Reconstructing Children’s Rights

An online institute about dismantling racism, neo-colonialism, and patriarchy in humanitarian and development efforts to protect children and support families

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Conversation #1:  

Confronting Colonialism, Racism and Patriarchy in International Relations, Development and the Humanitarian Aid Industries

OVERVIEW

The goal of the Reconstructing Children’s Rights Institute is to raise awareness and recognition of how racism, patriarchy, and power permeate the international child rights and child protection field. Before we can delve deeply into the children’s rights space, we must first examine the larger ecosystems of international development, humanitarian aid, international relations, and peace and security, and unpack the colonial vestiges and power imbalances intrinsic to these larger contexts. Analyses and critique of the international development and humanitarian aid industries are critical for understanding international child protection and children’s rights efforts.

“Decolonizing aid/development” has become the in-vogue slogan of the international aid and development sectors in 2021 following the killing of George Floyd and the ensuing racial justice protests that took place in the US and around the world. There has been a flood of statements and internal diversity reflection exercises by some international development and humanitarian organizations and philanthropic foundations. Building upon reflection about how to upend racism in the American context, some reflections have led to debates regarding the colonial legacy and systematic racism within the international aid industry, including fundamental questioning of the way foreign aid works. As Degan Ali noted, “the unfinished business of decolonization is the original sin of the modern aid industry.”

While some may perceive this critique of international development and humanitarian aid as an emerging phenomenon, such critical analysis is nothing new. The recognition of this power imbalance has deep-rooted historical underpinnings, and constructive critique has been taking place for decades. Academics, researchers, and activists have been critically examining the international relations and humanitarian aid systems, as well as the neo-liberal institutions that have been replicating neo-colonial structures, hierarchies and ideologies.

1. Refer to Reference List below.
3. Refer to Reference List below.
Practiced incorrectly and without making explicit the underlying dynamics of power and funding, humanitarian and development aid can cause harm and undermine the dignity and autonomy of those it intends to support, who become othered “beneficiaries”. The axes of power differentiation include wealth discrepancies, age, gender, and race. As the humanitarian community seeks to create quick, cost-effective solutions, the likelihood of the imposition of concepts and practices that replicate oppressive, patriarchal, and racist norms is high. In turn, many are questioning whether the technocratic, foreign-dominated system should even exist— How can we continue to fund a paternalistic system that disempowers those that it intends empower? Who is deemed the holder of power and why? This session will bring these scholarly voices and critiques, which have been marginalized to the fringes of discussions and teachings, to the center of our discussions.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Nimmi Gowrinathan is a writer, a scholar, and an activist. She is a Professor at the City College of New York, where she founded the Politics of Sexual Violence Initiative, a global initiative that draws on in-depth research to inform movement-building around the impact of sexual violence on women’s political identities. As a key part of this initiative, Dr. Gowrinathan created Beyond Identity: A Gendered Platform for Scholar-Activists, a program that seeks to train immigrants and students of color in identity-driven research, political writing, and activism anchored in a thoughtful analysis of structural violence. She has been an analyst and policy consultant on women’s political voice and participation in violence in South Asia for the International Crisis Group, The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, UN Women, and the Asian Development Bank. She is also currently a Senior Scholar at the Center for Political Conflict, Gender, and People’s Rights at the University of California, Berkeley. She provides expert analysis for CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, and the BBC, and has been published in Harper’s Magazine, Freeman’s Journal, and Guernica Magazine among others. Dr. Gowrinathan is the creator of the Female Fighter Series at Guernica Magazine and the Publisher of Adi, a new literary journal to rehumanize policy. Her work and writings can be found at www.deviarchy.com. Her forthcoming book, Radicalizing Her, examines the complex politics of the female fighter (Beacon Press, April 2021).
Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay is an associate professor in the global policy area at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Her research focuses on the relationships between political violence, state building, and governance during and after war. She is currently serving as senior expert on the Afghanistan peace process for the U.S. Institute of Peace. She is the author of Good Rebel Governance: Revolutionary Politics and Western Intervention in Syria (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) with Kimberly Howe, and Warlords, Strongman Governors and State Building in Afghanistan (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Her scholarly work also includes articles published in Conflict, Security and Development, International Negotiation, Perspectives on Politics, as well as a series of book chapters in edited volumes. Her policy-oriented writing has been published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Foreign Policy, Lawfare, the U.S. Institute of Peace, and The Washington Post. Dr. Mukhopadhyay’s research has been funded by the Carnegie Corporation, the Eisenhower Institute, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the U.S. Institute of Peace, Harvard Law School, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Education. She is vice president of the American Institute of Afghan Studies and a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Prior to joining the Humphrey School, Dr. Mukhopadhyay was on the faculty at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs from 2012 to 2020. In 2016, she was a visiting scholar at New York University’s Center on International Cooperation.
The following is a brief list of resources by academics, researchers, practitioners and activists critically examining colonialism, racism and patriarchy in international relations, development and the humanitarian aid industry. Please refer to the Institute’s Master Reference List for a complete list of resources.

**Confronting Colonial Legacies and Racism in International Relations and Political Theory: Academic Journal Articles and Book Chapters**


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List was compiled thanks to resources shared by Dipali Mukhopadhyay and Alyssa Bovell as well as research by the Institute.
Critical reflections on humanitarian aid and humanitarian interventions: Academic Journal Articles and Book Chapters

- Madeline Otis Campbell and Sarah Tobin, “NGO Governance and Syrian Refugee “Subjects” in Jordan,” *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)* (Spring 2016)

Colonialism and Racism in International Development Studies: Academic Journal Articles

Confronting Colonial Legacies and Racism in International Relations, Development and Humanitarian Aid: Articles, Personal Reflections, Blogs, and Critical Conversations

- Adi Magazine, **Issue 6: White Deeds (Winter 2021)**. The issue of Adi interrogates the global force of whiteness not (only) as a racial category, but as a worldview.

- Degan Ali and Mari-Rose Romain Murphy, “Black Lives Matter is also a reckoning for foreign aid and international NGOs,” *OpenDemocracy* (July 19, 2020)

- Arbie Baguios, “It’s time to decolonize project management in the aid sector,” *The Medium* (22 October 2019)


- Alyssa Bovell, “Interested in international development work? Take time to examine your power and privilege.” *University of Dayton Human Rights Center Blog* (28 February 2020)

- Devex Articles by Angela Bruce-Raeburn (Regional Advocacy Director for Africa at the Global Health Advocacy Incubator)


- Paul Currion, “Decolonising aid, again: The unfinished business of decolonization is the original sin of the modern aid industry,” *The New Humanitarian* (July 13, 2020)


- Lynne Jones, “An aid industry laboring under neocolonial structures is no help,” *Aeon*


- Hugo Slim, “Is racism part of our reluctance to localise humanitarian action?” *Humanitarian Practice Network* (June 5, 2020)


- The Editorial Board, “Foreign Aid is Having a Reckoning,” *New York Times* (February 13, 2021)
Podcasts and Videos

- “What we can do about the White Savior Complex,” Tiny Spark Podcast, hosted by Amy Costello (October 26, 2018)
  Conversation with Lydia Namubiru, Angela Bruce Raeburn, Solome Lemma, Jennifer Lentfer, Teddy Ruge, Tiny Spark has several episodes focusing on anti-racism and diversity, equity and inclusion in the international development and non-profit sectors.

- Aid Re-imagined: How to be Anti-Racist in Aid: A Conversation about Racism in the Aid Sector with Stephanie Kimou, Marie Rose Romain Murphy, Naomi Tulay-Solanke, and facilitated by Arbie Baguios (17 June 2020)

- Rethinking Development Podcast Series with Safa Shahkhalili (2020)
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