

HOW TO KEEP YOUR INSTITUTION WHITE: WHITENESS IN THE WORLD BANK'S ANTI- RACISM RHETORIC

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Abstract

Whiteness as the dominant racial identity remains the normality and creates racialized hierarchies in society and the international political system. International organizations, like the World Bank with 189 member states and operations mainly in African states, have long been criticized for their Eurocentrism and internal racial discrimination. But how do racial hierarchies of power in institutions survive amid popular anti-racism uprisings? This thesis argues that the World Bank is a White institutional space in which Whiteness, a system of structural privileges, enables the World Bank to systematically subordinate Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color.

Thus, the World Bank's discourse on its recently implemented anti-racism efforts is analyzed through a reflexive Foucaultian thematic analysis. The results are six discursive mechanisms that function to reproduce the Bank as an exclusive White institutional space: Merging race in a broader discrimination frame, centering the state in measurements of diversity, claiming neutrality and objectivity through meritocracy, silencing the discussion of racism, relying on individual anti-racism measures, and depending on voluntarism and non-interference. These mechanisms help White institutions to pay lip-service to anti-racism measures while allowing them to continue to ignore any structural causes of inequalities.

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It is necessary to expose white privilege everywhere, not just because it is an injustice, but because by working to dismantle it, we will be creating a post-Western world that is fairer, has less conflict, is more united and is better able to respond to the existential challenges facing humanity.¹

Introduction

Racial injustices and an end to structural inequalities have been the center of social movements around the World: Black Lives Matter in the US, the mass uprisings across the Arab region, Fridays for Future internationally to name only a sequence. And their demands for an alternative world have even reached the World Bank,² an international financial institution (IFI) that promotes itself as purely economic and apolitical. In 2020, it launched an Anti-Racism Task Force led by Sandie Okoro, Senior Vice President, Bank Group General Counsel, and a British woman of color, to address racism within and outside the organization. While (Black) activists have been criticizing the Bank for its Western centric structure,³ international relations scholars have thus far not analyzed the World Bank through the concept of race and Whiteness.

Discourse analyses of the World Bank's policies and documents are plentiful. Previous scholars focused on the Bank's discourse regarding education,⁴ corruption,⁵ information and

¹ Chandran Nair, "Racism In America Should Not Take Center Stage in the Global Fight Against White Supremacy," *Time*, July 20, 2021, <https://time.com/6082168/white-privilege/>.

² Today's World Bank Group consists of five agencies: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Cooperation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and the International Centre For Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). By referring to the World Bank, this thesis focuses on the IBRD and IDA which are collectively known as the World Bank.

³ Muhammed L. Saidykhan, "Update on 'This Anti-Black Racism Must End' Campaign," *Critical Investigations Into Humanitarianism in Africa* (blog), August 31, 2020, <http://www.cihablog.com/request-to-add-this-anti-black-racism-must-end-campaign-on-the-world-bank-imf-2020-annual-meetings-agenda/>.

⁴ See for example: Ryan P. Deuel, "Governing Higher Education toward Neoliberal Governmentality," *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 20, no. 3 (2022): 310–23; Francine Menashy, "Interrogating an Omission," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 34, no. 5 (2013): 749–64; Eduardo Domenech and Carlos Mora-Ninci, "World Bank Discourse and Policy on Education and Cultural Diversity for Latin America," in *Global Neoliberalism and Education and its Consequences*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 151-170.

⁵ Tara Polzer, *Corruption: Deconstructing the World Bank Discourse*, Working Paper (London: LSE, 2001).

communication technologies,⁶ resilience,⁷ and neoliberalism.⁸ Stefania Errico asks to what extent the Bank's development projects towards indigenous communities comply with international norms. But by surveying the Bank's policies concerning the indigenous people's "right to land and the right to free, prior, and informed consent", Errico takes a legal materialist, rather than a discursive perspective into account.⁹ In 2021, Sarah Moritz' published a Foucaultian discourse analysis of the Bank's research reports on Uganda and India.¹⁰ Her de- and postcolonial sociological approach connected with a Foucaultian thematic analysis results in a rare analysis of the Bank's knowledge production and its relationship to the societies it operates in.

In addition to Moritz, this thesis builds upon Penny Griffin's *Gendering the World Bank*. In her poststructural framework in line with Judith Butler, Griffin uses a discourse analysis of documents and interviews

to show, first, in what ways and through which discursive practices 'gender' and 'sex' are discursively constituted to render apparently ungendered neoliberal discourse coherent, and, secondly, how 'gender' is made intelligible in order to better serve neoliberal ideals of marketisation, privatization, deregulation and flexibilization.¹¹

She concludes that individual bank members are well committed to gender equality, but the Bank continues to view macroeconomics through a genderblind lens. Furthermore, she finds that the Bank's fundamental and complex institutional structures are incapable of integrating gender more than as an add-on. In her last chapter on HIV/AIDS, Griffin takes up the historical

⁶ Mark Thompson, "Discourse, 'Development' & the 'Digital Divide'," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 99 (2004): 103-23.

⁷ Peter Ferguson and Linda Wollersheim, "The World Bank's Resilience Discourse," in *Rethinking Multilateralism in Foreign Aid*, ed. Viktor Jakupec, Max Kelly, and Jonathan Makuira (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 160-178.

⁸ Andy Storey, "The World Bank, Neo-Liberalism, and Power," *Development in Practice* 10, no. 3-4 (2000): 361-70.

⁹ Stefania Errico, "The World Bank and Indigenous Peoples," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 13, no. 4 (2006): 374.

¹⁰ Sarah Moritz, "Potentialities in Applying Foucault's Discourse Analysis to World Bank Research," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 14, no. 4 (2021): 67-84.

¹¹ Penny Griffin, *Gendering the World Bank*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 5.

intersectionality of gender and race in Western racialized assumptions on African sexuality. Besides this, there have been no analyses of the Bank's discourse on race.

By attempting to mitigate this literature gap, this thesis contributes to the existing literature on international development and global inequalities by bridging critical race theory, international relation theory, and Whiteness studies. Empirically, it generates new perspectives on the underlying assumptions of the World Bank which helps to understand and explain why fighting structural racism demands a critical assessment of the dominant players within the international system.

Race is defined here as a social and political construct that derives from ideological effort and thus, it is fluid, instable and undergoes dynamic processes and practices.¹² The idea of race has evolved from and continues to be deeply rooted in colonial history and social changes that need to be examined when analyzing race. It is therefore necessary to view the World Bank's discourse on racism as historically embedded in a racialized liberal world view. Furthermore, Whiteness is often considered as invisible and unmarked, a phenomenon that Frankenberg calls a "white delusion".¹³ The delusionary aspect becomes evident, when asking for whom Whiteness is invisible and for whom it is very much present. In this thesis, Whiteness is understood as a system of relative structural privileges intersecting with other subordinating factors (gender, class, age etc.) in a racially hierarchal organized society.¹⁴ It is a perception from which to view, elaborate and create oneself, others, identities, and global structures.¹⁵ Whiteness is a historical and social process like other categories of races, but it is hegemonic

¹² Ruth Frankenberg, "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," in *The New Social Theory Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander (London: Routledge, 2020), 73.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 76

¹⁵ Steve Garner, "A Moral Economy of Whiteness: Behaviours, Belonging and Britishness," *Ethnicities* 12, no. 4 (2012): 446.

and dominant because it subordinates, controls and thus functions as the threshold from which all the other racialized identities are being measured by.¹⁶

How exactly do racialized hierarchies of power in international organizations survive? In the case of the World Bank, the concepts of Whiteness and colorblind racism uncover how the World Bank, despite good intentions of fighting racism, was created as and continues to be a White institutional space. Moore identifies four mechanisms contributing to the production of White institutional spaces in the legal education system: the racist exclusion of people of color, the development of a white normative frame, the historical construction of the curriculum, and the assertion of law as a neutral and impartial doctrine unconnected to power relations. By linking the history and organizational structures of the Bank to external reports on racism and interpreting the Bank's discourse on diversity and racism through a Foucaultian discourse analysis, this thesis identifies institutional and discursive practices which are "produced in and function to reproduce the racial social structure – which in the United States is based on White supremacy."¹⁷

The purpose is to show how deeply Whiteness and colorblindness is embedded in the World Bank's discourses which have emerged in a liberal environment benefiting from the continuation of racial inequalities. By highlighting the importance of race and Whiteness in international relations, the hope here is to contribute to make international organizations, as the quote at the beginning promotes, more fair, united, and humane. This normative approach is, however, not less "objective" than positivist theories that claim value-free research. The starting point is that no scientist or writer conducts value-free research, so reflecting on the researcher's position and its impact on the research is a more open and explicit methodology.

¹⁶ John Hartigan Jr, *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁷ Wendy L. Moore, "The Mechanisms of White Space(s)," *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 14 (2020): 1947.

The next section elaborates the concepts of Whiteness, colorblindness, and White institutional space. This theoretical framework demonstrates the importance of Whiteness and presents discursive mechanisms within liberal discourses to maintain White privileges and racialized global hierarchies of power as theorized by Bonilla-Silva.¹⁸ After an overview of the methodology of the discourse analysis, the case study of the World Bank follows. Here, a historical genealogy sketches the Bank's (white) history, including its colonial history, exclusion of BIPOC, and its unequal voting shares. Then, the Bank's discourse in public documents on racism and diversity is analyzed through a Foucaultian thematic discourse analysis. The overarching aim is to lay down how institutionalized racial hierarchies of power in the Bank have survived since its foundation in July 1944 in the United States.

Whiteness, Colorblindness and White Institutional Spaces

Focusing on the construction and perpetuation of Whiteness is vital for critical analyses of racial hierarchies and subordinations. White is a socially fabricated racial identity as any other form of race but, even more important, it holds a dominant position and is historically constructed as the normal. Following Ruth Frankenberg, ignoring Whiteness means leaving its status within racial ordinations unexamined and an “unmarked marker”, while othering non-white racial identities. The notion that Whiteness is unmarked and invisible, as Frankenberg suggests in her earlier works, is what she later calls “a white delusion”.¹⁹ This delusion is part of a wider attempt to rationalize, normalize and naturalize White norms when in fact, Whiteness is a process which is fragile and thus requires mechanisms to be reproduced. For people and entire communities who are not considered White, Whiteness is very much present and have real effects such as (neo-)colonial practices, while White people claim to not see colors.²⁰

¹⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2022).

¹⁹ Ruth Frankenberg, “The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” in *The New Social Theory Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander, second edition (London: Routledge, 2020), 73.

²⁰ Ruth Frankenberg, ed, *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Duke University Press, 1997), 4.

Whiteness is accompanied by White privileges and intersects with other subordinating concepts such as nationality and functions as a power to exclude or include.²¹ It is thus necessary to mark Whiteness when, for example, discourses on diversity obscure the dominance of White norms.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva serves as another guiding scholar in this thesis who develops the concept of colorblindness in *Racism Without Racists*. In his ethnographic study on racism in the US, Whites claimed that they do not see colors and do not categorize humans along racial lines. This is striking considering that major parts of US society have long been disadvantaged in any aspect of life because of their skin color and racialization by the dominant White society. Although overt acts of racism have become less acceptable in the US, Bonilla-Silva identifies new mechanisms by Whites to maintain racial hierarchy without seeming racist. The results of his numerous in-depth interviews are four frames that Whites use to articulate racist views in a seemingly responsible, moral, and common sense: naturalization, cultural racism, the minimization of race, and abstract liberalism.

Bonilla-Silva regards the former one as the most foundational theme and indeed it is the most apparent in this discourse analysis. Abstract liberalism entails the language and mindset of political and economic liberalism, such as individuality, free choice, or non-interference. For example, Whites would agree that BIPOC are underrepresented and that everyone is equal, but they consider affirmative actions, such as quotas, unfair for Whites because “it’s up to them (BIPOC) to meet the standards.”²² Similarly, as the discourse analysis shows, the World Bank commits to fight racism but leaves the anti-racism task force to volunteer workers.

Building on these frameworks, Wendy Leo Moore developed in 2020 a theory of *Mechanisms of White Space(s)*. She depicts how routines and specific mechanisms produce spaces that are predominantly White and benefit White people. While social scientists have long researched the distribution of resources along racial groups, Moore’s concept of White

²¹ Ibid.: 4.

²² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2022), 31.

space focuses on the normative function of race, in which White is the normal and enjoys the authority. These mechanisms work tacitly and fundamentally intertwined with the racialized social structures in which they are embedded, namely the US society. They include “racist historical and contemporary institutionalized hierarchies of power, institutionalized White logics, discourses, and ideologies which inform everyday racialized practices, that function synergistically to channel the resources of these institutions disproportionately to Whites.”²³ Moore’s mechanisms can be divided into historical, such as the racist exclusion and a development of White norms, and contemporary mechanisms, for example the practice of colorblindness which

(...) occurs as, on the one hand, institutional members affirmatively assert a commitment to racial equality, often in the form of commitment to race neutrality and/or equality of opportunity, while, on the other hand, engaging in systematic patterns of racialized practices.²⁴

Due to the explorative character of the discourse analysis, the interpretation followed along these theoretical frameworks. While Frankenberg is mainly used to understand Whiteness and its importance, Bonilla-Silva helps to unmark Whiteness. Moore’s mechanisms of White institutional spaces were used as guidelines rather than as a strict checklist to avoid any artificial categorizing of the themes identified in World Bank’s discourse. The upcoming discourse analysis thus draws from several sociological theorists to understand racial hierarchies in the international development discourse.

A Historical Genealogy of the World Bank

This section draws a genealogical sketch from the World Bank’s history with the purpose to identify the sources that made the Bank a White space. It differs from a traditional historiography of specific events which explains the past by connecting data from the past.

²³ Wendy Leo Moore, “The Mechanisms of White Space(s),” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 14 (2020): 1947.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 1956.

Rather, this genealogy uses the past to describe and explain the present. More specifically, it asks how the organizational processes of the Bank were situated in and impacted by a racialized social structure. This approach follows Foucault's purpose of genealogy: "to show, based upon their historical establishment and formation, those systems which are still ours today and within which we are trapped."²⁵ Thus, this analysis is one postcolonial interpretation of the Bank's history rather than a casual, linear claim for absolute truth.²⁶

After World War II and the destruction of Europe, representatives of 44 countries convened in New Hampshire in July 1944, known as the Bretton Woods Conference.²⁷ The leaders discussed mainly the establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) aiming at securing stable exchange rates and balance-of-payments to avoid another Great Depression, economic crises and wars. The conference members debated the foundation of an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to enhance private financial markets in devastated Europe and under certain circumstances lend funds to development projects in poorer states. Under the leadership of the economist Lord John Maynard Keynes from the United Kingdom, the commission on the IBRD drafted the World Bank's article of agreements, which was approved by the delegates of the conference and signed in Washington D.C. in December 1945.²⁸

At that time, the founding members held colonies and most parts of the world were still colonies. The first instrumental means that led to the World Bank as a White space is the hiring of former colonial officers. While one could argue that the process of decolonization had already started, Hodge's study shows how international organizations, such as the World Bank,

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1989): 64, **quoted in** Kate Kearins and Keith Hooper, "Genealogical Method and Analysis," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 15, no. 5 (2002): 735.

²⁶ Kate Kearins and Keith Hooper, "Genealogical Method and Analysis," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 15, no. 5 (2002): 736.

²⁷ World Bank, "Explore History," accessed May 16, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/archive/history>.

²⁸ Ibid.

recruited their staff from former British colonial officers who then careered in influential development projects.²⁹ Roughly one-third of the colonial officers in his study continued to work in the same state and many of them seamlessly transitioned to the role of an international development expert. In total, 17 percent of the ex-colonial officers in the study careered in the World Bank.

Most of the colonial officers worked in Sub-Saharan countries and as colonial experts they significantly shaped development policies through their colonial experience and mindset. Consequently, Bank's first study on agricultural development in Sub-Saharan focused heavily on Kenya only (44 percent of their case studies) and the officers involved continued to hold influential position until the 1980s.³⁰ As an example, the Bank funded, together with the UK government, the Million Acre Settlement Scheme which lent money to Kenya to relocate around 1,2 million acres of land which was stolen by the British government during colonialism.³¹ The Bank put in charge Sandy Storrar, a Scottish farmer's son, who then hired six former colonial colleagues, three of them former Kenyan settlers.³²

Storrar is not an individual case of a former colonial agronomist with a postcolonial career at the Bank. The agricultural staff in the World Bank during the 60s and 70s consisted disproportionately of ex-British colonial officers. The consequences were an inherent incorporation of a colonial mindset into the Bank's programs, best exemplified in the Bank's Integrated Rural Development Programs (IRDP) from 1960-1980. These IRDPs included the Lilongwe Land Development Project in Malawi, whose outcomes were devastating. It did not generate any increase in maize yields, as it was supposed to, but it even decreased the groundnut yields. This was due to the One-size-fits-all approach that the Bank applied based on British

²⁹ Joseph M. Hodge, "British Colonial Expertise, Post-Colonial Careerism and the Early History of International Development," *Journal of Modern European History* 8, no. 1 (2010): 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 32.

³² *Ibid.*: 37.

colonial personnel across different African states. Although the Bank changed its policy formulation during the 1980s, the institutionalization of postcolonial mindsets within the Bank has been much neglected in development studies. Finally, it is important to note that the World Bank was not the only international organization who recruited colonial professionals, and neither was Britain the only state that hired colonial officers. France, Netherlands, and Belgium relied also on colonial staff for their development programs.³³

The second institutional means that has impacted the Bank's White DNA is the US capitol, Washington D.C., as the headquarters location of the World Bank. The geographical location in the United States and its imperial history matter for a historical genetic analysis of the Bank. As Weaver points out, "the structure and organizational culture of the World Bank did not evolve in isolation from its task and authorizing environment, but rather in response to it."³⁴ The socioeconomic structures in the US, in which the World Bank produces and organizes its expertise, knowledge and global network, are rooted in colonial history, racial oppression and slavery. As previous scholars have extensively laid down, the US political system, including its Constitution which handled enslaved Blacks as property, is built upon slavery and White dominance.³⁵ Similarly, the US capital economy and today's wealth of the White population relied heavily on the enslavement of Blacks as free labor and land exploitation, which Cedric Robinson theorized as racial capitalism. The fundamental racist formation of the US also shapes the foundation of the World Bank, whose staff consists of a vast majority of White Americans, as it is further elaborated on in the next section.

³³ Ibid.: 43.

³⁴ Catherine Weaver, "The World's Bank and the Bank's World," in *Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 45.

³⁵ see for example, Joe R. Feagin and Kimberley Ducey, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Fourth edition, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); Steve Martinot, *The Machinery of Whiteness: Studies in the Structure of Racialization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014); David Goldberg, *The Racial State*, (USA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

Another example of how the Bank's location is entangled with and beneficial for the US is reflected in the practice that the Bank's president has always been a US citizen appointed by the US government. While power is historically inherited, it is important to admit that the Bank's location in the US is not a sufficient argument for its power today *per se*, as Foucault stated, "power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action."³⁶ However, according to Wendy Moore, the US social system with its "racist historical and contemporary institutionalized hierarchies of power, racist institutionalized logics, and racist discourses and ideologies" contributes to the institutional practices that "channel the resources of U.S. organizations and institutions disproportionately to Whites".³⁷ How exactly the racist discourse of the World Bank nowadays functions is analyzed in the discourse analysis later.

A third institutional means that benefits dominant states from the Global North is the unequal distribution of voting shares at the World Bank. At first, the voting shares of each member depended on their monetary contribution in form of paid-in capital. Now the voting power aligns with the states' ownership shares in the Bank which are allocated in different ways in each agency.³⁸

Today's World Bank Group consists of five agencies: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Cooperation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and the International Centre For Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The World Bank Group senior decision-making body is the Boards of Governors which consists of one Governor and one Alternative Governor as appointed by each member state. Similarly, the

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon, 1980): 89.

³⁷ Wendy Leo Moore, "The Mechanisms of White Space(s)," *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 14 (2020): 1947.

³⁸ World Bank, "Boards of Directors," accessed May 16, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/directors>.

Board of Executive Directors is composed of the representatives of the Bank's member states as elected in the four Boards of Directors from the IBRD, IDA and IFC.

The United States claims the largest shares of votes in both agencies, the IBRD and IDA, with 15,9% and 9,96% respectively and enjoys the right to veto over majority decisions.³⁹ Former European colonizers such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom also hold a significant share of votes within in the Bank. But even more important regarding the unequal voting distribution is that these states, plus Japan, China, Russia and Saudi-Arabia, represent themselves with their own Executive Director (ED) while West-, Sub- and Central African states are grouped and represented by one single ED. States from the Global South are underrepresented with regards to their voting shares, particularly when compared to their gross domestic product (GDP) measured as purchasing power parity.⁴⁰

For example, according to the Bank's data from 1990-2020, Nigeria has the lowest voting share of 1,7% despite a GDP in PPP of 1,07 Trillion Dollar compared to Australia with 4,05% and 1,37 Trillion Dollar GDP in PPP.⁴¹ As Griffith-Jones points out "The current proportions of shares (in the Bank and the Fund) are very heavily influenced by past shares, and insufficiently influenced by the current relative size of countries' GDP."⁴²

It is unsurprising that overt racism and a racist exclusion has also been part of the Bank's recruitment history. The internal racial discrimination and exclusion of BIPOC in the World Bank was first reported in 1978 by William Raspberry in the Washington Post who criticized that only a few Black people work at the World Bank and even fewer move up to higher position. He finds that employers at the World Bank are "60-odd black African professionals

³⁹ Appendix 1 summarizes the Executive Directors, the constituencies, and their voting status in the IBRD and IDA as shown in the Bank's fiscal report of 2021.

⁴⁰ Stephany Griffith-Jones, *Governance of the World Bank*, (Report prepared for DFID, 2022), 5, <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/GovernanceWorldBank.pdf>.

⁴¹ World Bank, "GDP, PPP (current international \$) - Nigeria," accessed May 16, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD?locations=NG&most_recent_value_desc=false.

⁴² Stephany Griffith-Jones, *Governance of the World Bank*, (Report prepared for DFID, 2022), 5, <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/GovernanceWorldBank.pdf>.

on a professional staff of more than 2,400; three black Americans out of 619 American professionals employed at the bank; zero black division chiefs out of 160 scattered throughout the bank.”⁴³ The Bank’s Board first discussed issues of race in 1979 at the WB-IMF Annual Meeting in Belgrade. In 1998, the World Bank’s Team for Racial Equality revealed a memo stating that “There is a cultural prejudice among some managers, who rated Sub Saharan Africans as inferior.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the memo revealed “The findings of three earlier WB studies send a clear message: race-based discrimination is present in our institution, including denial of opportunity and inequitable treatment on the basis of the color of their skin. The problem is serious indeed.”⁴⁵ The Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa⁴⁶ (CIHA) Blog consisting of transnational African scholars at the University of California refers to the World Bank diversity report from 2003 that shows 16 WB studies having reported “systemic racism ‘with varying degrees of empirical rigor’”⁴⁷

The World Bank does not publish internal studies on racial discrimination and does not categorize staff and positions by racial identity. Instead, the Bank only gathers demographic information of their employees according to their passports which leads to White Africans holding high positions and Black US citizens lower ranked positions.⁴⁸ The Government Accountability Project published the thus far most detailed report on discrimination of particularly Black Americans at the World Bank in 2009. The report, which details discrimination in recruitment, retention, and judicial decisions, finds that “black Americans, in

⁴³ Shelley Walden, Beatrice Edwards, “Racial Discrimination at the World Bank,” *Governmental Accountability Project* (2009): 7.

⁴⁴ The Team for Racial Equality. Memo to James D. Wolfensohn, President, World Bank Group. 4 March 1998.

⁴⁵ CIH, “Update on ‘This Anti-Black Racism Must End’ Campaign,” 2020, http://www.cihablog.com/request-to-add-this-anti-black-racism-must-end-campaign-on-the-world-bank-imf-2020-annual-meetings-agenda/#_ftn16.

⁴⁶ Scholars are based at six research institutions: l’Université Gaston Berger (Senegal), the University of Ghana, Legon, Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), University of California, Irvine, and the University of Rochester (US)

⁴⁷ CIH, “Update on ‘This Anti-Black Racism Must End’ Campaign,” 2020, http://www.cihablog.com/request-to-add-this-anti-black-racism-must-end-campaign-on-the-world-bank-imf-2020-annual-meetings-agenda/#_ftn16.

⁴⁸ World Bank, *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Articles of Agreement*, June 27, 2012, 13. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/722361541184234501-0330022018/original/IBRDArticlesOfAgreementEnglish.pdf>

particular, are excluded from professional employment at the World Bank and that, rather than improving, their situation has actually deteriorated in the past ten years.”⁴⁹ As an example, the World Bank employs only four Black Americans out of over 3500 professional grade staff worldwide, out of them more than 1000 US citizens.

Unsurprisingly, other Black employees from Sub-Sahara Africa or Caribbean are disadvantaged and underrepresented, especially in higher ranks. Black employees are also disproportionally constraint to the Bank’s positions on Africa which according to Bonilla-Silva is a practice from the Jim Crow era that pigeonholes Blacks to positions in, for example, minority affairs that offer little mobility.⁵⁰

Weaver points out how the Bank’s apolitical, technical and economic ideology is deeply embedded in its structure and culture.⁵¹ She uses the Young Professional Program as an example of how the Bank recruits young staff from elitist universities from which 80 percent enjoyed a US or British education. In addition to Weaver’s insights, it is necessary to note that these elite university are traditionally White institutions. Julie Oyegun, the director of the Bank’s Diversity Office, argued that the World Bank simply cannot find qualified Black employees. As noted by the Institute for Policy Studies, however, the World Bank does not seem to recruit from the Howard University, which is a historically Black elite university.⁵² Its close location to the Bank and its highest graduation rate of Black PhDs in the world, raise serious concerns of the Bank’s alleged inability of finding Black employees.

The final aspect of how the organizational structure and history of the Bank favors Whites demonstrates the lack of an independent juridical body within the World Bank. As an

⁴⁹ Shelley Walden, Beatrice Edwards, “Racial Discrimination at the World Bank,” *Governmental Accountability Project* (2009): 19.

⁵⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2022), 71.

⁵¹ Catherine Weaver, “The World’s Bank and the Bank’s World,” in *Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 45.

⁵² Bea Edwards, Emily Schwartz Greco, “Racial Discrimination at the World Bank,” *Institute for Policy Studies* (2009), https://ips-dc.org/racial_discrimination_at_the_world_bank/.

international organization, the World Bank does not fall under US national law but has an internal justice system, the Administrative Tribunal. Although the Bank refers to it as an independent judicial forum, it is not overseen by any outside body, and the judges are “appointed by the Executive Directors of the Bank from a list of candidates drawn up by the President of the Bank after appropriate consultation”.⁵³

The report by the Government Accountability Project reviews juridical decisions by the internal Administrative Tribunal. It shows that between 1996 and 2008, every of the 21 court cases reviewed regarding racial discrimination was dismissed. Considering the witness reports of racial discriminations and the Bank’s internal studies which prove the Bank’s awareness of the problem, this lack of juridical justice is alarming. A recent example of racial injustice at the World Bank from 2014 concerns Dr. Yonas Biru whose application as a global manager was denied by the Bank because “Europeans are not used to seeing a Black man in a position of power.”⁵⁴

This genealogy of the World Bank’s history shows that the Bank’s governance structure, its initial staff and contemporary hiring process as well as its unequal voting shares reflect the racist social structure in which it is embedded. While individual racists acts might not be the norm anymore, institutional racism consists through the racist exclusion of Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPoC). More importantly, and quoting Bonilla-Silva, racism “is not simply a ‘superstructural’ phenomenon (a mere reflection of the racialized system), but becomes the organizational map that guides actions of racial actors in society.”⁵⁵ As this

⁵³ World Bank, “The World Bank Administrative Tribunal,” accessed May 16, 2022, <https://tribunal.worldbank.org>.

⁵⁴ E. Faye Williams, “First Legally Sanctioned Racial Discrimination Case in the U.S. in the 21st Century,” last modified November 7, 2017, <https://afro.com/first-legally-sanctioned-racial-discrimination-case-u-s-21st-century/>.

⁵⁵ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 474.

sections lied down racism has guided the Bank's actions along its organizational and culture structure from the beginning of its foundation in 1945.

Qualitative researchers are always thinking, reflecting, learning and evolving – we do not reach a point where we have nothing more to learn. We are journeying, not arriving!⁵⁶

Methodology

Positionality & Reflexivity

Critical race theory, post- and decolonial (feminist) approaches consider a researcher's own position as meaningful when analyzing data because (asymmetrical power) relations between the researcher and the researched object impact the research field. Reflecting on my identity does not lead to more authenticity or stronger arguments but can contribute to decolonizing academia. My mostly White socialization in the global North might limit me to fully recognize Whiteness in a discourse or to not interpret the data with a White gaze. In the past years, I have immersed myself in the studies of post-/decolonialism, white feminism, critical race theory, I learned to critically reflect Western academia and lifestyles and to include global South scholars and epistemologies in my writings. My personal process of deconstructing, self-examining, and being comfortable with the discomfort that privileges bring with them, however, is a lifelong journey. While self-reflexivity will not hinder me from failing, I hope to motivate other white academics to be open about their privileges because "having such an awareness (about the self) is an essential step towards reconceptualizing research as a 'co-construction' of knowledge as well as conducting research 'with', rather than 'on' or 'about' a group or area of interest."

I understand qualitative research as a creative, thoughtful, deliberative procedure that draws from the researcher's subjectivity as a resource for knowledge production, rather than

⁵⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 592.

fighting it as a potential danger. It is about making meanings that are always situated in a specific context, instead of trying to find meaning ‘out there’. I follow Braun and Clarke who point out that “qualitative data analysis is about telling ‘stories’, about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the ‘truth’ that is either ‘out there’ and findable from, or buried deep within, the data.”⁵⁷ Thus, a critical thematic analysis, as developed by Braun and Clarke, as a specific form of discourse analysis is the most appropriate method here. I lay down my methodological journey to make transparent what, why and how I conducted the thematic analysis.

I understand discourses from a poststructural perspective as constructed, relative and in the Foucaultian sense as institutionalized structures of meanings and identities shaped by history and systems of orders, disciplines, and consistencies.⁵⁸ While language is seen to reflect social meanings, there are no absolute facts, but any meaning is constructed. Reality is thus the knowledge that one has about it and this knowledge organizes the reality. Discourses do not only describe the reality as we know it but also form the reality as they bring about the constructed knowledge and meanings to any objects.

Silence and the oppression of discourses are considered as discursive tools that exclude some discourses from informing our knowledge of reality and thereby can produce a limited reality. Thus, discourses come with the power to include or exclude, produce, or erase knowledge.⁵⁹ The results are hegemonic discourses that “structure meaning, identity and behaviour through the articulation and re-articulation of certain knowledges,” and thereby “create a specific and limited social ‘space’ for behaviour and study”.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 591.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 41.

⁵⁹ Margaret Wetherell et al., *Discourse Theories and Practice*, (London, California, New Delhi: SAGE, 2002), 72.

⁶⁰ Penny Griffin, *Gendering the World Bank*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 29.

The World Bank claims expert knowledge on development, economic prosperity and fighting poverty. Inspired by Penny Griffin's analysis of the gendered discourse of the World Bank, this section argues that the Bank (re-)produces a hegemonic, racialized, White development discourse

through specific discursive practices, practices that predicate, prescribe and reproduce the identities, meanings and behaviours that best correspond with the Bank's view of the world. In so doing, the Bank creates a 'reality' to match the limits of that which it can perceive as possible.⁶¹

With this in mind, the discursive themes that I created out of the following discourse analysis do not only reflect the racist social environment in which they are situated but, more importantly, are discursive mechanisms that produce the Bank's reality as a White institutional space.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of World Bank documents begins in 2020, when the Bank started to address racism and racial discrimination in public. So far, the Bank has only published five documents, partly in the form of statements, that I used for a Foucaultian thematic discourse analysis. Additionally, I included the Bank's key documents⁶² on diversity, equity, and inclusion, not to complement missing data but much more to examine how not mentioning racism might be part of a discursive practice of silencing it. Table 1 lists the material used in the analysis, grouped in those addressing racism directly and those that discuss racism indirectly in the context of diversity. The document analysis was considered complete after coding no longer added extra value and the material was saturated.

⁶¹ Ibid.: 30.

⁶² Key documents are understood here as those that the Bank published to indicate their values, work ethics, strategies, annual reports, including those focusing on diversity.

Table 1: Corpus of World Bank's texts analyzed.

	Title	Year
	Discussing racism directly	
1	Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination	2021
2	Anti-Racism Charter	2021
3	Committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	2020
4	Ending Racism	2020
5	A Key Milestone in the World Bank Group's Anti-Racism Efforts	2021
	Discussing racism indirectly in the context of diversity	
6	Code of Ethics	2022
7	Diversity and Inclusion. World Bank Group Statement of Commitment to Diversify and Inclusion	2022
8	From Crisis to Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Recovery. Annual Report 2021	2021
9	A Stronger, Connected, Solutions World Bank Group. An Overview of the World Bank Strategy	2022
10	Code of Conduct For Board Officials	2018
11	Social Sustainability and Inclusion	2021

I followed six phases of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke. In phase one, I familiarized myself with the dataset by re-reading the Bank's statements and taking notes on my initial observations. In the second phase, I generated codes that grabbed pieces of the data that might be interesting for my research question. I used the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA to code the data because it facilitates the export of the coded segments for the construction of themes. Moreover, I decided on an inductive coding approach because I relied on explorative research as the World Bank's discourse on racism is new and has not been analyzed thus far. My coding started with the broader question in mind of how the Bank makes meaning of race issues, what assumption are implied, and what measures the Bank engages in to fight racism. In the first run of a test analysis, I noticed that the Bank uses the word race mainly in combination with other forms of oppression. Thus, I created the code *Race, gender, age, sex* defined as "Statements that group race with other forms of discrimination" as in the following statement:

We are working to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion so that everyone, regardless of their race, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or disability, has access to opportunity.⁶³

⁶³ World Bank, "The World Bank Group: Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination," Nov. 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2021/11/11/the-world-bank-group-addressing-racism-and-racial-discrimination>.

In another example, I initially created a code called *Lack of intersectionality*, which I adjusted to *Focus on gender and poverty as discriminatory factor* defined as “Statements that highlight the importance of fighting gender inequality and poverty but exclude race as a discriminatory factor” because I found that the World Bank uses intersectional approaches but only regarding gender and class issues. An example for this code is “The project has also provided livelihood opportunities for more than 20,000 people, of whom 88 percent are women.”⁶⁴

For codes that referred to statements that were left unsaid (*No historical structures considered*), hence not made by the Bank, I coded segments that indicated where the Bank sets its limits on the history of racism. For example, the Bank’s limit on historical discrimination of BIPoC is set to the event of killing of George Floyd and Juneteenth as no historical structures are referred to as in the following:

This Friday, June 19, is the anniversary of the official end of slavery in the United States and ‘Juneteenth’ is being recognized around the country as a moment to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and make commitments to end racism.⁶⁵

When I coded all documents systematically, I came up with 10 codes from which I created themes. The code system includes the title of the code, the definition, and an example for illustration to ensure transparency and the possibility of intercoding in future research.

⁶⁴ World Bank, *Annual Report 2021*, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/annual-report>.

⁶⁵ World Bank, “June 18, 2020: Ending Racism,” World Bank Blogs, June 18, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/june-18-2020-ending-racism>.

Table 2: Code System

Code	Title of Code	Definition	Example	Frequency
Main code 1	Racism and racial discrimination	Statements specifically regarding racism and racial discrimination		
Subcode 1.1	Race, gender, age, sex	Statements that group race with other forms of discrimination	"We are working to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion so that everyone, regardless of their race, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or disability, has access to opportunity."	10
Subcode 1.2	Zero tolerance policy	Statements that reject any form of racism and other discrimination	"Racial discrimination and social injustice have no place in any of our workplaces or societies."	10
Subcode 1.3	Measures and results	Statements about the Bank's measures against racism and their results	"The launch of the new World Bank Group Anti-Racism Charter and the creation of three key staff positions to tackle racism and racial discrimination and support staff as needed."	47
Main code 2	Diversity	Statements on diversity		
Subcode 2.1	Equality for all	Statements that call for social inclusion, diversity, justice, respect, and equality for all	"Our shared values include justice and equity for all and always treating others with dignity and respect, areas we continue to improve upon."	16
Subcode 2.2	Bank's understanding of diversity	Statements about what diversity means to the Bank	"We track diversity by nationality — as mandated in our Articles of Agreement — not by race." "We all have a role to play in ensuring that employment decisions are made solely on the basis of merit"	25
Subcode 2.3	Measures and results	Statements about the Bank's measures to boost diversity	"The World Bank Group Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has set up interactive training session for staff to raise awareness of unconscious bias."	9
Main code 3	Gaps and silence	Aspects that remain unaddressed		
Subcode 3.2	No material or historical structures considered	Statements that do not reflect on colonial history but consider the market as naturally given	"This Friday, June 19, is the anniversary of the official end of slavery in the United States and 'Juneteenth' is being recognized around the country as a moment to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and make commitments to end racism."	19
Subcode 3.3	Focus on gender and poverty as discriminatory factor	Statements that highlight the importance of fighting gender inequality and poverty but exclude race as a discriminatory factor	"The project has also provided livelihood opportunities for more than 20,000 people, of whom 88 percent are women"	32
Subcode 3.4	Intransparency regarding WB reports on discrimination	Statements that mention the Bank's report on internal racism without mentioning the results	"To help inform its work, in early fiscal 2021, the Task Force carried out the first-ever World Bank Group Survey on Race. About 70 percent of staff participated and offered over 6,000 comments."	11
Subcode 3.5	Self-reflection	Statements that (do not) reflect on the Bank's own actions regarding racism	"We know we can and must do better as an institution to increase our diversity."	21

In phase three, I generated initial candidate themes by “using codes as building blocks”, grouping codes, deleting some, to form “clusters of meaning”.⁶⁶ These candidate themes were part of three broader patterns of meanings (themes), namely *Racism and Racial discrimination*, *Diversity*, and *Gaps & Silence*. At this point, I had only dived into the relevant literature briefly and thus the theme development remained inductively and explorative.

Phase four involved developing and reviewing themes by controlling the candidate themes against the coded segments and the whole data set, determine their persuasiveness and relevance to the research question. By tagging the coded segments for the candidate themes, I combined some codes, disregarded others, and developed the themes in a more nuanced way. For example, the subcodes 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5 formed the theme *Silencing the discussion on racism*, subcode 3.3 was combined with 1.1 and 2.1 to create *Merging race in a broader*

⁶⁶ Virginia Braun et al., “Thematic Analysis,” in *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, ed. Praneet Liampittong (Springer: Singapore, 2019), 855.

discrimination frame and the subcode *Zero tolerance policy* was disregarded as it does not contribute to the research question. In a recursive process, I refined, defined, and named the themes (phase five) which included focusing in detail on each theme in consideration of the research question on how the World Bank remains a White institutional space.

In the final, sixth phase I dived deeper into the relevant literature which I deductively incorporated into the thematic analysis. The theoretical frameworks used are described in the previous section. After receiving feedback from my supervisor, immersing into the literature, and revising the data, I came up with six themes as follows.

1. Merging race in a broader discrimination frame
2. Centering the state in measurements of diversity
3. Silencing the discussion of racism
4. Claiming neutrality and objectivity through meritocracy
5. Relying on individual anti-racism measure
6. Depending on voluntarism and non-interference

Referring to Foucault, these themes do not simply reflect the World Bank's reality but also maintain and produce it, thus, I call them mechanisms to (re-)produce the Bank as a White institutional space.

The World Bank's Mechanisms of a White Institutional Space

The results of the thematic discourse analysis show a strong rhetorical commitment to diversity and inclusion for everyone in statements such as "We embrace diversity and pursue inclusion of backgrounds, identities, cultures, work styles and perspectives."⁶⁷ The desired outcome of the diversity approach is not explicitly defined but it includes shared prosperity where gains and losses are shared equally by everyone. Moreover, the Bank emphasizes the appreciation and strengths of differences that benefit the economic success of the Bank and partner countries' development.

⁶⁷ World Bank, *Code of Conduct for Board Officials*, Nov. 1, 2008, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/786861541011483695/pdf/Code-of-Conduct-of-the-Board-Officials.pdf>.

Before 2020, the Bank does not explicitly speak about racism but instead frames it within this diversity and inclusion discourse. Although the Bank started to use the word racism and addresses the issue publicly after June 2020, the analysis shows that this is merely an add-on within the same discourse. Rather, the Bank's diversity discourse follows a colorblind ideology which functions as an instrument to make structural Whiteness invisible and thereby protecting Whiteness while silencing racial inequalities and thus, reproducing them. In the following, the discursive mechanisms that explain how the Bank maintains and solidifies itself as a White institutional space are presented. The six mechanisms identified include: Merging race in a broader discrimination frame, centering the state in measurements of diversity, claiming neutrality and objectivity through meritocracy, silencing the discussion of racism, relying on individual anti-racism measures, and depending on voluntarism and non-interference.

Merging race in a broader discrimination frame

The Bank merges race with other discriminatory factors as, for example, in the Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion where it says: "acknowledging and respecting differences including nationality, gender and gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, and educational background."⁶⁸ This coding of racism within a broader discrimination frame suggests that everyone is somehow marginalized and individually discriminated.⁶⁹ It derails the attention from and undermines anti-racism efforts and instead protects white privileges by ignoring, for example, the racist policies that enable social class struggles.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ World Bank, "World Bank Group Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion," accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/careers/diversity-inclusion>.

⁶⁹ Jason Rodriguez and Kendralin J. Freeman, "'Your Focus on Race Is Narrow and Exclusive:,' *Whiteness and Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

While all the hereby mentioned discriminatory factors are without a doubt valid, a superficial intersectional discourse runs the risk of sidelining racism and refocusing Whiteness by, for example, centering discussions on gender and poverty. Diversity then functions as a mechanism to first withdraw attention from specifically race related issues to general experiences of marginalization and can then lead to a refocusing on gender, sexuality, and class issues in which, however, the experiences of BIPOC are not considered.

An example for this race-silencing tactic by refocusing on gender can be found in the Bank's annual report 2021 which refers to a "diversity index". This "diversity index" shows how the Bank met gender targets in the fiscal year of 2019, 2020, and 2021 but does not differentiate between wo*men of different racial identities. In the annual report, the Bank celebrates the general increase of women⁷¹ in the Bank (although the table clearly reveals that the number of women in management positions is with 2.7 percent significantly lower than in administrative positions with 17.8 percent and has even decreased within the last three years). While there are no publicly available data about the number of wo*men of color in the Bank's staff, this "diversity index" conceals that wo*men of color are more likely to be underrepresented in general and in higher ranking positions particularly. The Bank's focus on gender diversity, women empowerment and statistics on women and girls within their institution and in their programs, as laudable as they appear at first, must be examined critically within the discourse of diversity.

State-centric measurements of diversity

The Bank's discourse on inclusion for all is based on a state-centric understanding of diversity. This becomes apparent when the Bank clarifies that it "track(s) diversity our by

⁷¹ The World does not refer to any non-traditional definition of women which gives reasons to belief that wo*men are not considered in the Bank's definition.

nationality—as mandated in our Articles of Agreement—not by race”.⁷² The Bank announces in their annual year report 2021 that 45 percent of their full-time staff is based outside of their headquarters in Washington D.C.⁷³ The report does not further explain the compilation of staff regarding, for example, racial identity or ranks of positions. This recruitment process focusing on geographical regions and diverse nationalities, leads to the overrepresentation of white nationals in the Bank’s staff. The Bank’s misleading underlying assumptions here are that the state is a unified, coherent and raceless body.

But, as argued in the historical genealogy of the World Bank, the development of today’s modern states was founded on colonial violence, slavery, land exploitation and the racist assumption of a superior West. In the US, the original founders of the nation and its constitution deliberately denied the personhood of African Americans, BIPoC and wo*men⁷⁴. Thus, the persons that the state originally aimed to protect were white men and the social contract was meant to be between white males.⁷⁵

Following Goldberg and a more critical perspective, the state can be defined, in opposition to the Bank, as “inherently contradictory and internally fractured, consisting not only of agencies and bureaucracies, legislations and courts, but also of norms and principles, individuals and institutions.”⁷⁶ Opening up the state’s black box, considering state norms and including radical social theory, Mill comes to the conclusion that in the US political culture, “Sexism and racism, patriarchy and white supremacy, have not been the *exception* but the *norm*” (original highlights).

⁷² World Bank “World Bank Group Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion,” accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/careers/diversity-inclusion>.

⁷³ World Bank, *Annual Report 2021*, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/annual-report>.

⁷⁴ The * refers to the constructedness of gender categories. It enables identities and self-positioning to be included that go beyond traditional, binary attributions.

⁷⁵ Charles Mills, “Racial Liberalism,” *Pmla* 123, no. 5, (2008): 1382.

⁷⁶ David Goldberg, *The Racial State*, (USA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 7.

The Bank's perspective, however, mirrors the assumptions of liberal political theorists such as Rawls and Kant who do not consider race in questions of justice, perceive society through white settlers' perspectives, assume the existence of a terra nullius before the creation of states and ignore thereby non-white experiences and realities.⁷⁷ At the same time, the Bank is ignorant towards Whiteness as a racial category that enjoys privileges through domination and oppression of other racial identities. As an institution that portrays itself as "one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries"⁷⁸ the Bank is influenced by its social environment stemming from the political culture (in the US) and the racialized history of modern statehood,

But it is also productive of the reality it creates. By relying on a diversity understanding measured by the number of nationalities, the Bank assumes states to be raceless actors, which indicates a White perspective and maintains Whiteness as the norm. The Bank thus constructs a reality in which Whiteness is made invisible, while the experience of settler violence and the experience of former colonized people is erased. Thereby the Bank maintains the status quo because "Everyday practices embedded in institutions, institutional and individual, produce the accumulation of economic, political, and social rewards for whites while valorizing and normalizing whiteness."⁷⁹

Meritocracy for neutrality and objectivity

The Bank constructs its staff recruitment as objective and neutral by referring to meritocracy as the Code of Ethics shows: "we all have a role to play in ensuring that employment decisions are made solely on the basis of merit".⁸⁰ Proponents of meritocracy, such

⁷⁷ Charles Mills, "Racial Liberalism," *Pmla* 123, no. 5, (2008): 1393.

⁷⁸ World Bank, "Who We Are," accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/who-we-are>.

⁷⁹ Michelle Christian, "A Global Critical Race and Racism Framework," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 2 (2019): 177.

⁸⁰ World Bank, *Code of Ethics*, 2022, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/147281468337279671/pdf/WBG-Code-of-Ethics.pdf>.

as the World Bank and liberal theorists like Rawls, believe that it creates more equal and fair opportunities because everyone is measured by the same, supposedly objective criteria. Michael Young first polarized the term meritocracy and thus the liberal belief of equal chances by stating that it is a tool for society, that generally believes in equality, to legitimize and perpetuate inequality.⁸¹

By referring to a meritocratic recruitment process, the Bank assumes an equal access to resources for, in this case, all the World Bank applicants and, once again, ignores structural social inequalities and White dominance.⁸² This ignorance, in return, can only be possible from a White perspective and population who is the winner of meritocratic processes because, as the dominant racial group, they do not face racial discrimination in, of example, application processes. The problematic consequence is that individuals who fail to be successful candidates are made responsible for their rejection.

Bonilla-Silva's confirms in *Racism Without Racists* that themes of liberal discourses are "used by Whites to explain racial matters [which] is the Jeffersonian idea of 'the cream rises to the top,' or meritocracy (reward by merit). But Whites seem unconcerned that the color of the 'cream' that usually 'rises' is White."⁸³ The reports on racial discrimination in the World Bank show that White employers are dominant in the Bank. Just as Bonilla-Silva states, the Bank implicitly explains these racial inequalities by referring to meritocracy claiming that as the fairest method to select the best employee.

Meritocracy thus functions as another mechanism to keep the Bank White without engaging in the discussion of race. The Bank does not seem to see that this recruitment process not only discriminates against BIPoC but by implication, advantages Whites and maintains White privileges. The reference to meritocracy paired with the ignorance of contemporary and

⁸¹ Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870-2033*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958).

⁸² Stephen J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller, *The Meritocracy Myth*, (USA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 217.

⁸³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2022), 86.

past racial discrimination assures that the World Bank “can safely voice [its] opposition to affirmative action in an apparently race neutral way.”⁸⁴ Meritocracy offers the Bank a way to detract from any efforts to increase social justice and because of its dominance, the Bank becomes the authority about what racism is by claiming that its recruitment process is not racist, it is meritocratic.⁸⁵

Silencing the discussion of racism

This Foucaultian analysis also looks at themes that remain unmentioned in the Bank’s discourse on anti-racism and diversity. First, the results show that the Bank does not speak about racism in its diversity statement. But, secondly, even when racism is in the center of the statements, the bank does not elaborate on any colonial history or structural dimensions as a root cause of racism and racial inequalities. Third, the Bank makes use of institutional practices to conceal racism within its institution by being untransparent and silent on internal racism reports. In the following, these aspects are further elaborated on.

Even until now, the Bank does not discuss the term racism and uses the R word without defining it. The Bank’s *Code of Conduct* defines racism or racial discrimination only regarding discrimination:

“Discrimination” shall refer to any unjustifiable differentiation between individuals or groups within Board Officials or staff of the Organizations on the basis of a **personal characteristic**, such as age, **race**, color, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability, political or other opinion, national or social origin, religion or creed.⁸⁶ (my highlights)

⁸⁴ Ibid.: 88.

⁸⁵ Joe R. Feagin and Kimberley Ducey, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Fourth edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 89.

⁸⁶ World Bank, *Code of Conduct for Board Officials*, Nov. 1, 2008, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/786861541011483695/pdf/Code-of-Conduct-of-the-Board-Officials.pdf>.

Sarah Ahmed did not only study the discourse of diversity but asked what this discourse does and what it means that racism is not discussed in the discourse of diversity.⁸⁷ She observed what happens to an organization that is confronted with institutional racism after it has committed to diversity. Ahmed concludes that

Racism becomes something bad that we can't even speak of, as if to describe x as racist is to damage or even hurt x. The organization becomes the subject of feeling, as the one who must be protected, as the one who is easily bruised or hurt. When racism becomes an institutional injury, it is imagined as an injury to whiteness. (...) *Diversity can be a method of protecting whiteness.*⁸⁸ (original highlights)

Rutazibwa calls it *strategic reluctance* when the category of racism is not used in fear of hurting some people's emotions.⁸⁹ It is this basic assumption of strategic reluctance and hurting Whites' feelings within the World Bank that using the R word is avoided. From a decolonial perspective, it is necessary to point out this reluctance of the R-word to demythologize any hegemonic belief that a diversity approach cannot be racist.

Similar, the bank is silent on colonial history and racist violence that created the need for diversity approaches in the first place. The Bank only refers to historical statements such as the killing of George Floyd and Juneteenth as a historical day. This leaves the impression that racial injustice is an individual phenomenon and thus, neglects institutional, systematic violence.

Moreover, it feeds a knowledge system believing that formally racist practices such as slavery and colonialism have been erased from today's realities.⁹⁰ Although the Bank does not use straightforward phrases such as "that is the way it is" as respondents did in Bonilla-Silva's interviews, the Bank's silencing of racialized inequalities is also a mechanism to naturalize its existence. The usefulness of the naturalization through silencing frame is illustrated in the following statement by Sandie Okoro:

⁸⁷ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 147.

⁸⁹ Olivia U. Rutazibwa, "From the Everyday to IR," *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 2 (2016): 195.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 197.

But by contrast, for many millions of children worldwide, racism and racial discrimination do starkly limit what is possible, while growing up and throughout their lives. Sadly, racism and racial discrimination persist and continue to harm lives and limit opportunity.⁹¹

This statement is not followed by any explanation on why racism persists or how it has evolved. Thus, the readers are left with a static understanding of racism as being sad but natural, static, and permanent.

Moreover, and in contrary to the Bank's main entitlements in their work, the institution silences the voices of people affected by racism through a lack of transparency. Despite earlier NGO reports and the Bank's previous studies on racial discrimination within the institution, as explained in previous sections, the Bank calls a survey conducted under the new anti-racism task force the "first-ever Bank Group staff survey specifically focusing on race".⁹² So far, no incidents of racism have been made public by the Bank.

Silencing functions as a mechanism for the Bank to construct a reality in which serious self-reflection regarding its own history of racism becomes unnecessary. While the *Strategy* document states the need for improvement and reform "such as breaking down institutional silos, reforming the budget process, and improving the use of human resources"⁹³ and the *Code of Ethics* even admits that "we all have biases and flaws"⁹⁴, explicit reflection on racism within the Bank remains not only insufficient, but vague and a very recent phenomena as in the following statement from June 2020: "As an institution, I'm sure that we can do better in tackling injustices, racism and inequality within the World Bank and around the world."⁹⁵

⁹¹ World Bank, "A Key Milestone in the World Bank Group's Anti-Racism Efforts," World Bank Blogs, Nov. 11, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/key-milestone-world-bank-groups-anti-racism-efforts>.

⁹² World Bank, "The World Bank Group: Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination," Nov. 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2021/11/11/the-world-bank-group-addressing-racism-and-racial-discrimination>.

⁹³ World Bank, *A Stronger, Connected, Solutions World Bank Group* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2013), 5.

⁹⁴ World Bank, *Code of Ethics*, 2022, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/147281468337279671/pdf/WBG-Code-of-Ethics.pdf>.

⁹⁵ World Bank, "June 18, 2020: Ending Racism," World Bank Blogs, June 18, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/june-18-2020-ending-racism>.

Individual anti-racism measures

The Bank constructs race as a static concept that is a *personal characteristic*, instead of a sociopolitical attribute imposed on the subject externally through historical processes and interactions. In doing so, the Bank individualizes racism and suggests that, although all individuals have some disadvantageous attributes, society in general is fair and only needs more opportunities for individuals to “make it”.⁹⁶ This might be accurate from a dominant White perspective but leaves behind the lived experiences of centuries of racial structural oppression.

In their newly created Anti-Racism Charter from September 2021, the Bank points out their motivation to fight racism as “fundamental to achieving the World Bank Group’s twin goals of eradicating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.”⁹⁷ The Charter exemplifies what the analysis has found, that racism and racial discrimination are merely added to the previous discourse on inclusion, equality and shared prosperity that had excluded racism entirely.

The analysis made apparent that the World Bank focuses on the measures and results of their current fight against racism rather than on defining racism, showing lived experiences of racism in the Bank, or exploring historical roots. At the same time, the Bank highlights that change and progress need time because changing people’s minds is a slow, long-term process.⁹⁸ The still common belief that race related change must come from the people’s heart and cannot be forced upon society was used during the Jim Crow era to justify the status quo and continues to be uphold in the Bank’s approach.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Jason Rodriguez and Kendralin J. Freeman, “‘Your Focus on Race Is Narrow and Exclusive:’, *Whiteness and Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 9.

⁹⁷ World Bank, “World Bank Group Anti-Racism Charter,” Nov. 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/11/11/world-bank-group-anti-racism-charter>.

⁹⁸ World Bank, “The World Bank Group: Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination,” Nov. 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2021/11/11/the-world-bank-group-addressing-racism-and-racial-discrimination>.

⁹⁹ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2022), 88.

The main results are summarized as follows:

- The launch of an anti-racism task force in 2020 led by Sandie Okoro with recommendations within and outside the Bank
- An Anti-racism Charter
- A Bank staff survey focusing on race
- Appointment of three key staff position focusing on racism
- A glossary of terms for staff and a guide for respectful conversations on race
- Virtual events on racism
- Extended funding and increase in charities for anti-racism projects in communities worldwide and the launching of Minority Business enterprise
- An all-staff event on June 19 to recognize the historic day and to hang up a #endracism banner

The measures are targeted for the individual level that is oriented towards individuals (volunteers, survey, new appointments, glossaries, events), single events (hanging up a banner, virtual events) or are located outside the World Bank. This can be traced back to the Bank's focus on the individual in looking at issues of discrimination and the ignorance of structural racialized obstacles. These individual measures suggest a false unified experience of discrimination among the staff members in the sense of everyone sits in the same boat. It irons out the diverse individual experiences and structural barriers and in doing so justifies individual, symbolic actions over collective, systematic changes. Bonilla-Silva termed this approach a central frame of colorblindness – abstract liberalism.¹⁰⁰ In line with the Bank's economic liberal assumptions that the individual is rational, self-sufficient, and free of choice, the individual is also the center of analyses. Thus, using an abstract liberal discourse helps justifying superficial, minor changes targeted at employers and single events.

Non-interference and voluntarism

Especially in the US where the World Bank is located and socialized, the liberal myth continues to dominate that the market handles discrepancies and thus the government should

¹⁰⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind," *American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 11 (2015): 1364.

only interfere in a limited way. Bonilla-Silva found this line of argumentation in his ethnographic studies also in colorblind ideologies and termed it abstract liberalism. Whites admitted that racial segregation exists but argued at the same time that living in a certain neighborhood is everyone's choice and thus the government should not force any affirmative measures against racialized segregation.

The Bank condemns any racism but does not engage in any structural affirmative changes and follows a non-interference approach. This becomes apparent in how the new anti-racism task force was established:

The Task Force kicked off with **a call for volunteers** from headquarters and country offices (...) The Task Force brought together 54 colleagues from diverse backgrounds and all regions who devoted their time and effort (...) – **all on top of their work and family responsibilities** and amid a global pandemic. I believe this level of engagement from our staff reflects how **personally** – and pervasively – racism and racial discrimination have touched our individual lives.¹⁰¹ (my highlights)

The Bank thus relies on voluntary staff to examine racism in its institution and praises the personal engagement. Here, the Bank's values and assumptions on how racism should be tackled become apparent: voluntarily and personally instead through enforced mechanisms on an institutional level.

Volunteer work remains elitist because it requires the luxury of free time without any remuneration.¹⁰² As BIPoC are generally less likely to be hired in high positions within the World Bank and thus suffer from lower incomes than Whites, sourcing out the fight for racial justice to volunteer instead of paid work creates extra burden of already marginalized and disadvantaged employees. Whites, on the other hand, can benefit from volunteering because they can boast of their racial awareness and become diversity champions.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ World Bank, "A Key Milestone in the World Bank Group's Anti-Racism Efforts," World Bank Blogs, Nov. 11, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/key-milestone-world-bank-groups-anti-racism-efforts>.

¹⁰² Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 135.

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 131.

Sarah Ahmed found in her interviews with university staff on commitments to diversity that committed individuals are decisive for the persistence and realization of diversity measures. Paradoxically, she also notes that “the commitment of individuals can also be a means for organizations not to distribute commitment.”¹⁰⁴ An abstract individualistic approach helps the Bank to obscure their reluctance to invest material resources into the anti-racism task force. Another example of how the Bank engages in limited intervention on tackling racism is that the anti-racism Charter “is an aspirational, non-binding document”¹⁰⁵ and no independent enforcement mechanism, such as an independent court, exists to address internal racial discrimination.

Conclusion and Implications

Whiteness is a socio-politically constructed racial identity that requires, like any other race, mechanisms for reproduction. But unlike others, Whiteness dominates other racial identities particularly by representing itself as the norm. By following Frankenberg, Moore, and Bonilla-Silva this thesis discussed why Whiteness matters, how it creates institutional spaces privileging Whites and how it rhetorically serves to justify racial inequalities by claiming colorblindness.

Despite the establishment of an anti-race task force, the World Bank remains a White institutional space. By engaging in a postcolonial genealogy and a Foucaultian thematic analysis, I identified organizational and governing structures as well as six discursive mechanisms that reproduce the Bank’s Whiteness. The most shocking mechanism is the Bank’s silencing of reports on racism accompanied by a missing independent court. A surprising finding is how the Bank manages to use a seemingly non-racist language by referring to diversity and gender equality to avoid a discussion on racism. Moreover, the Bank justifies and

¹⁰⁴ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 135.

¹⁰⁵ World Bank, “A Key Milestone in the World Bank Group’s Anti-Racism Efforts,” World Bank Blogs, Nov. 11, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/key-milestone-world-bank-groups-anti-racism-efforts>.

tackles racial inequalities within its own organization with measures based on liberal values such as meritocracy, individualism, and volunteer actions. Thus, anti-race efforts remain volunteer, unpaid positions and yet seem reasonable and laudable.

As an international finance institution and the largest Bank in the world, the World Bank represents today's liberal world order. This liberal order, however, has undergone a legitimacy crisis which must be openly discussed. Whiteness and institutional racism play a crucial role in the liberal order because they explain global inequalities, grow grievances, and play into the hands of authoritarian regimes. China has become the alternative for African state borrowers because it presents itself as a truly apolitical, non-colonial actor, delegitimizing others. Thus, international relations scholars need to seriously incorporate race as a concept that fundamentally organizes our international political system.

For further insights into international organizations and experiences of racial discrimination, future research could complement these findings with qualitative interviews with BIPOC employees. Finally, there are practical implications resulting from this thesis. The World Bank's silencing of opposing voices and its refusal to publish internal studies on racism should no longer be ignored by the international community. The genealogy of the World Bank shows that there is an urgent need for external control mechanisms for international organizations. So far, victims of racial discrimination have not achieved juridical justice because of the lack of an independent court and the international organizations' legal exemptions from national laws. For a more peaceful world and a unified international system capable of combating global issues, the mechanisms of White institutional spaces and White privileges need to be exposed and dismantled.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Executive Directors Voting Share, FY 2021.

Country/represented country	Executive Director	Vote in % of total vote	
		IBRD	IDA
	Appointed		
United States	United States	15,9	9,96
Japan	Japan	7,47	8,36
China	China	5,07	2,25
Germany	Germany	4,26	5,35
France	France	3,94	3,81
United Kingdom	United Kingdom	3,94	6,76
	Elected		
Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey	Turkey	4.93	4.76
Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine	Netherlands	4.16	4.80
Australia, Cambodia, Kiribati, Korea, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Naurua, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New, Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	Australia	4.05	3.91
Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Spain	Spain	3.89	2.37
Antigua and Barbudaa, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaicaa, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines	Canada	3.86	4.40
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka	India	3.67	3.99
Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Panama, Philippines, Surinamea, Trinidad and Tobago	Brazil	3.58	3.35
Albania, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, San Marinoa, Timor-Leste	Italy	3.32	3.09
Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden	Iceland	3.14	5.49
Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistana, Uzbekistan	Poland	3.08	4.60
Afghanistan, Algeria, Ghana, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Tunisia	Algeria	2.99	2.53
Brunei Darussalama, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam	Malaysia	2.90	2.9
Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic	Russian Federation	2.72	0.36

Country/represented country	Executive Director	Vote in % of total vote	
		IBRD	IDA
Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Maldives, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Yemen	Kuwait	2.7	2.02
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	2.59	3.34
Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	Peru	2.23	2.34
Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo	Benin	2,04	4,15
Botswana, Burundi, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Botswana	1,88	3,92
Angola, Nigeria, South Africa	Angola	1,7	1,19

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