalities, an analysis of race as the organizing influence underlying this global phenomenon remains absent. This conceptual essay argues that our understanding of globalization of HE would benefit from an intersectional understanding of critical Whiteness studies and temporal studies to help racialize and further temporalize this phenomenon. It introduces *Whiteness as futurity* framework and its three components: Whiteness as (a) aspiration, (b) investment, and (c) malleability. Drawing on this framework, it provides a critical race temporal account of globalization of HE by critically examining two contemporary global HE trends, namely: (a) the global diffusion of liberal education, and (b) the growing use of global university rankings (GURs). It argues that *Whiteness as futurity* colonizes (or orients) global subjects' (nation-states', policy makers', institutions', and individuals') imaginaries and reinforces the asymmetrical movements, networks, and untethered economies underpinning global HE. The article concludes that educators should consider seriously the insights of Whiteness studies in reconceptualizing globalization of HE.

**Keywords** Whiteness · Temporality · Globalization · Curriculum · University rankings · Critical race studies

## Introduction

In this conceptual essay, we demonstrate racial asymmetries as the central organizing influence underpinning globalization of higher education (HE) as it is foreclosed by “Whiteness as futurity”—a *futurity orientation* embedded in Whiteness. While many highlight the inequalities embedded in globalization (Altbach, 2004; Sidhu, 2006; Luke, 2001; Naidoo, 2011; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010), we argue that our understanding of globalization of HE would benefit from an intersectional understanding of critical Whiteness studies and temporal studies to help racialize and further temporalize this phenomenon. We

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conceptualize globalization as the process that forms the global dimension (Marginson, 2011). By “Whiteness,” we refer to a set of “narrative structural positions, rhetorical tropes and habits of perception” (Dyer, 1997, p. 12) standing for the normal. Whiteness, as a state of knowing and being, creates a superstructure that privileges White people, institutions, and cultural norms and *orients* social and political environments towards the benefit and protection of White life (Ahmed, 2007). By demonstrating the interconnection between racial and temporal logics in the globalization of HE, we extend the literature emphasizing inequalities in global HE.

While indeed accounts of racialized politics in global higher education exist in the internationalization of HE literature (e.g., Ahmed, 2016; Lee, 2020; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yao et al., 2019), such accounts tend to take the nation-state for granted (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013) (recent exceptions include Chatterjee & Barber, 2021; Ress, 2019; Stein, 2017), and/or are concerned with mapping and documenting contemporary racisms in or between specific geographies (Christian, 2019, p. 171). As scholars of color coming from Brown, Black, South Asian, African-American, and/or Muslim backgrounds situated in the Global North, we distinguish between “internationalization” and “globalization” of HE, while recognizing these are multiple and contested concepts. Derivative of a nation-state ontological standpoint, we interpret internationalization of HE as focusing on the relations or mobility and/or connections between nations (i.e., mobility of people, culture, and knowledge, and/or involvement of HE institutions across national borders). Meanwhile, our understanding (and analysis here) of globalization of HE encompasses possibility of relations or agency that span, flow over, and/or ignore nation-states, including flows and disjunctures of culture, capital, technology, media, and the growing role of non-HE transnational actors (e.g., commercial rankers, publishing companies, global media, and/or international NGOs) transcending and reconstituting national borders that are mitigated locally with/in HE sector and institutions globally (see Marginson, 2011; Sidhu, 2006; Shahjahan, 2019).

While the internationalization of HE literature above grapples with race shaping the global HE landscape, we build upon this body of literature by unpacking race as the *central organizing influence* of globalization of HE that has not been done in the same degree as we do here. By *not* taking the nation-state for granted, we foreground the global linkages manifesting in transnational racialization (Christian, 2019; Quijano, 2000). Race and racism are not uniform across the globe but continue as a transnational phenomenon. Despite the absence of White bodies, social and institutional power structures continue the aims of Whiteness (Christian, 2019). How is this possible? As we will demonstrate, Whiteness’ enduring capacity lies in its malleability, its ability to shape-shift in response to its present environment to (re)construct its past and future.

The article demonstrates how Whiteness plays a critical role in shaping mentalities and subsequent futurities by colonizing our global future imaginaries. Our point of departure stems from Marginson’s (2011) suggestion that globalization of HE “fashions mentalities, and is fashioned by those mentalities in return” (p. 22). Existing temporal accounts of globalization of HE focus on time–space compression through global flows of ideas and technology (Marginson, 2011), and/or impact of global capitalist time on universities amid academic capitalism (Walker, 2009). By uncovering the “not-yet” to come and/or the state of being related to the future, we offer a novel *futurity*-temporal perspective to this debate. We argue that *Whiteness as futurity* colonizes (or orients) global subjects’ (nation-states’, policy makers’, institutions’, and individuals’) imaginaries and reinforces the asymmetrical movements, networks, and untethered economies underpinning global HE. As such, we first delineate our *Whiteness as futurity* framework and its three components: Whiteness as (a) aspiration, (b) investment, and (c) malleability. Drawing on this framework, we next

provide a critical race temporal account of globalization of HE by critically examining two contemporary global HE trends, namely: (a) the global diffusion of liberal education, and (b) the growing use of global university rankings (GURs). We focus on these two current trends because they share many similar hallmarks in their cultural transmission driven by globalization and bounded by Whiteness. Yet, they are different as the former is about curricula, and the latter is focused on metrics and policy. We conclude suggesting that educators consider seriously the insights of Whiteness studies and futurity in reconceptualizing globalization of HE.

## Whiteness as futurity

Drawing on two domains of knowledge—Whiteness and temporal studies—we delineate here how globalization of Whiteness governs the future through three distinct pathways: (a) influencing future aspirations, (b) creating conditions that make it economically and culturally harmful to not invest or continue the investment in Whiteness, and (c) remaining malleable enough to disguise or superimpose itself by appearing flexible to local conditions. Through the three pathways referenced above, Whiteness constrains pasts and presents while producing White futures. The three characteristics detailed above do not emerge procedurally, but instead symbiotically able to exist independently while also catalyzing the potency of one another.

Additionally, these framing characteristics emerge because, as derivatives of a modern/colonial system (and thus entangled with capitalism), Whiteness is the colonial superstructure (Quijano, 2000). Therefore, global HE systems prioritize White interests, while reproducing racialized precarity, resource extraction, and ecological destruction across a variety of scales (Stein, 2017). Temporal dimensions also prompt us to contend with how Whiteness is also interconnected with ways of knowing and being largely shaped by modern/colonial epistemologies and ontologies. We cannot separate modern/colonial subjectivity from Whiteness-oriented subjectivity. Colonial preconditions necessitate that all mechanisms that protect against precarity be beholden to Whiteness (Mbembe, 2001). Therefore, to pursue capitalist gain, safety, or global mobility is to pursue Whiteness. We elaborate on these entanglements throughout the below framework.

## Whiteness as producer and foreclosure of aspirations

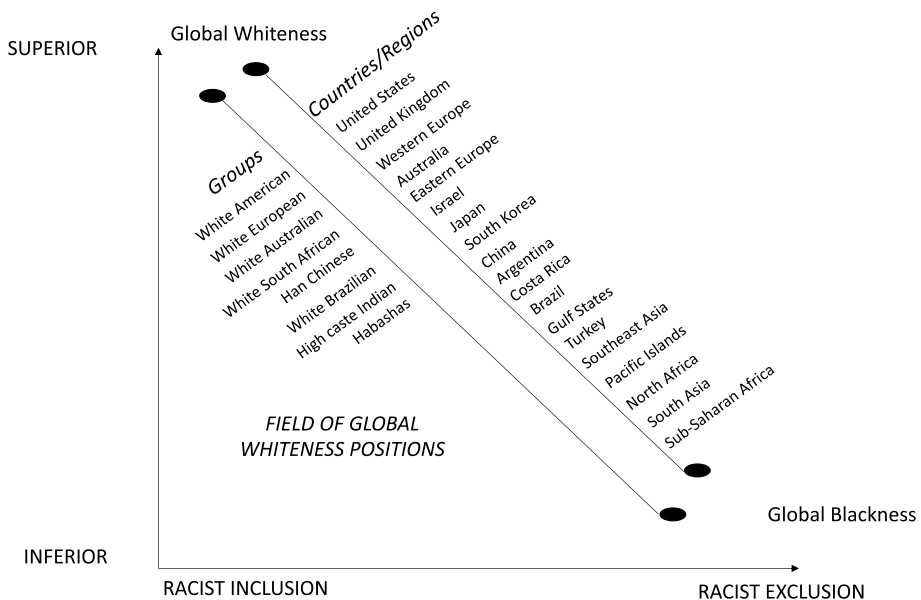
Scholars' long-standing preoccupation with a racist past often distracts from an analysis of Whiteness's role in the creation of the future (Baldwin, 2012). An historicized view of race, while important, suggests a future resolution, obfuscating how the future also produces and reproduces race and racism. Challenging "Whitenesses and their hold on racist social imaginaries" requires attention to how White identity invokes the future and shapes geographies (Baldwin, 2012, p. 172).

A chronopolitical analysis of time as racialized highlights the way powered systems compel individuals to imagine the order of time, and how that ordering shapes not only present understandings of self and other but also one's aspirations for a future self (Mills, 2020). More specifically, a chronopolitical lens clarifies the ways in which contemporary sociopolitical asymmetries reinforce the power of Whiteness globally and shape invocations of the future. A neutral process under different conditions, such as educational evaluation, catalyzes outcomes "orientated around some bodies, more than others" (Ahmed,

2007, p. 157). Since a global subjectivity provides access to global currency, locales with fewer resources endure pressure to pursue aspirations that normalize Whiteness, and thus protect Whiteness's dominance into the future.

The pervasiveness of English language learning exemplifies normalized White aspirations shaped by global asymmetries. As Marginson and Wende (2007) noted, “English is the premier language of business and the professions and the only global language of science, research and academic publication” (p. 21). Global economies and academic exchanges most frequently employ English, the language of Anglo-America, the “Whitest” Whiteness (see Fig. 1 for a visual representation of Whiteness's geographic hierarchies). The global racial formations that magnetize Whiteness function within what Quijano (2000) describes as “coloniality of power,” highlighting Whiteness's genesis as a production of global capitalism. Access to tests such as TOEFL provide global mobility for non-White actors, producing conditions where Whiteness makes one's subjectivity possible. English language dominance also tethers White HE institutions (HEIs) to the global marketplace, situating the “comprehensive research university” as the ideal form and necessary preparatory context for global leadership (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015). Idealizing the “university” also Whitens aspirations, since the very concept of a university presumes the “universality” of White institutional models (Peters, 2019). Given English is the primary local language, White nations benefit from easy exportation of HE templates, dominate scholarship, and attract students from around the world (Marginson & Wende, 2007), further universalizing the White “university.”

Present global dominance projects White institutional models as the evolutionary superior and the desirable educational future, delegitimizing non-White world models, as well as erasing the connection between Western educational ideals and non-Western



**Fig. 1** Global field of Whiteness. Reprinted from “A global critical race and racism framework: racial entanglements and deep and malleable Whiteness,” by M. Christian, 2019, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5(2), 180. Copyright [2018] by the American Sociological Association. Reprinted with permission

philosophical traditions (Mignolo, 2011; Peters, 2019). White nations' manipulation of global educational structures positions them as the future for which the rest of the world must aspire. Their control of educational imaginations and aspirations also evokes particular investments, which reinforce dominant nations' occupation of the center. When non-White nations explicitly adapt their educational agendas in response to global trends, they implicitly participate in the spread of White imaginations and aspirations because, "performance is an orientation towards the future, insofar as the action is also the expression of a wish or intention" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 153). The "wish or intention" in the above case constitutes a global subjectivity oriented towards Whiteness.

### Whiteness as investment

We recognize the globalization of HE as a process of White investment expansion, which enhances predictive capacity. As Baldwin (2012) wrote, "the future is rendered knowable through specific practices (i.e., calculation, imagination and performance) and, in turn, intervenes on the present through three anticipatory logics (i.e., pre-caution, pre-emption and preparedness)" (p. 173). Future-oriented "practices" and "anticipatory logics" make White education's dominance on the global landscape possible. Lipsitz (2006) argued that through a variety of economic, political, cultural, and social mechanisms, White people invest in the propagation of a racialized value system, recognizing that the system confers material advantage. The system also ensures that Whiteness maintains a protected asset value (Baldwin, 2012).

To maintain Whiteness's value, non-White subjects must also feel compelled to invest. Global subjects (and aspirants) imagine and calculate their potential value based on educational parameters set by dominant actors. The adoption of White parameters works as a precautionary practice for less powerful nations, preparing them for participation in the global economy. In turn investment in global anticipatory logics and practices secures White nations' position at the center. Racialized global investment processes are of course powered. As Christian (2019) noted, the reaction to "global racial presumptions...reproduc[e] hegemonic understandings" (p. 176) about race in favor of Whiteness.

Globalization of HE generates "pre-caution, pre-emption, and preparedness" by engineering an imagined security resulting from investment in capitalist employment and economic structures. Predicting one's future value (e.g., knowledge skills and abilities) (seemingly) secures one's "future [which] works as a resource in the geographic expression of Whitenesses" (Baldwin, 2012, p. 175). Students in the Global South "hoping" to access geopolitical centers to improve employment opportunities find future security particularly relevant (Caluya et al., 2011; Sidhu & Ishikawa, 2020; Winberg & Winberg, 2017). Transnational actors (e.g., World Bank, OECD, and British Council) exacerbate security imaginaries tied to the global economy in Global South contexts (Shahjahan, 2016). As such, students in the Global South vigorously pursue curricula that carry global currency (e.g., Engineering) and, conversely, perceive local, relevant decolonizing curriculum as thwarting career mobility (Winberg & Winberg, 2017). Students in the Global North simultaneously experience an expansion of their domestic investment, solidifying global privilege and future security. For instance, non-White HEIs highly prize professionals who possess degrees from White HEIs and/or can teach/communicate in English (Marginson & Wende, 2007). White credentials travel easily around the world. Non-White global subjects, such as Indian and Chinese workers who attend elite HEIs in their home countries modeled after

White institutions, experience a moderate extension of White privileging, which allows them to compete for similar jobs in the global economy (Brown et al, 2011). However, we see the limits of White extension when non-White global laborers' ability to compete requires they provide labor at a cheaper cost (Brown et al, 2011). The most prized global worker remains the one possessing White national citizenship and White HEI credentials (Stack, 2020). To be clear, we are not simply challenging the dominance of White people in the labor market, but (as mentioned earlier) we suggest challenging Whiteness as a superstructure. For instance, some may read the present frame and wonder if it is Whiteness that is being aspired to and invested in or is it capitalism. However, within the context of European colonization, Whiteness and capitalism cannot be disentangled. Put differently, capitalism is always "racial capitalism," entrenching "racialized hierarchies" that center Whiteness (Robinson, 1983).

Since the protection of Whiteness requires investment from non-White people, Whiteness must appear accessible in some form, albeit costly. Christian (2019) considered how orientations of Whiteness become accessible through the use of racial capital in service to White institutions:

part of Whiteness's maintenance is found in how countries and groups constructed as "not White" have reproduced the system by *buying into* [emphasis added] Whiteness...Because Whiteness since modernity discursively represents status, desirability, development, and global power, these are characteristics that countries and groups can attempt to capture. (p. 179)

Non-White locales may enter the global marketplace to purchase and invest in Whiteness through various institutional structures, such as HE, enabling Whiteness's ability to travel globally. Likewise, White nations provide non-White locales moments of Whiteness orientation at micro-, share-like levels through limited relationships (e.g., institutional partnerships; fellowship programs) that privilege the White nation (Adriansen & Madsen, 2019). This also constitutes a volatile investment because a "group that acquires forms of Whiteness in one space, or in a structural form, may find it evaporate in another" (Christian, 2019, p. 180). For example, while attempts to model White curricula may align non-White locales with global trends, location and lack of social capital (such as primacy of English language use) continually exempt non-White locales from recognized GURs (Mejias et al., 2018). Non-White locales' access to Whiteness necessitates limitations. Investment in Whiteness for non-White locales mirrors the volatility of the stock market. The market (Whiteness) always wins, even while individual investors lose.

### Whiteness as malleable

Whiteness engenders non-White aspiration and investment because it is malleable and thus appears useful throughout a variety of contexts. An orientation to Whiteness is appealing because it places certain objects and resources "within reach" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 152). However, in order to function as an aspiration worthy of investment, Whiteness must also appear reachable. Reachability can happen across a variety of dimensions as Fig. 1 clarifies. For example, while Anglo-American Whiteness is the "Whitest" Whiteness and thus the most valuable, "Japanese Whiteness" may appear more "in reach," and therefore a worthy investment for Southeast Asian subjects (Sidhu & Ishikawa, 2020).

Charting the malleability of Whiteness amounts to not only a geographic exercise but also a temporal one. Whiteness's shifts often serve to protect an imagined future, persisting

by shape-shifting, being plural, local, and specific in response to changing dynamics. Shifts in Whiteness are fundamentally temporal processes. Malleability equals change and change happens over time. The many faces of Whiteness allow it to project itself into many different futures. As Christian (2019) noted, Whiteness’s “position of historical global wealth accumulation and political economic power...reproduc[ing] itself through contemporary structural practice” (p. 179) enables it to structurally secure White presents and futures. Whiteness not only shifts over time to accommodate local particularities, but nations constantly re/negotiate internal racialization in relation to their regional counterparts, striving to appear more White in comparison to those nearest (Christian, 2019). The constant interaction between and within White and non-White nations is an ongoing exercise in orienting to Whiteness.

While the ways in which Whiteness becomes entrenched may vary across geography, each iteration supports “racialized hierarchies” (Christian, 2019, p. 180), securing White futures. Racialized hierarchies (re)produce at the micro- (e.g., individual students’ English language acquisition), meso- (e.g., introduction of liberal education to institutional curricula), and macro- (e.g., GURs) levels. Since racialized interactions are constantly negotiated, the production and maintenance of racial hierarchies need to respond to local characteristics. In the short term, malleabilities may appear to offer opportunities for democratization within geopolitics of knowledge, but as Ahmed (2007) noted, “[o]rientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from ‘here’” (p. 151). While particular pursuits may end up as amalgamations between Western ideals and local customs, they begin from a White orientation, which protects the long-term security of Whiteness. For example, in the USA, White students’ exposure to difference through “multicultural” programming (e.g., study abroad) may be prioritized to secure the preparation and earning potential of White students entering an increasingly non-White workforce (Edwards, 2021; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Comparatively, in South Africa, a rigid Anglo-American curriculum that disallows space for “Africanization” may have a demand among graduates seeking to access global (White) resources (Winberg & Winberg, 2017).

Illuminating the temporal dimensions of Whiteness—aspiration, investment, and malleability—assists with understanding its relationship to time and, specifically, futurity. Next, applying the above framework, we discuss how the globalization of HE manifests as Whiteness as futurity. Specifically, we demonstrate how Whiteness accesses and controls the future in two ways, through (a) the global diffusion of liberal education, and (b) the growing use of global university rankings.

## Global diffusion of liberal education

As we suggest in the framework, Whiteness expands and firmly establishes itself through colonizing futurity, reproducing a White orientation to the future. We also argue that globalization of HE mechanizes White futurity. As a product of White HE, the expansion of liberal education is one way in which the globalization of HE reproduces White futures. Recently, many observed the appearance of liberal education in non-White regions globally (Boyle, 2019; Godwin, 2015a, b; Marber & Araya, 2017; Peterson, 2012). The expansion of liberal education, though still on the periphery of the postsecondary landscape in most countries, has encompassed places as culturally dissimilar and geographically distant as, “Russia, India, Ghana, China, Israel, the Netherlands, Chile, Bangladesh, and Brazil—places where liberal education has rarely existed before” (Godwin, 2015a, p. 2).

Such proliferation suggests that non-White institutional actors increasingly view liberal education as an investment that can assist with attaining global subject aspirations—i.e., a Whiteness-oriented subjectivity.

Globally, liberal education situates the non-White subject in relation to Whiteness in a variety of ways. For instance, liberal education works as a preparatory product in the global marketplace. Through liberal education, students are promised the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Labor preparation for a global economy has become particularly relevant in the midst of discussions about the impending Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by a radical shift in economies and societies towards advanced technology, such as “artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnologies and nanomaterials” (Penprase, 2018, p. 215). In the future HEI, a 4IR curriculum heavily informed by White liberal education will prepare students with the skills necessary for a more “integrated,” “interconnected,” “interrelated” world (Penprase, 2018). As global actors presume people and cultures will become more pluralistic due to the explosive increase in technology, the global student will benefit from the “democratizing” skills provided by liberal education. Arguments for global adoption suggest that liberal education enhances students’ ability to,

*become* [emphasis added] better able to debate matters of public importance and to arrive at a reasoned agreement, or reasoned disagreement, with their peers in the political or civic sphere...[liberal education can also] shape more innovative contributors to the economy and society...[I]n the post-industrial world, employers value softer skills such as creativity, the ability to think outside the box, and openness to multiple perspectives...[which] *prepare* [emphasis added] students well for life in a multicultural or cosmopolitan society by *making them* [emphasis added] aware of a variety of cultures and the need to communicate effectively across cultural differences. (Lewis, 2018, p. 19)

Investment in a liberal education promises to produce an aspirational global employee. Unsurprisingly, the aspired-to laborer is actualized through White educational processes.

Assuming White liberal education’s exclusive ability to promote skills and abilities useful in a democracy supports the perpetuation of “global racial presumptions” and “racialized hierarchies” (Christian, 2019, p. 180). White liberal education’s spread suggests that non-White nations lack educational traditions that support critical thinking, and therefore did not co-create liberal education’s foundational concepts (Lilford, 2012). However, many of liberal education’s “aims also resonate with Confucian, Hindu and ancient Islamic Values” (Boyle, 2019, p. 231), as well as African intellectual traditions (Lilford, 2012). By attaching liberal education to a White philosophical tradition, it reinforces the notion that collectivist epistemologies squelch creativity and engender rigid thinking. White liberal education, “assert[s] the West’s universal epistemic value” (Stein, 2017, p. 6). In addition to securing non-White dependency on White educational models in order to participate globally, the proliferation of White liberal education also catalyzes the creation of a global aspirational self that comes into being through Whiteness.

The spread of liberal education also works to entrench Eurocentric values into the future by camouflaging the fallacy that an educational model embedded in Whiteness can engender “openness to multiple perspectives” and the ability to “communicate effectively across cultural difference.” Liberal education, as heretofore conceived, is incontrovertibly a legacy of Europe. From its perceived roots in classical Greece and maturation in the universities of Europe (Godwin & Altbach, 2016) to its present status as an “American obsession” (Rothblatt, 2003, p. 1), liberal education remains deeply rooted in White knowledge systems. As



we consider liberal education's prominence in the creation of the ideal 4IR employee, its European roots take on greater significance. The presumption that liberal education will equip students to support global democratization and the diffusion of power expected to result from the increase in technologies, ignores the inextricable link between orientations to power and "how we begin" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 151). As liberal education gets swept up in the tide of globalization and spreads to new, non-White contexts, it carries with it a perpetuation of a White episteme at the expense of other ways of knowing and being (Godwin, 2015b). As Stein noted, "there is a growing concern that mainstream approaches to internationalization may further entrench colonialist, capitalist global relations, and reproduce the Euro-supremacist foundations of modern Western higher education" (Stein, 2017, p. 16). Liberal education as a "mainstream approach...to internationalization" entrenches Whiteness globally.

Liberal education's global emergence also orients the futures of non-White locales towards classist social arrangements endemic to White nations, which protects and expands capitalist investments. Analogous to the USA and UK, wealthy students in non-White locales access exported liberal education most easily since private institutions typically offer the curriculum (Godwin, 2015b). As Godwin (2015b) wrote, "[I]f opportunities to engender those skills are limited to students with social capital, financial stability, and geographic access to programs in the [Global Liberal Education Inventory], then liberal education could exacerbate social and economic inequality" (p. 234). Although packaged as an education that gives students the skills to look critically at the world around them, the adoption of liberal education works to entrench models of social inequality that disproportionately favor Whiteness globally. For example, instead of developing an indigenous Chinese approach to critical thinking, Peking University's curriculum models Harvard University's curriculum (Xin, 2004). As such, Peking follows an institution model foundational to US colonization, one that continues to mirror and perpetuate US elitism, systemic bias, and White supremacy (Wilder, 2013). The curricular choice makes clear China's aspiration to and investment in a particular class-based White standard.

Along with an imagined skill set, liberal education also presupposes a universally acceptable democratizing appeal. Proponents of liberal education rhetorically align the curricular model with freedom (Lewis, 2018). For resource-poor locales constrained and constricted within a global economy, access to a liberal education would appear to place economic and political freedom—a luxury currently reserved for White nations—"within reach" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 152). However, liberal education's propagandized version of democracy emphasizes self-development and unobstructed individual growth, epistemes that undergird racial capitalism and neoliberalism (Robinson, 1983; Sharma, 2017). As such, an investment in liberal education engenders an aspirational relationship to capitalism for societies that value collectivist ways of being (Godwin, 2015b). And while local values may misalign with Anglo-American perspectives on democracy, malleability makes acceptance of liberal education as a globally beneficial good possible. Since there is no consensus on what liberal education is, it functions as a malleable product that stands-in for access to Whiteness. As Boyle (2019) suggested, "the label [of liberal education] alone may offer legitimacy" (p. 238) to non-White institutions. So while many institutions may not adopt liberal education's curricular principles wholesale, choosing instead to maintain local cultural norms within the framework, the name alone can still provide rewards in a global educational marketplace (as evidenced by Yonsei University's bureaucratic approach to its Underwood International College (UIC) (Kim, 2016)). In this way, the malleability of White liberal education may neutralize local dissent by making Whiteness appear accessible through adaptation to local customs. Conversely, the need for liberal education's

malleability reveals persistent dissent from non-White locales. Nevertheless, White nations determine the boundaries of liberal education and, by extension, a global subjectivity.

The adoption of liberal education globally also accompanies an investment in English language learning, creating an educational landscape that privileges the recruitment of instructors trained in the West who can not only teach liberal education content but can also do so in English. The pairing of English with liberal education further evinces the asymmetrical power relations at play, as well as the way resources then become oriented towards bodies designated as White. Since the global marketplace is oriented towards Whiteness, “[u]niversities are encouraged to...increase...English-taught and more globalized content courses, so-called global liberal arts programs” (Yamada, 2016, p. 419). In the pursuit of a global subjectivity, institutions import liberal education curricula entirely in English and brand the units that use the curricula as “international colleges” or international programs (e.g., Yonsei University’s UIC in South Korea and University of Liberal Arts in Bangladesh (ULAB)). As is the case for Peking and Harvard University, in some instances, institutions will develop formal relationships with highly ranked universities in White nations, apparently recognizing that White nations will continue to control and inform the global economy for the foreseeable future. English-taught liberal education thus becomes a proxy for alignment with White culture, values, and ideas.

Institutional relationships are less about the merit of liberal education and more about aspirations towards and investments in a neoliberal economic environment. Sharma (2017) reflecting on one of these cross-national relationships noted “Duke will offer all kinds of courses that will teach and prepare Chinese students to move into the modern economy. That is their main orientation” (p. 2). The relationship with Duke is less about how liberal education supposedly produces intellectual development, and instead about global economic access provided by an orientation to Whiteness. Since Whiteness is malleable, an investment in the product of White liberal education can appear fruitful even sans an authentic application of its curricular principles.

Mapping the global exportation of liberal education reveals its relationship to the hegemonic aims of Whiteness. Liberal education functions globally as both an assumed cumulative value and an economic good, compelling nations outside of geopolitical power centers to both aspire to and invest in its propagandized promises of creating democratic, critical thinking, and creative laborers. Narrating liberal education as a value-added good camouflages its coercive elements. Instead of independent acceptance, nations view liberal education as a requirement for participation in the global marketplace. In the process, global educational and economic trends displace indigenous models of learning and implicitly ascribe ownership of critical thinking to the West. Liberal education’s exportation of Western elitism across the globe is also under-examined. Despite its persistent global movement, liberal education remains malleable enough to respond to local demands while keeping Whiteness at the center.

## Growing use of global university rankings

With the growing use of global university rankings (GURs), Whiteness also acts as an orientation within the globalization of HE. Given its White historical roots, the orientation of GURs *around* and *towards* certain bodies is evident. The first set of university rankings derived from White men’s quests for “Genius” or “Great men” studies in the early 1900s in the UK and USA (Usher, 2017). For instance, psychologist James Cattell (1860–1944)

sought to reproduce eminent White men. Informed by a long tradition of measuring eminence in the eugenicist tradition, Cattell's rationale of the first university ranking drew upon eugenicist theoretical and methodological considerations. Cattell redirected his focus from individuals to institutions, when the excellent university, as the emblem of scientific and intellectual strength, replaced the "eminent man" shaped foremost by heredity and upbringing (Hammarfelt et al., 2017, p. 408). The original idea of ranking institutions (and excellence) was thus to ensure White futurity by identifying key HEIs that would reproduce more "eminent" White men in society.

GURs constitute aspirations and investments for a future "success" rooted in Whiteness in the global HE arena today. Underpinned by narrow notions of institutional excellence, GURs privilege particular institutions (via discourse of world-class excellence), disciplines, language, and overall mission of HEIs deriving from particular geographies of HE (i.e., the White world). For instance, the first global university ranking in 2003, currently known as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), was produced by researchers at Shanghai Jiao Tong University for the purpose of studying and improving the relative position of Chinese universities (Hazelkorn, 2018). Yet, the Chinese oriented their top universities according to the US-based comprehensive research institution (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015), thereby promoting the White model as its "future self" of Chinese HE. As Ahmed reminds us, "[o]rientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from 'here'" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 151). Given the Chinese "began" and "proceeded" with White models, Whiteness as an orientation put university excellence "within reach" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 154) for the Chinese, thus defining their capacity to envision and aspire towards academic excellence.

GURs' orientation around Whiteness is further evident when we observe who (or which bodies) succeeds in such rankings. As Ahmed (2007) noted, Whiteness informing space can be discerned by the "repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others" (p. 159). For instance, Stack (2020) in a recent analysis of the interconnections between Big Three rankings (i.e., ARWU, *Times Higher Education* and *Quacquarelli Symond*) and Nobel Prize as a proxy for excellence, eloquently put it:

Because the Big Three rankings have inscribed scholarly excellence as commensurate with Whiteness, maleness, and Anglo-American identity, striving to achieve the rankings' definition of excellence moves higher education institutions away from achieving their goals related to equity and inclusion. (p. 7)

In other words, GURs' future-oriented outcomes and reinforcement of Whiteness colonizes and displaces institutions' futurity (or goals) for diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, GURs' orientation around Whiteness is further evident as rankings privilege predominantly White metropolitan centers of knowledge. The top ten in the Big Three rankings in each of their annual rankings are similar, whereby two of the 10 universities come from Southern England (Oxford and Cambridge) and the rest come from the USA (i.e., Caltech, Stanford, Berkley, Columbia, Yale, Princeton, MIT, Harvard, and University of Chicago). The latter are all located either in California or the Northeast Coast area (i.e., New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Massachusetts). All top ten universities are predominantly White institutions, wealthy with huge endowments, and close to major media centers (Stack, 2020). Many of the historically prestigious East Coast US universities derived their foundational wealth from the Atlantic Slave trade (Wilder, 2013). Finally, Stack (2020) noted that narratives of the heroic, predominately White male scientist dominated both the (a) top-ranked universities' websites and (b) the corresponding descriptions of these institutions on the Big Three rankings' websites. Overall, GURs' culture is embedded in a White

past constituting future aspirations, as institutions and governments seek to attain prestige and resources through gaining a foothold in White oriented metrics.

Whiteness as futurity colonizes national and institutional actors' future aspirations and reinforces investment in Whiteness as they play "catch-up" in GURs and claim to be "world class." While certain bodies (e.g., scholars, HEIs, governments, and cities) occupy such global spaces of equivalence in comfort (as mentioned above), other bodies "become visible when they do not pass, which means they 'stand out' and 'stand apart'" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159). Thus, these Othered bodies seek belonging and pride in these same spaces (Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). As Baldwin (2012) reminded us, futurity informed by anticipatory logics (pre-caution or preparedness) intervenes in the present. As such, local subjects fearing the "yet-to-come" or hoping for better things to come (Baldwin, 2012) increasingly turn into global subjects by adopting a global White eye. For instance, the concept and diffusion of "world-class university" (WCU) was an idea popularized at the global scale by a World Bank staff member Jamil Salmi and its Tertiary Education Program (Salmi, 2009). Such a WCU concept both relied on and shaped the criteria of different rankers. Governments worldwide heavily invest in WCU initiatives within their respective higher education sectors to "catch up" with White institutional models (Collins & Park, 2016; Dembereldorj, 2018; King, 2009).

The notion of catch-up signifies an orientation, or a form of preparedness, one clouded in malleable Whiteness. To put it simply, WCU, derived from particular templates, are morphed and changed to fit local tastes. Government-driven WCU initiatives range from mergers of smaller institutions to larger ones (e.g., France), internationalization efforts (e.g., Japan and South Korea), funding initiatives focusing on an exclusive number of national universities to attract academic stars and increase their publication outputs in indexed journals (e.g., China and Korea), and build up research infrastructure (through research centers) (e.g., Germany and Japan) (King, 2009). Furthermore, other countries have attracted WCUs from elsewhere to create "hubs" to set up operations locally and establish joint ventures with their domestic counterparts (e.g., Singapore) (King, 2009). In contrast, in developing countries, the priority has been to build research intensive universities (Dembereldorj, 2018). The deterritorialization of these WCU templates and their universal application (albeit modified) highlights the Whiteness of these templates given their geopolitical locations are rendered invisible. Whiteness thus colonizes the aspirations and investments of HE stakeholders as all these actors aspire towards White norms. WCU initiatives, informed by GURs, thus "orientates bodies [HEIs and governments] in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space, and what they 'can do'" (Ahmed, 2007, 149). In short, Whiteness as futurity defines "success."

HEIs' investments in Whiteness solidify Whiteness' stronghold on the futurity of leadership in global HE as universities increasingly turn into global subjects by aspiring towards moving up their position in GURs. Adopting the Global North's idea of futurity as Whiteness, as well as sense of academic excellence, local actors forgo their local languages, local missions, ways of knowing, and thinking (Collins & Park, 2016; Ishikawa, 2009; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015). As such, regional/national/local universities are slowly losing particular missions and autonomy. Due to GURs establishing and maintaining a universal framework of comparison, universities are urged to see themselves as global actors rather than just regional or national players (Brankovic et al., 2018). Thus, universities are today less thought of as nationally or locally rooted institutions tightly connected to specific traditions and histories but empowered organizational actors in a globalized academic world (Brankovic et al., 2018, p. 271). GURs reconfigure the mission of the university from a "national" institution serving the public towards a corporate

entity guided principally by global performance (Collins & Park, 2016, p. 126). Yet, as nations are urged to aspire and invest in attaining global standings, Whiteness offers the future mirror through which to evaluate where a nation or institution stands and should go.

Many governments and institutions invest in Whiteness as futurity by heavily investing in internationalization efforts, including recruitment of academic stars, international collaboration efforts, and introducing more coursework in English. For instance, before 2008, no Saudi universities were included in any of the global ranking lists. To this end, King Saud University (KSU) studied the experience of 98 international and prestigious universities in ten advanced countries and created a strategic plan to raise KSU's status among the world universities. In 6 months, KSU was able to form 79 program partnerships with world universities, including Harvard and Illinois, and recruit 14 Nobel Prize winners and highly recognized researchers (Almansour, 2016, p. 4). Furthermore, despite carrying histories of significant national prestige, Korea University (KU) and Seoul National University (SNU) have had to internationalize or the corporatization of SNU and the internationalization of KU, reflecting the willingness of government and society to continue to fund universities to become global leaders. Finally, certain aspiring globally competitive nations and their HEIs have increasingly engaged in English language initiatives, like English skills development in academic writing among faculty (e.g., Russia), or include more programs that utilize English, and/or wide-scale implementation of English in their institutions (e.g., Malaysia, China, and/or Japan) (Yudkevich et al., 2017). As we mentioned earlier, the adoption of liberal education is another example of how rankings influence curricular shifts that lays the groundwork for a sort of global culturally White hegemony (Godwin, 2015b). It would be wrong to assume that most nations believe that the West's approach to education is better, but as Kim observes (2016), it "is more a compliance with market forces that demand the recruitment of Western faculty members...to rise up in global rankings and attract more students" (p. 87). In the global marketplace, because the product that is being invested in is Whiteness, significant national institutions are bending towards aligning themselves with White aspirations reinforced by GURs.

In response to GURs, such trends highlight how globalization of HE can be interpreted as the globalization of Whiteness. The latter not only colonizes futurity of what "successful HEIs" or academic work looks like, but also highlights what Ahmed (2007) noted that Whiteness enables and constrains "doing things" among governments, institutions, and leadership. As one could argue, given that now China and other Asian countries are starting to topple USA-UK hegemony in GURs, are such indicators really privileging Whiteness? We agree that while indeed non-White-nations are "catching up," the orientation to Whiteness as success still remains given its malleability. Furthermore, based on our Whiteness as futurity framework, such countries represent specific racialized groups (e.g., Han Chinese or Japanese) that gain "access to economic, cultural, and symbolic racial capital" (Christian, 2019, p. 180) informed by the global Whiteness continuum. Others may suggest that some actors (e.g., academics and institutions) look towards the East (e.g., Malaysia towards Japan) to bolster their global aspirations through student exchanges and institutional partnerships, thus bolstering regional harmony (Yonezawa et al., 2017). Yet, such regional harmony aspirations are not counted in GURs. Aspirational global success through GURs is still clouded in predominant White Eurocentric epistemologies and frameworks. Furthermore, while non-White actors are catching up, this does not necessarily entail the integration of non-White knowledge systems (e.g., epistemologies from the Asian socio-historical context), but quite the contrary as many note that vernacular languages and knowledges

are increasingly marginalized (see Ishikawa & Sun, 2016). The values and epistemologies underpinning such metrics remain White.

## Conclusion

In this conceptual essay, we demonstrated how *Whiteness as futurity* orients global subjects' imaginaries and reinforces the asymmetrical movements, networks, and untethered economies underpinning global HE. Globalization of education debates have largely omitted discussions about race (see Allen, 2001; Leonardo, 2002; Rizvi, 2007). An analysis of race allows us to see how imaginaries are part of a racialized process, whereby certain groups are afforded privilege because such imaginaries are considered universally applicable, or desirable, thus decontextualizing the articulation, or geo-body politics, of such imaginaries. By highlighting two arenas, i.e., curricula globalization and global metrics in HE, we underscore the various spatial and temporal landscapes that Whiteness can penetrate and reconstitute given its intimate connection to futurity and aspirations. Our argument around Whiteness as futurity, however, is not to deny historicist approaches to race, but to complement them.

While many discussions about globalization of HE tend to be seen as lateral spatial movements (albeit asymmetrical), our paper highlights the importance of considering the future orientations acting like a mirror that constantly reflects what this ideal future looks like, thus governing our present. In other words, we suggest a futurity embedded in Whiteness underlies this compass guiding all the lateral/vertical movements we see spatially in globalization. Globalizing processes, while disjunctive, are also tied to movements towards "something," while at the same time moving away from "something." It's these "somethings" we need to interrogate and ask: who is defining this "something"? How is the movement towards this "something" lodged with an affective economy (i.e., of hopes and fears)? How is this "something" related to modern/colonial modes of knowing, being, and relating (see Shahjahan, 2019; Stein, 2017)? For instance, we could simply problematize that white values dominate GURs. In this case, the solution would be for localized rankings to consider local values, or for revised shared (universal) rankings to include multiple values. However, we could raise the fundamental problem of rankings with underlying ranking logic itself (see Shahjahan et al., 2017). We suggest that, most importantly, all of these inquiries reveal that there is a compass, and that compass is oriented to Whiteness. Critical Whiteness studies, along with temporal studies, offer us an entry point to illuminate such invisible asymmetric flows towards this "something" by interrogating whose values, aspirations, knowing, being, and relating underlie this "something."

We would suggest that critical scholars of race in higher education and anti-racist educators go beyond the national containers (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013) and consider the transnational racialization processes underpinning globally facing HE policies and practices (see Estera & Shahjahan, 2019; Stein, 2017; Yao et al, 2019). To this end, one way to move forward beyond methodological nationalism is to critically examine how race and racism inform the futurity of students, HEIs, and national policies that tend to be part of global imaginaries (see Stein & Andreotti, 2017). One fruitful area would be examining the branding and mediatization of HE globally. Similarly, the role of transnational actors (such as international agencies, or companies (e.g., commercial rankers), or national policies (e.g., COVID)) and/or institutional internationalization practices could be interrogated from a transnational racialization perspective. Furthermore, students, educators, and

administrators based in the Global North (particularly in the Anglo-American world) need to better understand and interrogate their global privileges and how they are implicated in the globalization of Whiteness even if they are not White. For instance, we wondered, as scholars of color located in the Global North, what are our own assumptions about imagined/desired goals and purpose of global higher education and how do these assumptions reproduce Whiteness (or other forms of colonial continuities/dispositions)? What are the complexities, contradictions, and nuances of critiquing Whiteness in the context of the modern/colonial system in which we are embedded? Furthermore, although we focus on global movements informed by racialized asymmetries, we encourage the reader to not lose sight of the very real violence these movements constitute. Global subjectivity is not simply a luxury or “leg up” for White national actors; it is an orientation to the globe that places the ability to oppress “within reach” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 152).

Some might argue that we don’t provide voices to the “third” or “hybrid” spaces, and/or local actors who have agency through such globalizing forces. We agree that such shape-shifting is indeed going on given Whiteness is also malleable. However, the Whiteness logic of such hybrid-forms tends to ignore the ultimate orientation governing the productions of such hybrids. Furthermore, some may argue that the global is only one space where human actions take place, and also are nested with local and national spaces and that movements are unpredictable and so on (Marginson, 2011). What we are suggesting is that Whiteness as futurity acts as a force to make the transnational legible, or codify what is possible, desirable, and or knowable, thus providing a grammar to articulate a subject’s futurity. But, given Whiteness as futurity is not a complete process, but contingent on various actors “buying into” such futurity, alternative ways of knowing and being are essential as we, as educators, navigate globalization of higher education.

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#### Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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