

Learning Whiteness: material, epistemic and affective relations of Higher Education

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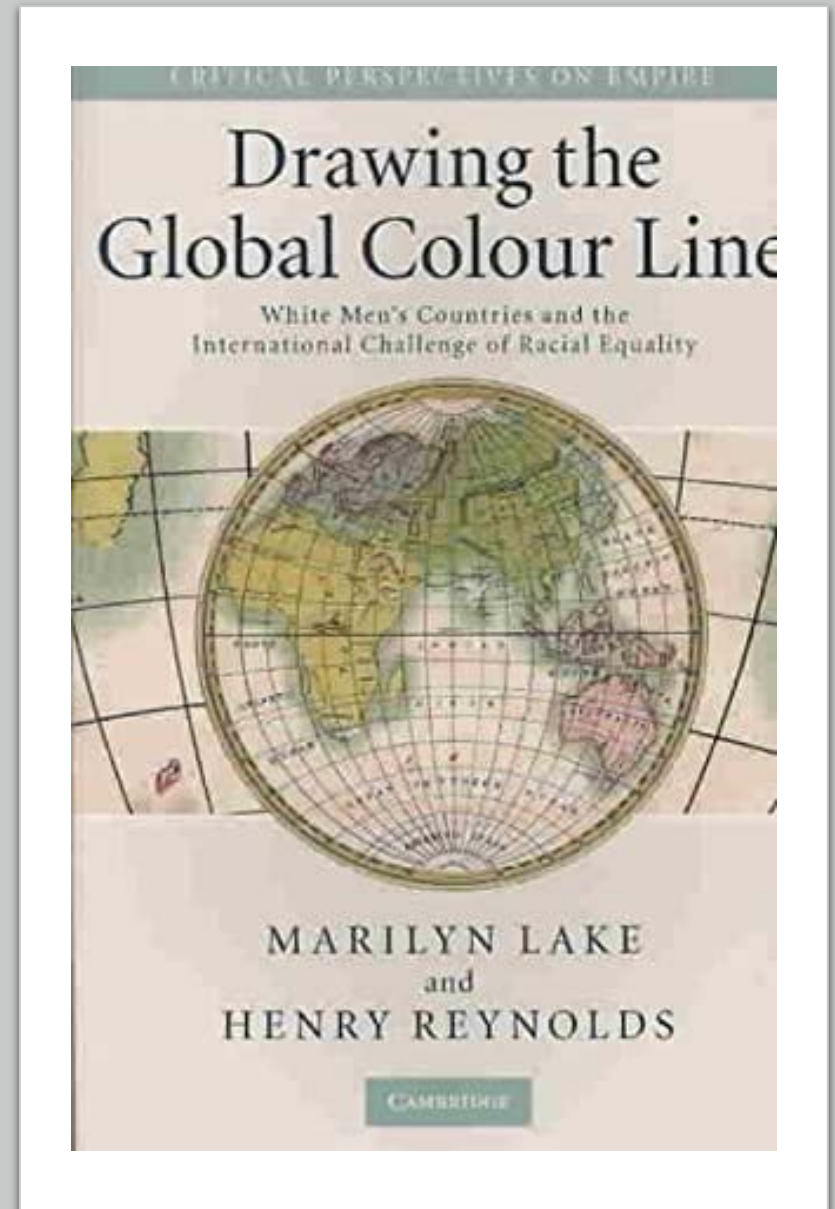
In collaboration with Sophie Rudolph and Jessica Gerrard

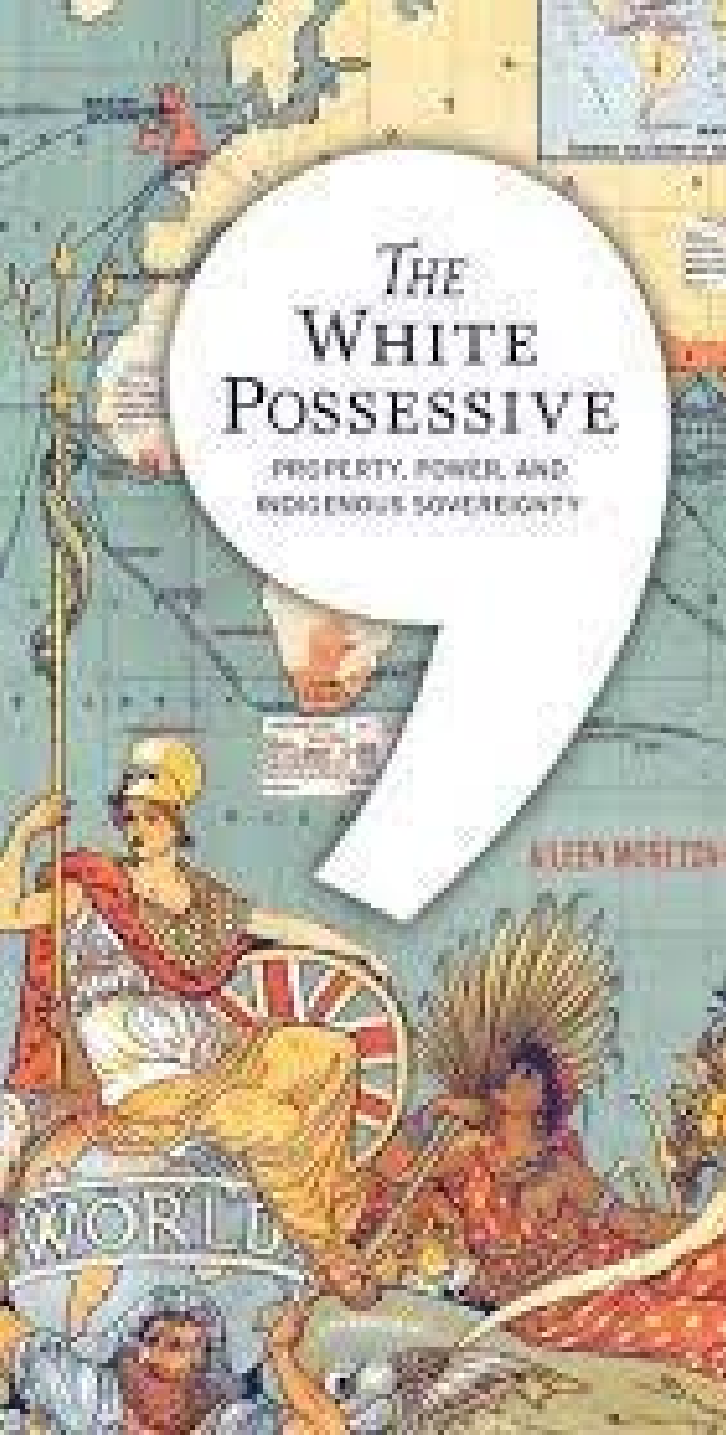
Learning whiteness

Racial domination is not predestined or natural, it is made and it is learned.

Historically contingent: whiteness as formed and relayed through specific *and enduring* interests of settler colonialism.

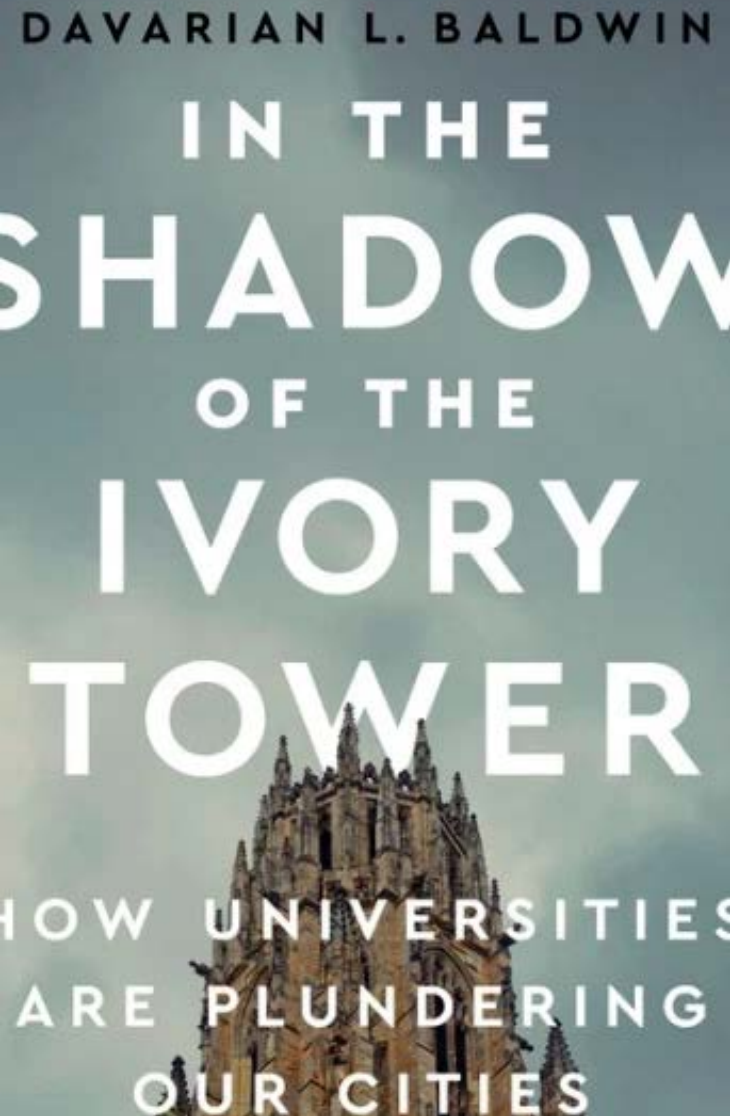
(Higher) Education has been central to the formations and relay of whiteness across its **material**, **epistemic** and **affective** domains.





(I) Materialities of Higher Education

- The material production of education – its sites and systems – have been bound up in the *dispossession and enclosure* of people and land.
- Education is produced through *divided labour* – it rests upon racialised forms of classed work – cleaning, building, administration, teaching, caring, and so on;
- Education involves the *extraction of value* – for example, through material infrastructures and commodities, hierarchies of people and knowledge, and the valorisation of educational assets, products and outputs.



DAVARIAN L. BALDWIN

IN THE
SHADOW
OF THE
IVORY
TOWER

HOW UNIVERSITIES
ARE PLUNDERING
OUR CITIES

Enclosure and dispossession

The expansionist and extractivist projects of education systems under capitalism – the capitalisation of land, buildings, infrastructures – *require* racialised enclosing/ dispossessing – often under the guise of ‘access’

- See landgrabs: <https://www.landgrabu.org/>
- Sharon Stein (2020) A colonial history of the higher education present: rethinking land-grant institutions through processes of accumulation and relations of conquest, *Critical Studies in Education*, 61:2, 212-228

Divided labour

Education not only creates divisions in labour, divided labour is foundational to education.

Think about outsourcing and subcontracting in HE: cleaning, technology, content production (journals) and research itself.

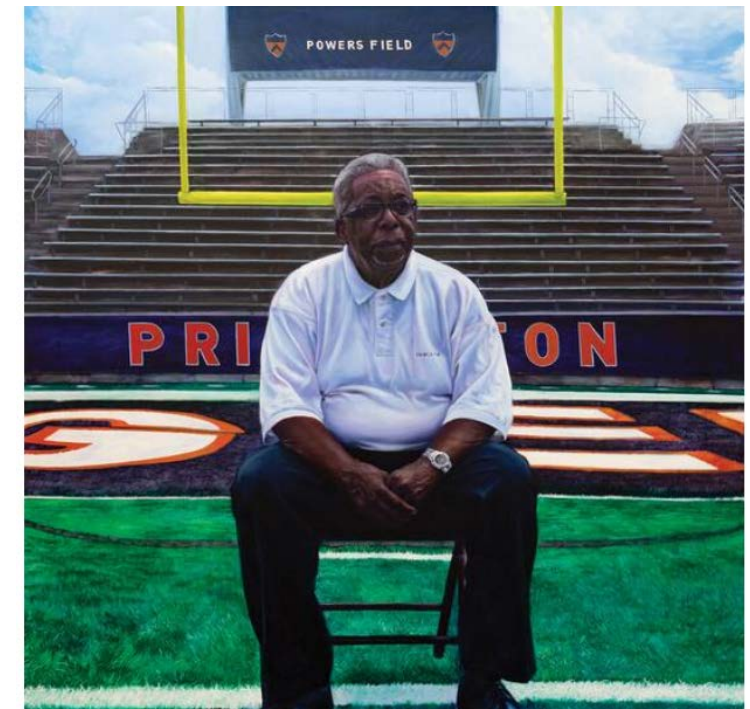
See:

Sukarieh, M. & Tannock, S. (2019). Subcontracting academia: Alienation, exploitation and disillusionment in the UK overseas Syrian refugee research industry, *Antipode*, 51(2), 664-680.

Portraits on campus lacked diversity, so this artist painted the blue-collar workers who 'really run things'

Source:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/01/24/portraits-campus-lacked-diversity-so-this-artist-painted-blue-collar-workers-who-really-run-things/>



Education as extracting value

The valorisation of some forms of educational, social and economic life involves the devaluing of others.

Education is bound up in making and sustaining these hierarchies of worth through the *extraction* of value.

Shahjahan, R. A., and K. T. Edwards. 2021. "Whiteness as Futurity and Globalisation of Higher Education." *Higher Education*, 1–18

'Callous treatment': international students stranded in Australia struggle to survive



“Hundreds of young Melbournians line the footpath of Flinders Lane waiting to secure a free meal from Tian38”. (Sept 2020)

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/17/callous-treatment-international-students-stranded-in-australia-struggle-to-survive>

(II) Epistemic politics of learning whiteness in HE

Colonial and racial domination is not only a material force, it is also about power and control over knowledge – over our understanding of ourselves and others, and over our pasts, presents and futures.

Reflecting on W. E. B. Du Bois' identification of the 'colour line' as the defining problem of the world under its history of white supremacy, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni observes that an 'epistemic line' cascades from the 'colour line', because the 'denial of humanity automatically disqualified one from epistemic virtue'

Decolonising the curriculum → not a relativist position or 'woke-washing' but about historically contextualising the politics of knowledge production; addressing & correcting for the erasures, distortions and interests of white domination within the formations of the disciplines.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2018).

Tracey Bunda, Lew Zipin and Marie Brennan, 'Negotiating University "Equity" from Indigenous Standpoints: A Shaky Bridge,' *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16, no. 9 (2012): 941–57

HE and Epistemologies of White Ignorance

Imagine an ignorance that resists.

Imagine an ignorance that fights back.

Imagine an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly – not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge.

Charles W. Mills (2007)

Charles W. Mills, 'White Ignorance,' in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007)

(III) The affective dimensions of learning whiteness in HE

- Denial, defensiveness and pride have been active feelings in the production of white ignorance – shaping exclusions and distortions within university curricular reform & political discourse
- The positioning of people of colour as emotional, irrational within institutions.
- Comforting benevolence. Inclusion without transformation: whiteness allows some bodies, knowledges and feelings to be ‘at home’, while others are variously visitors, outsiders, outcasts. (The ‘non-traditional’ student).

The redressal of racism calls for remaking affective relations – across public cultures, interpersonal exchange and within the institution of (higher) education itself.

These questions of justice are not simply about creating ‘good feelings’ or even about ‘feeling better’ because it is precisely through such appeals that the structures of racism are left untouched.

Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012

Ahmed, Sara. ‘The Politics of Bad Feeling.’ *Australasian Journal of Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 1 (2005): 72–85.

Nadena Doharty (2020) The ‘angry Black woman’ as intellectual bondage: being strategically emotional on the academic plantation, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23:4, 548-562

A reparative justice agenda for education?

The possessive investment in whiteness can't be rectified by learning "how to be more antiracist." It requires a radical divestment in the project of whiteness and a redistribution of wealth and resources. It requires abolition, the abolition of the carceral world, the abolition of capitalism. What is required is a remaking of the social order, and nothing short of that is going to make a difference.

Saidiya Hartman (2020)

Interview: Saidiya Hartman on insurgent histories and the abolitionist imaginary. *Artforum* July 14, 2020
<https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579>

Sriprakash, A., Nally, D., Myers, K., and Ramos-Pinto, P. (2020). [Learning with the Past: Racism, Education and Reparative Futures](#). Paper commissioned for the UNESCO Futures of Education report.