Introduction: Coloniality, Educational Leadership, and White Supremacy: The Other Global Pandemic

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Abstract
In lieu of writing a separate introduction to this special issue, the three guest editors invited the EAQ Editor-In-Chief to join them as a coauthor in their introduction. López, agreed but took a few liberties with the draft that was provided to him by the guest editors. The result is an imagined “conversation” that did not actually take place but is highly probable given the deep admiration and mutual respect the four individuals have for each other both as individuals and as scholars. This introductory conversation situates the theme of the special issue within the larger scope of educational leadership while simultaneously troubling the role of school leaders as agents of Coloniality.

Keywords
coloniality, epistemicide, schooling

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GERARDO R. LÓPEZ: As you all know, EAQ doesn’t do too many special issues. The last special issue we published was back in 2017 soon after the Every Student Succeeds Act was finalized (Fernández et al., 2017). In fact, yours is the first special issue under my editorship. When you approached me with the idea of focusing your special issue on the topic of Coloniality, I was intrigued. I fully recognized that the conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and social justice that we were having in our field were simply inadequate and insufficient. It was as though something deeper was missing in how we collectively approached these topics.

Although we have CRT and other critical organizing frameworks, I also felt that the field needed new lenses to engage some of the deeper logics functioning at a more epistemic level. For example, there has been little discussion of hegemony, domination, subjugation, and settler logics in our current theories—even within our more contemporary theories that focus on race and racism. I’m curious to know, how and why you arrived at this particular theme for this special issue.

GUEST EDITORS: It is often lost on educational administration scholars the extent to which the field of leadership and administration was, and continues to be, the foremost enforcer and reproducer of hierarchical schooling structures and Coloniality. Indeed, one of the primary arguments for Coloniality is that historical colonial logics, practices, discourses, and dispositions have become systemic and institutionalized, and are inherent to institutions and organizations such as schools (Lopez, 2020). Even when scholarship about power and difference is published, it is often done to simply “manage inequity” and not to excavate the Coloniality embedded within schools or cause drastic changes to how schools are managed and/or have us rethink the purpose(s) of schools/schooling altogether (Folds, 1987).

GERARDO: Are you suggesting that the very frameworks we rely on in our field tend to emerge from and/or reproduce logics of control? Or are you suggesting something deeper might be going on?

GUEST EDITORS: Coloniality, as a lens, aims to unearth those hidden logics that function as tools of domestication and colonization. These may be frameworks, but they also extend to theories, practices, ideas, and the very scholarship that is produced. For example, we know that the canons of the field of educational administration, including some of its foremost architects, were active in forwarding a White supremacist, settler-colonial
agenda. For example, the various descriptors of modern schools—e.g., the factory model, the business management model, the corporate school model (Schlechty & Joslin, 1984)—along with the formal study of educational administration, are widely attributed to the beliefs and works of Ellwood Cubberley (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Button, 1966; Erickson, 1965; Guthrie et al., 1970; Rinehart & Logan, 1999; Tyack, 1974). As a former professor and head of Stanford University’s College of Education from 1898–1933, Cubberley is considered the architect of the contemporary scientific, management, and factory school models (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Cubberley’s work is canonical and foundational to the field of educational leadership and administration, as well as many of its contemporary norms and practices. In his book, The History of Education, first published in 1920, Cubberley illuminates his ideological persuasion by highlighting where education came from and where it needed to go (Cubberley, 2006). Cubberley’s educational efforts were part of a self-described ideology of “advancing world civilization” that he described as the foundation of modernity.

Cubberley’s educational goals and efforts shed insight into how he believed students ought to be molded for the modern world. He asserts that Western nations, as fundamental to the project of modernity, are “to help backward peoples to advance, and to assist them in lifting themselves to a higher plane of world civilization” (p. 363, emphasis added). In effect, The History of Education is the ontological equivalent of “The White Man’s Burden” (Kipling, 1899), shaped by a conglomeration of Greek and Roman philosophy and Westernized versions of Christianity. To be certain, Cubberley’s impact on the field—both overt and subtle—arrived when the field of educational administration was still in its infancy, and it became firmly rooted as one of the seminal texts in the field throughout the years. This is just one example of many.

GERARDO: So you’re suggesting that the foundational texts in our field are tainted with the logics of Colonialism and white supremacy. Since our field was built on these foundational text, then, by extension, the very structure of our entire knowledge base functions to reproduce these particular logics. Most teachers, administrators, and researchers would like to see ourselves as agents of change. Yet, despite our best efforts and good intentions, we may actually be contributing and enforcing the Colonialist project. For those of us in this field, that’s a pretty hard pill to swallow! What do you hope to achieve through this special issue?
GUEST EDITORS: As guest editors, we feel that this special issue highlights White supremacy’s hierarchical and hegemonic systems of knowledge and culture inherent to educational systems. We also believe that Coloniality illuminates the “darker side” of modernity, which is central to educational leadership practices, norms, and ideas. Mignolo (2011) conceived of Coloniality as a complex structure of management and control of knowledge that subsequently redefined modernity. To drive home this point, we draw upon Wright’s (this issue) descriptions of modernity and epistemicide. As Wright suggests, modernity is “the manifestation of Westernized capitalism’s outgrowth from the interconnectedness between settler colonialism and enslavement.” Borrowing from de Sousa Santos (2014), Wright then defines epistemicide as “the death of knowledge through unequal exchanges and imposition of culture, which causes the destruction and loss of social practices and norms.” What this means, is that White supremacy and settler colonialism are the foundational material of educational leadership. Historically and into the present, the structures built upon those foundations have actively worked to forward deculturalization—namely, the annihilation and erasure of Indigenous and various other historical knowledge systems and ways of being (Spring, 2016).

GRL: For years, numerous scholars have argued that schools are toxic spaces for children of color (Duncan-Andrade, 2022), and reproductive sites of Settler Colonialism at best (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). In fact, in the aggregate, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that schools have historically not “worked” for children of color. In other words, the same schools that historically segregated and domesticated Black, Indigenous and Brown kids are the same ones that now blame these same kids and families for low performance and test scores. It would seem—at least on the surface—that our modern-day educational practices continue to serve the interest of Coloniality, which goes to your previous point.

GUEST EDITORS: The canons of our field are shaped by a powerful and constrictive Eurocentric ideology—constitutive of Coloniality—as a web of new technologies helping to reimagine and reform White supremacy with a conspicuous admixture of subtle violence.

GRL: Subtle violence? Can you elaborate on that?

GUEST EDITORS: These new technologies and reforms work to control and oppress minoritized communities. As Goldberg (2009) asserts:
Policing, schooling, and emphasis on legality as modes of social order came to displace raw physical violence as principal models of civil and state control by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Civil society thus becomes the codification, the socialization, of violence rendered invisible…. The architecture of the state embedded violence rendered standardized relations and modes of violence regular even as they become regulated, structurally embedded, in a word, civil. (p. 141)

In other words, Coloniality asserts that the violence of White supremacy is embedded in the apparatuses and functions of institutions and systems (such as schools), including their organization and administration. In this way, schools function to cement hegemonic knowledge, which many scholars describe as “epistemicide”—that is, the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures, and customs, and as a form of violence against these communities (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2019; Valenzuela, 1999).

GRL: It seems that when you talk about epistemicide, you are referring to more than just those brutal acts of cultural violence and genocide against communities of color; the same logics that were at play when Richard Henry Pratt was zealously eager to “kill the Indian but save the man” (Brayboy, 2005).

GUEST EDITORS: It certainly is deeper. It’s also much more insidious than those overt/explicit acts of racism at play. It extends beyond the structures and apparatuses that serve the interest of white supremacy. In other words, it’s both overt and systemically baked into the institutional and cultural fabric of society. Horsford and her colleagues (Horsford et al., 2021) discuss the latter as a type of symbolic violence: those conspicuous subtleties and often unconscious methods used by Eurocentric groups throughout society to impose their cultural capital as the norm. This arbitrary capital “(e.g., white skin, a particular way of pronouncing words, a manner of dress, etc.)…has no inherent superiority…[yet has been imposed] as a dominant social norm through social institutions, particularly through formal schooling…” (Horsford et al., 2018, p. 174).

GRL: I recognize the various ways in which white cultural forms are normalized in school apparatuses and reified through the curriculum, teaching norms, and organizational practices. In this regard, the “everyday” practices of schooling—what teachers and school leaders do on a day-to-day basis, ultimately serve the interest of Coloniality and white supremacy. I can see how that effectively functions as a form of violence. Can you help me connect this understanding of “violence” to the notion of “epistemicide”—particularly within our field?
GUEST EDITORS: James Anderson’s (1988) critical examination of Southern Black education from 1860 to 1935 exposes epistemicide in educational administration and leadership. Anderson’s recontextualization of Black schooling up until 1935 highlights the sociopolitical and economic commitment by Black people immediately after enslavement, as well as their attempts to create an educational system in service of their imaginings of freedom. However, their hopes and efforts were derailed by compulsory industrial schooling systems that helped shape the contemporary political and economic subordination of present-day Black communities.

Siddle-Walker’s (1996) case study of the unwarranted closing of the Caswell County Training School (CCTS) in rural North Carolina (1934–1969) centers epistemicide and the erasure of Black leadership. CCTS was an exemplary school with an excellent Black school administrator. CCTS offered a nurturing environment for Black children, coupled with high academic achievement despite the violence, duress, and injustice of Jim Crow (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Thus, it was not only that 90% of Black principals were removed from their jobs after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954, but the historical ways of leading schools that Black leaders embodied and exuded were also directly threatened. Their focus on Black liberation was forcibly removed and replaced with an overemphasis on enrollment and test score data.

Similarly, from a policy perspective, Watkins’s (2001) research on The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865–1954 offers a succinct and critical historical and ideological analysis of the way in which White supremacist ideology informed Black educational policy. Watkins’s analysis, from the period of Reconstruction to the beginnings of the Brown v. Board of Education era, investigates “the ideological construction of colonial Black education by examining the view, politics, and practices of the White architects that funded, created, and refined it” (pp. 1–2). Watkins concluded that the architects of Black education were ideologically, politically, and economically motivated. These architects were influenced by hegemonic social relations, labor market economics, and racial divisions undergirded by 250 years of unpaid slave wages and another 100 years of sharecropping. Black education became forced to align with the burgeoning industrial capitalism; as such, power sharing and the goals of Black education pointed out by Anderson (1988) were quickly disfigured.

All that is historical fact, but it also continues in the present day. These epistemicidal forces remain salient in contemporary leadership and policy discourse as evidenced by ongoing attacks leveraged against critical race theory and ethnic studies courses, for example. It is also present in the resurgent push
to center Christianity, prayer, and the Bible in the public schools, as witnessed in the recent supreme court ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* (2022).

**GRL:** We are, indeed, living in interesting times—where control over the curriculum, control of school boards, control over who gets hired and fired, and ultimately the control of schools are all explicit objectives within certain segments of the political Right. How did you capture these complexities in this special issue?

**GUEST EDITORS:** In the call for proposals for this special issue, we invited submissions that sought to explore Coloniality in relation to the field of educational leadership, and more specifically, “the modern colonization of knowledge and knowledge systems, and its expressions in educational leadership” (Wright et al., 2019, p. 697). Since the original call, we have witnessed the persistence of anti-Black violence, the emergence of the COVID19 pandemic, anti-Asian violence, a White supremacist insurrection at the U.S. capitol, and crippling examples of state-sanctioned murder—and if not state-sanctioned, perhaps state indifference—including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Daunte Wright. In one regard, this special issue is timely as it is set against the backdrop of pronounced anti-Black/racial inequities and injustice that have been laid bare in our times. Meanwhile, it is also timeless, as racism/anti-Blackness and White supremacy are preserved cornerstones of Western civilization and all of its institutions, particularly schools. Before our eyes, we are witnessing a violent coloniality/modernity dichotomy unfold with far fewer subtleties as millions of minoritized youth in compulsory schooling—many who were working and studying remotely—are enduring the subtle “spirit murdering” (Love, 2016; Williams, 1987) of White supremacist education.

This special issue accentuates inverse and oppositional histories and experiences to dominant Eurocentric norms—Coloniality—operationalized as school administration and leadership. More specifically, this special issue offers critical lenses to understand the relationship between schooling and the work of educational leaders within the dichotomy of Coloniality/modernity. Underlying this work is the critical importance of relationships, which have been part of the educational leadership discourse since its inception.

**GRL:** Can you elaborate on what you mean by “relationships”?

**GUEST EDITORS:** A significant part of understanding how coloniality is reproduced and remains invisible in schools, is by unearthing the power relationships within schools. School leadership and administrations
models are based on hierarchies. The articles in this special issue indeed speak to educational leadership relationships with coloniality through the following: (a) an historical analysis of knowledge production and epistemicide (Wright); (b) policy and reform (Clay); (c) gender constructs and parent/family/community engagement (Abdi); and (d) Western knowledge production and the epistemic possibilities of centering Indigenous knowledge systems for the purpose of realizing a multicentric future (Dei & Adhami).

Despite the different contexts in which these articles unfolded, the relationship to coloniality, epistemicide, White supremacy, and a reliance on Black radical tradition(s)\(^1\) are consistently and identifiably related across all articles. This special issue underscores the relational focus of the four papers, especially the different decolonial relationships and conversations occurring in educational leadership across varied educational, geopolitical, and ethnic contexts. The papers deal with Blackamerican, East African (Somalia) decolonial perspectives embedded in the context of the United Kingdom (England), West African (Ghanaian), and South Asian decolonial perspectives embedded in the context of Turtle Island (Canada).

Our engagement with relationality is to identify unique local contexts that embody similar and different practices of decoloniality, toward entering conversation and building understanding of the scope of coloniality. This engagement with relationality is not intended to forge any global solutions or abstract universals as many scholars have warned against (Grosfoguel, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In fact, Ramon Grosfoguel (personal communication, July 8, 2021) cautioned against relationality discourses without specifying the relationship/relationalities being discussed, in order to avoid “Eurocentric abstract universals” void of any “concrete content.”

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) remind us that there is no singular path toward decoloniality, but rather, they offer the concept of relationality/vincularidad as it “unsettles the singular authoritativeness and universal character typically assumed and portrayed in academic thought” (pp. 1–2). Furthermore, Tucker (2018) adds that relational framing “emphasizes connection and interrelatedness amongst individuals, communities, histories, and knowledges, as well as the worlds—both past and present—in which these are rooted” (p. 227). Feldman (2016) notes that relationality is a critical concept to describe and analyze the connections and linkages that surfaced throughout the global South that had been obscured by modernity/coloniality discourses and systems. Furthermore, Feldman argues that relationality disrupts Eurocentric constructs of race, gender, and sexuality and allows people to think differently, as well as make connections and
relationships across diverse demographics and contexts. In this special
issue, relationships with coloniality, White supremacy, and epistemicide
vis-à-vis educational administration/leadership emerged in four very dis-
tinct contexts.

GRL: In effect, there’s a thread that weaves throughout the Colonial
narrative that is both situated, and global. And yet, the work of decol-
oniality must stand outside those very frameworks that gave it life, so to
speak. That makes absolute sense, because one cannot “undo” some-
thing with the same oppressive logics that created it—or there will be
remnants of coloniality within decoloniality. To quote Audre Lorde
(1984): “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”
Can you tell the readers about the manuscripts you pulled together
for this special issue?

GUEST EDITORS: Setting the tone for this special issue, James Wright pre-
sents a critical analysis of White supremacy and epistemicide as derivatives
of Coloniality—integral to the Eurocentric knowledge informing educa-
tional leadership research, preparation, practice, and reform. In addition to
offering a historical critique of the foundations of the field, and unanswered
calls to address the field’s narrow and constrained White supremacist con-
ceptions of leadership and administration in its most prominent journal,
Wright presents his Coloniality Racial Capitalism and Modernity
(CRCM) framework. By operationalizing the CRCM framework, he articu-
lates the centrality of BIPOC epistemologies in challenging both historical
and modern expressions of White supremacy and epistemicide embedded in
educational reform and the field. Blending critical concepts rooted in under-
standings of coloniality and racial capitalism as situated in Robinson’s
(1983) Black Radical Tradition, Wright’s article models the criticality of
engaging BIPOC epistemologies for the purpose of decolonizing educa-
tional leadership.

Complementing Wright’s critique of educational leadership through con-
ceptualizations of coloniality—White supremacy and epistemicide—Kevin
Clay explicitly takes up the relationship between coloniality and educational
policy. Clay presents a critical policy analysis and case study of two school
districts in New Jersey engaged in implementing Black history education
under the guidance of the state’s Amistad legislation. Clay examines the
extent to which the legislation supported the implementation of a culturally
relevant and responsive Black history education and how district adminis-
trators internalized the legislation. Though complex, his findings speak to
how ambiguous policy discourses can carve out opportunities for districts
and leaders to create symbolic systems of compliance, operationalizing
how epistemicide can function in the policy process. However, Clay finds possibility in the agency and actions of district leaders committed to the Amistad legislation for their students’ benefit and offers critical insights on how their efforts and approaches can be structured by community knowledge and engagement.

In a related discussion, Nimo Abdi offers insights into Somali mothers who are navigating parental involvement in an urban school in London, UK, shaped by a culture of coloniality of gender discourses. Taking a critical phenomenological approach, Abdi explores the experiences of Somali mothers’ resistance to deficit discourses of race and gender, deeply rooted in the culture and structure of the school. Drawing on conceptualizations of matripotency (Oyewumí, 2016) and the supremacy of motherhood, she forwards the Indigenous Somali concept of “Hooyonimo” to challenge colonial frameworks of race and gender-related to school engagement with minoritized immigrant communities. In Somali epistemology, Hooyonimo is transcendental—unlike Western notions of motherhood, it is not bound to a relationship with patriarchy. Thus, Hooyonimo “illustrates the connection between Somali mothers’ conception of their roles as mothers and their leadership roles in their children’s education in a world not dominated by coloniality” (Abdi, this issue). In addition, Dr. Abdi operationalizes the value of engaging Indigenous Somali and African notions of matripotent leadership to inform leadership theory, policy, practice, and in decolonizing the field.

Rounding out this special issue, George Dei and Asna Adhami present a compelling dialogue and path forward, centering the relationship between Indigenous knowledge systems and the coloniality of knowledge. Dei and Adhami call upon the “racialized scholars” (all of us) to challenge the particularity and supremacy of Western knowledge, while seizing opportunities to center Indigenous knowledge and reimagine cartographies of knowledge so as to understand the world through a more complete and multicentric lens. Dei and Adhami are explicitly concerned with countering Western knowledge production, and they offer critical considerations and implications for educational research, as well as African educational futurity.

GRL: As the editor, I’m really happy with what you’ve put together for our readers. I think it provides a solid introduction to Coloniality while providing a cogent understanding of why we need such powerful theoretical frameworks to understand the reproductive and colonialis function of the educational leader.
GUEST EDITORS: This special issue is representative of the moment in which we find ourselves as humans: seeking for our humanity in the face of an ever-invisibilizing Coloniality. We agree that the articles bring attention to one of the most effective tools of the Colonial state—the school leader. But how are we to understand this issue in light of, for example, modern school principals who, in one voice, call for “social justice” or “anti-racist” school leadership, while on the other hand, enjoy all of the fruits of Empire and Colonial states? Can a school leader truly be anti-racist, socially just, or transformative, and at the same time uphold Coloniality?

We believe that Coloniality and the technical-rational leadership of school leaders work against the humanity of children in schools. It debases children not only because of top-down, narrowly-focused (neoliberal) leadership practices, but also because school often fail to recognize their humanity—i.e., their communities and historiographies, living circumstances, experiential knowledges, goals for education, well-being, spiritual systems, economic sustenance, ability exist beyond ways that Western empire has defined them, and other ways that children communities define themselves.

We must remember that in an era in which schools were used to “kill the Indian and save the Man,” educational leaders were attempting to cleanse and rob children of what made them human in a quest to make good obedient citizens. In the process, they dehumanized themselves as well. This issue offers us the opportunity to disentangle the colonial impulses to conquer, subdue, surveille, order, and center white western capitalism and materiality at the expense of all else. The articles in this special issue call upon us to radically reimagine the purpose of school leadership—both the professional practice and the scholarship that it produces in its name.

It calls for us to focus not only on “equity” but also on experiential and ancestral knowledge of minoritized/resilient students and their communities. It calls for us to center this community knowledge into the policymaking and leadership of schools. It calls for us to search for ways to redraw the lines of power and hierarchy in schools—away from hierarchical, State sponsored practices. Finally, it calls for a radical re-shifting away from Western, White, and capitalist epistemologies that currently guide educational leadership scholarship and practice. If readers can take away these lessons from this special issue, then we feel we’ve done our job as scholars and educators.

GRL: You certainly have! You’ve pushed our thinking and have inspired myself and my editorial team to take an “internal” look at our practices and how EAQ may also be contributing to Colonialist logics. Our
manuscript is added as a bookend to this special issue, and hope it inspires others to keep pushing the field to do better.

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Note
1. By “tradition(s),” we are referencing and acknowledging the multiple Black and African radical traditions that stand in opposition to historical and modern manifestations of colonial relations (modernity/coloniality), while also informing alternative possibilities and multi-centric futures.

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**Muhammad Khalifa** is a professor of Educational Administration and the Executive Director of Urban and Rural Initiatives at The Ohio State University. His research examines how urban school leaders enact culturally responsive leadership and anti-oppressive schooling practices. He established the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute (crsli.org). He was previously a teacher and administrator in Detroit Public Schools and he has also contributed to community-informed education projects in Africa, Latin America, and Asia in various capacities.

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