SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# The International and the Local Worker: Understanding Multi-layered Processes of Racialisation in International Development Organisations

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## Abstract

This article seeks to examine how institutional hierarchies relate to processes of racialisation in development organisations that are multiracial. Complementing and building on existing literature focussed on race and development it shows how processes of racialisation help to produce and legitimate distinctions between local and international development professionals. It argues these divides cannot always be neatly mapped onto phenotype but are related to processes of racialisation tied to knowledge and class and this, in turn, helps to produce inequalities—power imbalances, pay differences and differential access to organisational benefits—between development workers. Therefore, while forms of racism and their material impacts shape the experiences of international staff of colour, there is another layer of racialisation at play that cannot be explained through existing racial categories but that draws on colonial ideas of epistemic superiority to create specific forms of racialisation within development organisations.

**Keywords** Race · International development · NGOs · Racialisation · Capitalism

## Résumé

Cet article cherche à examiner comment les hiérarchies institutionnelles se rapportent aux processus de racialisation dans les organisations de développement multiraciales. En complétant et en s'appuyant sur la littérature existante axée sur la race et le développement, il montre comment les processus de racialisation contribuent à produire et à légitimer les distinctions entre les professionnels du développement local et international. Il soutient que ces divisions ne peuvent pas toujours être nettement mappées sur le phénotype mais sont liées à des processus de racialisation liés à la connaissance et à la classe et cela, à son tour, contribue à produire des inégalités—déséquilibres de pouvoir, différences de salaire et accès différentiel aux avantages organisation-

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nels—entre les travailleurs du développement. Par conséquent, alors que les formes de racisme et leurs impacts matériels façonnent les expériences du personnel international de couleur, il existe une autre couche de racialisation en jeu qui ne peut pas être expliquée par les catégories raciales existantes mais qui s'appuie sur des idées coloniales de supériorité épistémique pour créer des formes spécifiques de racialisation au sein des organisations de développement.

## Resumen

Este artículo busca examinar cómo las jerarquías institucionales se relacionan con los procesos de racialización en las organizaciones de desarrollo multirraciales. Complementando y construyendo sobre la literatura existente enfocada en raza y desarrollo, muestra cómo los procesos de racialización ayudan a producir y legitimar distinciones entre profesionales de desarrollo local e internacional. Argumenta que estas divisiones no siempre pueden ser mapeadas de manera ordenada sobre el fenotipo, sino que están relacionadas con procesos de racialización vinculados al conocimiento y la clase, y esto, a su vez, ayuda a producir desigualdades—desequilibrios de poder, diferencias salariales y acceso diferencial a beneficios organizacionales—entre los trabajadores de desarrollo. Por lo tanto, mientras que las formas de racismo y sus impactos materiales dan forma a las experiencias del personal internacional de color, hay otra capa de racialización en juego que no puede ser explicada a través de las categorías raciales existentes, pero que se basa en ideas coloniales de superioridad epistémica para crear formas específicas de racialización dentro de las organizaciones de desarrollo.

## Introduction

In May 2021, Degan Ali, Executive Director of Adeso—an African aid and development organisation—gave evidence to the UK Parliament's International Development Committee. "My worry is that we end up doing a lot of diversity exercises and putting black and brown people in leadership roles, but the institutions and how they function are not changing", she explained as part of an investigation into racism in the aid sector (International Development Committee 2021, q86; see also Busby 2021; Riley 2020). Ali's concern is a pertinent one because while these organisations may be increasingly racially diverse (Kothari 2006a, p. 16), racialised hierarchies of power and accumulation continue to persist within development institutions, as well as within development practice.

This article focuses on the former by examining the international/local divide within development organisations. Drawing on a rich scholarship that analyses race (Du Bois 1952; Hall 1980, 1986, 1988, 2000), it seeks to make sense of epistemic and material divisions within development organisations and how these relate to racialisation, a term that refers to the processes through which race is injected into social relations and turned into a determining, meaning-laden form of categorisation (Murji and Solomos 2005; Garner 2016). Namely, this article

asks how do institutional hierarchies relate to processes of racialisation in development organisations that are multiracial and what, if anything, can this tell us about inequalities within these spaces?

I argue that notions of racialised superiority are intertwined with forms of epistemic authority that play a central role in how development professionals are categorised, how they see one another and how (they believe) they are seen or treated. Crucially, processes of racialisation and forms of institutional categorisation also play a role in determining and legitimising material inequalities between staff, in particular salary differences. In making these arguments, this article contributes to the small amount of existing scholarship on race in development (Wilson, 2012; Shilliam 2014; Pailey 2019) and in particular that which considers race within development organisations (White 2002; Goudge 2003; Kothari 2006a, b; Heron 2007; Loftsdóttir 2014; Benton 2016; Rivas 2018; Bian 2022). While much of this work examines how power inequalities map on to existing racial categories, I utilise and build on such scholarship by focussing on the international/local worker divide to provide a fine-grained and differentiated analysis of how racialisation works to structure power relations within development organisations. This enables us to make sense of the more obvious *and* more subtle forms of hierarchisation and inequality within these institutional settings.[1]

I proceed by organising this article in three parts. In the first section, I establish how this article builds on existing work on race in development and on the international/local divide. The second section lays out the theoretical tools used for this article; work that probes the way processes of racialisation and epistemic superiority are intertwined, drawing on colonial histories to do so. The third section focuses on my empirical analysis; I draw on 21 interviews with development professionals who have worked in India[2] and on data collected from 69 Secret Aid Worker columns

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[1] The internal realms of such institutions are not necessarily thought of as one of the central sites of inequality at least in part because the stated goal of 'development' (as expressed in international development principles) is poverty alleviation. However, in line with many others, I recognise that much mainstream development itself can be understood as producing inequalities, both through development interventions (see Escobar 1997 and Sanyal 2007 for different arguments about how development relates capitalism) and within development organisations (Crewe and Fernando 2006; Carr et al. 2010). Though I am focussed on international development, the purpose of this is not to advocate for a programme of reform or change. I do not seek to argue for reductions in inequality within development organisations while ignoring the inequalities beyond their walls or compounds. Instead I examine development organisations to consider the shifting nature of processes of racialisation and how this relates to material inequalities.

[2] I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with international development workers, both people born in Europe and in India. This included a range of people, of different genders, ages and 'races'. The nationalities of people interviewed span from those born in Britain, other European countries and India. All of those interviewed, though, worked on or in India at some point in their careers, even if only briefly, and the vast majority have done work on or in India between 1997 and 2017. Two participants fall outside of this timeframe, having worked in and lived in India prior to 1997 but continuing their work in development beyond this date with some ongoing engagement in India. All but one were classed as international.

Given the transient nature of development work, it was not necessarily desirable to adhere to criteria that would have, for instance, only engaged with people born in Britain. In addition, I interviewed a range of individuals—including those of different 'races'—because racial ideas of development can be co-produced and replicated as well as challenged by people of colour (Ahmed 2007). For instance, people of Indian origin and people of colour more generally might notice different forms of racialisation that white people do not; experience of an institutionally racist society may lead to different reflections.

from *The Guardian* newspaper.[3] This is composed of three constituent parts that explore how the category of international is related to epistemic superiority. The fourth and final section will examine these findings, exploring how seemingly race-neutral forms of institutional categorisation, and attendant material inequalities—which are connected to hierarchies of knowledge—are produced and sustained by processes of racialisation.

## Power and Hierarchy in International Development: Race and the International/Local Divide

There is a diverse body of scholarship that analyses how power and hierarchy operate in development organisations and which adopt different starting points to one another. One strand of this work focuses primarily on the racialisation at the centre of development processes (White 2002; Goudge 2003; Kothari 2006a, b; Heron 2007; Shilliam 2014; Loftsdóttir 2014; Benton 2016; Rivas 2018; Pailey 2019; Bian 2022; Cook-Lundgren 2023). Looking at interrelations between individuals involved in development, scholars have shown how "technical expertise", which is taken to be universal, is privileged, whereas local forms of knowledge are treated as inferior

Footnote 2 (continued)

However, it should also be noted this study itself is limited in several ways, from geographic focus to the racial categorisation of those who were interviewed.

In this paper, the term 'development professional' refers to people who work in a range of different organisations: INGOs, private development firms and DfID, and people—including academics—who worked as freelance consultants on projects. I did not limit my study to one specific group because it is possible to say there is an overlap between these different organizational forms, particularly given that government subcontracting arrangements (European Commission 2001, p. 14). As Terje Tvedt showed, development organisations have become increasingly similar, there has been "an integration process between states and organizations all over the world" and organizations "more or less share the same rhetoric and have become accountable to donor states or international institutions" (1998, p. 213).

I focus on India given the unique position it occupies in British debates about development. Having previously been the single biggest recipient of British aid between 2003 and 2008 and a place with increasing amounts of foreign direct investment.

[3] I collected the data online, beginning with Tuesday 15th September 2015, when the first column was written, until 13th November 2017, when the last column was published within the window of my data collection. In total, 72 articles were examined. Not all of these looked at or explicitly referenced India. However, each was examined and sections deemed to contain racialised language, descriptions or ideas and any parts with significant references to race were collated. Once all these data were collected, they were then codified into relevant categories; this codifying process was done twice to ensure the relevant categories had been created. This analysis was conducted prior to interviews and gave some indication as to some of the questions that I might ask, including those that would probe findings from the columns. Although columns are self-selecting, in that individuals must submit them, and thus limited in this way, their anonymity nevertheless allows insight into perceived general forms of power in the development sector and it is telling that some of these perceptions tally with and give further specificity to findings in existing literature, such as ongoing salary differentials. Due to the difficulties and ethical concerns related to in interviewing local development workers, the Secret Aid Worker column allowed for me to consider directly the perspective of local staff; the form of anonymity provided by the newspaper arguably made it easier for such individuals to share their experiences.

(Kothari 2006c; also see Koch 2020).[4] These distinctions can help to produce racialised divides within development organisations, where people who are phenotypically white are assumed to possess this technical expertise and are privileged above those who are not (White 2002; Goudge 2003; Kothari 2006a, b; Heron 2007; Loftsdóttir 2014; Rivas 2018; Cook-Lundgren 2023). Indeed, as Kothari argues, drawing on her own experiences, local counterparts were "visibly disappointed when they realized that their expatriate consultant was not white" (2006a, pp. 15–16). This chimes with other works that examine the way people who are racialised as white are afforded legitimacy in development spaces by virtue of their skin colour (White 2002; Goudge 2003; Loftsdóttir 2014; Heron 2007).

Another portion of analysis that focusses on power and hierarchy in development is also concerned with "technical knowledge" but it does not foreground race and instead looks at one of the most explicit manifestations of power asymmetries in these spaces: the division between some workers as international and others as local. Here "technical expertise" is explore in significant deal; scholars show how this relies on the idea that "development problems can be reduced to technical i.e. 'solvable', problems" (Parpart 1995, p. 225) where the world is presented as knowable "in positivist, empiricist terms" and quantifiable data are used as evidence of knowledge and authority (Stirrat 2000, pp. 37; 36). In the dominant conceptualisation, development and the "technical expertise" required to achieve it often means underdeveloped countries need to follow a specific model of economic growth, usually a specific form of capitalism and it is international workers who are seen to possess the knowledge to do this (Parpart 1995; Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1992; Crush 1995; Stirrat 2000; Løngreen 2001; Eyben 2006; Mosse 2011; Porter 1999; Rahnema 1997; Elabor-Idemudia 2002; Simpson 2004; Eriksson Baaz, 2005; Koch 2020). This understanding of development is rooted in colonial logics of "ascendency of Northern over Southern knowledge" (Koch 2020, p. 484, for the connection between development and colonialism also see Parpart 1995, p. 224; Mudimbe 1988; Nindi 1990; Escobar 1992) and thus development work often involves "the transfer of Western technical expertise to the developing world" (1995, p. 225). Therefore, the distinction between the local and international worker is at least partly based on who possesses "technical expertise" and who does not.

This distinction is based on what Autesserre (2014) has called a "knowledge hierarchy" where technical know-how, what also might be called "thematic competency", is valued over "local expertise" (Bian 2022, p. 8). While there has been a shift in development to valuing local knowledge, this does not "necessarily translate to them [local workers] being trusted with making administrative decisions based on their local knowledge to anchor the future trajectories of their organizations" (Bian 2022, p. 6); these workers often remain "second-class epistemic informants" (Koch 2020, p. 484). Consequently, there is a credibility deficit for locals and an excess for internationals, where "'local' experts in aid circles" are seen to "lack credibility

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[4] This bears the mark of colonialism and the relationship between material inequalities and epistemic dominance. See Edward Said's (1978) concept of 'positional superiority', Smith (1999), Adas (1989), Mignolo, (2007) and Grosfoguel (2007).

as epistemic subjects and are considered epistemically lesser than 'international' experts working for donor organisations". The construction of the local worker as epistemically deficient in this way is "inherently linked" with how internationals are seen; they are "considered *more knowledgeable* and *more competent* to deal with the challenges at stake" (Koch 2020, p. 483). It is therefore believed that to 'develop', individuals who possess 'expert' knowledge are required, and this is knowledge possessed by 'international' workers and not 'locals' (Ziai 2013; Crewe and Harrison 1998, p. 109).[5]

This organisational distinction also relates to material rewards (Carr et al. 1998, 2010; Crewe and Fernando 2006; McWha 2011). International workers are not only afforded more autonomy and trust (Lough and Carter-Black 2015, also see Fassin 2011; Duffield 2012) but, crucially, significantly better pay and benefits. Though there have been attempts to redress these imbalances (see Afadzinu 2020; Byanyima 2016), they continue to persist (Cook-Lundgren 2023).[6]

However, organisational divides and power hierarchies within development are not static. The international/local divide is part of a larger constellation of categorisation in development organisations, which range from "specific and formal" to "informal and general" and include titles such as "volunteer", "consultant" and "permanent" and relate to power, responsibilities and pay (McWha 2011, p. 31). These divisions are shifting; distinctions between "volunteers" and "consultants" can exist alongside a division between "expats" vs. "locals". This suggests institutional categorisation beyond the binary explored in this article should be analysed with reference to race. However, for the purposes of our study what matters is that by uncovering the different forms of institutional hierarchy within development organisations, work such as McWha's encourages us to seriously consider the various, porous way power can work in these spaces.

Understanding that institutional hierarchies are changeable and not rigid is of the utmost importance for making sense of how distinctions between white/'other' and international/local relate to one another, an essential line of inquiry given that both binaries are produced by and themselves reinforce a particular conceptualisation of technical expertise within development organisations. Existing work has not ignored the relationship between the two; it has examined the way white development professionals are privileged over either European/Western staff of colour (Rivas 2018) or local staff of colour (Cook-Lundgren 2023). For example, some work argues the divide between local and international staff reinscribes 'difference along racial lines'

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[5] This is not purely top down, there is significant innovation from local groups and International Non-Governmental Organisations (Sharma, 2008) and there are academics that have been reflexive about the power imbalances involved in development (Chambers 2006; Mosse 2011). There are those that advocate for 'local' and 'indigenous' knowledge to be assimilated into 'international expertise', yet this entails a continued reification of this division (Agrawal 1995; Elabor-Idemudia 2002, p. 227).

[6] Cook-Lundgren shows in their case study-focussed work that even in organisation actively attempting to create a more equal playing field continues to reproduce and be shaped by the 'hegemonic influence of American/Western rationalities', which are rooted in colonial power dynamics and that service to sustain "onto-epistemic" differences between "local" and "foreign" development workers (2023, pp. 535, 537).

(Cook-Lundgren 2023, p. 542). While this is certainly the case, utilising McWha's (2011) work we can see this is not all that is happening in terms of institutional divides; an individual can straddle two different categories that symbolise distinct forms of power; one can be an "expat", allowing more power and responsibility in comparison to a "local" and one can be a "volunteer", who has less power in comparison to a "consultant", so that they are at times closer in institutional proximity to a "local". There are also different degrees of locality (Pascucci 2019) and of being international, the latter which is explored in this paper. In addition, "volunteers" who are racialised as white might be regarded as having little valuable expertise, indicating that institutional divisions do not always neatly map onto phenotype. Benton's work also shows how race can function in similarly complex ways, for an African expatriate, for instance, "the shared condition of Africanness may form the basis for solidarity, rooted in an implicit subordinate status to white expatriates". Yet "one's blackness, regardless of nationality, may [also] prefigure ideas about one's competencies and abilities" (2016, p. 272). This indicates the shifting, multi-layered forms of power relations that can operate in development organisations and that, arguably, should be considered when analysing processes of racialisation and how they relate to knowledge and power in such institutions.

Most existing work on race in development organisations has not overtly or methodically analysed what institutional divides, such as that between the international and local, means for how we understand power and material inequalities in relation to processes of racialisation. That is, though some work on development and race that has examined how the international/local divide is racialised, it assumes that racial phenotype neatly maps on to these distinctions, which are understood as static, and on to pay disparities, where well-paid international staff are phenotypically white and lower-paid local staff are not. Considering the multiracial nature of the category of international and the shifting nature of power within these organisations, it is not immediately clear that this is always the case. Indeed, Bian points the "uneven and fragmented criteria of being considered as a professional in the humanitarian sector", where power is related to one's "whiteness" (2022, p. 2; see also Benton 2016) and this is not steady. This article builds on such analysis by providing a sustained, fine-grained analysis of this fragmentation of the international/local divide and race. It does so by exploring how processes of racialisation—in particular different articulations of whiteness—and these forms of institutional categorisation interact with one another. However, to do so, we must first consider how we understand processes of racialisation and their relationship to knowledge and power.

## Understanding Modalities of Racialisation, Colonialism and Culture

How should we set about examining the international and local categories and their relationship to race? As previously, albeit briefly, mentioned, existing scholarship shows that the demarcation between those who are thought to have technical expertise and those who are not often maps on to organisational distinctions that have their roots in colonial thinking (Kothari 2006a). In short, it was European colonisers who were believed to possess knowledge about development and

this thinking has continued to shape the way international development functions. This colonial history, then, is a good place to begin in order to understand how thinking on knowledge and development might be enmeshed with practices of racial codification.

As part of the colonial project, the hierarchy of knowledge was connected to the superiority of white Europeans above all other 'races'. It was thought Europe was able to progress because it had knowledge within its borders that helped it do so and this was explained through supremacist thinking; white people inherently had superior intellect (Sabaratnam 2020, pp. 6–11). This stemmed from a belief that placement in the racial hierarchy was, in part, connected to which peoples had (or had been thought to have had) a 'civilisation' to speak of and which, ostensibly, did not (McClintock 1995, p. 135). Such a hierarchical system relied on an erasure of many knowledge systems around the world, alongside which there was a construction of epistemic supremacy and progress supposedly rooted in Europe and in whiteness (see also Wainaina 2006). Indeed, "the naming of 'cultures' was important to the "western European colonial project" to mark "out a host of Others as beings deemed lesser than the 'national' Selves who sought to dominate them" (Frankenburg 2001, pp. 74–75). Thus, notions of civilisational progress and knowledge were constructed as innate properties of certain peoples and were thus reflective of processes of racialisation that marked some 'races' as lesser than others.

This might suggest that the international/local divide and the epistemic distinctions it is built upon can be understood through existing racial categories, for example, white vs. the other. Yet, these processes of racialisation did not and do not operate in a straightforward way. Drawing on work demonstrating that race is not solely reducible to phenotype, we can begin to understand the shifting ways processes of racialisation might relate to epistemic superiority through the notion of 'culture'. Writing about the category "black", Stuart Hall explained it is "constructed politically and culturally" and "cannot be confined to a set of transcultural or transcendental fixed racial categories" (1988, p. 443; also see Hall, 1980, 1986 and Du Bois 1952, p. 46). Race and racism he argued should not be examined through a narrow, essentialist definition that only understands it as colour-coded prejudice or as solely distinguished by phenotype. Instead, Hall encouraged us to think of "racism's […] two registers", biological racism and culturalism differentialism, the latter being where "difference is grounded in cultural and religious features" (Hall 2000, p. 223). Thus, racialisation can be conceived of as a process whereby racial categories are tied to the supposed ancestral backgrounds of individuals or groups (Sabaratnam 2020, pp. 10–11) that are considered identifiable through visible 'difference' and/or 'cultural distinctiveness'.

When we understand forms of racialisation as tied to supposed 'cultural norms' that can be symbolic of epistemic superiority, we can then make sense of the way race is not simply based on phenotype. Examining the distinction between the "West" and the "East" in "postcolonial" states, López argues that being "Western" in this context has less to do with where one sits on the map and more to do with how one relates to a colonial history in which "Western-ness" is bound up with both colonial dominance and whiteness (2005, p. 17). He writes:

whiteness remains behind in the new postcolonial state, in the form of both actual white subjects (former colonizers turned citizens) and the cultural and ideological apparatuses that continue to reflect the values of the colonial regime—a national language or religion, educational system, government infrastructure, and so on (2005, p. 13).

Thus, whiteness might be understood as a privileged subject position (López 2005; Du Bois, 1935), which means that bourgeois communities populated by people of colour can be invested in whiteness to achieve mobility. Some of these people claim "superiority by virtue of their relative whiteness and establishing economic and cultural hegemony over other less-privileged groups on racial grounds" (López 2005, p. 17). This highlights how language and demarcations that might be thought of are "color-less" (Bian 2022, p. 11) can function as a subtle form of racialisation.

To understand this further, it is illuminating to look at Frantz Fanon's work. Writing about the French language in the 1950s, he argued "the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language […] mastery of language affords remarkable power" (1952, pp. 17–18). This too is reflected in the work of Mary Bucholtz (2008) who argued there is a corollary between how you are racially marked and the "ideology of linguistic markedness", where African American high school students are accused of trying to be white when they used standard English as opposed to "slang" (87; 94–5).[7] To be clear, this does not mean whiteness is uncontested, steady or available at all times to these groups; "non-English Englishnesses" will always be compared to an "English Englishness" (López 2005, p. 13). Rather it shows that through language, which is a particular kind of knowledge, there is a possibility of performing a specific form of racialised acceptability (see Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 5). Language is arguably a cultural code that is racialised and allows individuals access to whiteness. This, then, shows that access to an epistemic superiority that is deeply racialised can be achieved by conforming to certain cultural apparatuses.

Following this scholarship, we can see racialisation is "continuous yet morphing" (Tilley and Shilliam 2018, p. 537), tied to notions of knowledge and civilisation that are rooted in supposed phenotypic and cultural "difference". Racialisation, therefore, is not always necessarily overt, it may seem race neutral, and  must be carefully examined to reveal the specific and changing of nature of how it functions. This is crucial for considering how we should understand the international/local divide and its relationship to race. It is to this I will now turn.

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[7] Fordham (1999) found high-achieving African American students are accused by black peers of "acting white". Bucholtz finds nerds are hyperwhite, but this does not determine their political action.

## The Wages of Development: Who is International and Who is Local?

"People from my country hold westerners up on a pedestal, assuming they are more disciplined and hardworking", one development professional wrote as part of the Secret Aid Worker series. "How incompetent must they think my country people are that they have to fly an 'international expert' 7000 miles just to conduct a day of training on being more eco-friendly in daily life?" (2017, pp. 5–6). Critiquing the way "westerners" are elevated to a position of power, this observation draws our attention to the distinction between the international and local aid worker—the former is seen to possess knowledge and expertise that the latter does not.

Here, there appears to be a relationship between what your nationality is and which of these two categories you will be put in. But given all we know about changing hierarchies of power in development organisations and about the relationship between racialisation and knowledge, it is worth asking: can this category be accessed in other ways or is it solely nationality that matters? And how might this process of categorisation relate to race? One of the reasons this matters because of the way these categories relate to material inequalities between local and international staff; one interviewee outlined how at the beginning of her career she received such little pay as a local worker that she could not afford to get the bus back from work at the end of the month. Similarly another interviewee said that in the organisations in which they worked, the local "always got maybe a fourth of what the international got paid even if their expertise was far superior".[8] Such material inequalities are common knowledge across the development sector and have also been the subject of academic study (Carr et al. 1998, 2010; Crewe and Fernando 2006; McWha 2011). The international/local divide, then, is not just a matter of semantics but is related to clear inequities within these organisations.

In this section, I will draw on my empirical analysis, which is based on 21 interviews with development workers and *The Guardian's* Secret Aid Worker column, to consider the above questions. I will look at three overlapping articulations of power and differentiation—nationality, location and education, and phenotype—all of which arose from my analysis and which are connected to perceived expertise and knowledge. I will now outline each of them in turn.

### Nationality

One of the recurring themes in interviews with development professionals is mirrored in the assumption articulated in *The Guardian* article above, namely that an "international expert" is innately more competent than a local member of staff and that access to such categories is shaped by nationality. In interviewes conducted for my research, one interviewee—G—explained that this divide between local and international is justified through how knowledge is seen:

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[8] In many contexts, local development workers are often paid more than the average local salary yet that there continues to be disparities within development organisations is important to analyse.

> It's that the international knows how to write reports for an international audience and it's not really an international audience […] it's Brits writing report for Brits and yet somehow Brits get to capture the mantle of being international.

We can see in this moment, "international" stands for "British". Though she is of Indian origin, Interviewee G outlined how she believes as a British person, she is afforded a level of responsibility and trust that a person with a nationality from the global South is not:

> I was British and therefore suitably foreign […] and therefore could be trusted in a way that local couldn't be […] the role was written into the contract and it came with a lovely stipend […] I got maybe it was something like $30 a day for not really doing anything […] it cut to the heart of […] who can be trusted [and] who cannot be trusted. In the divisions between the local and the international, I was classified as international and therefore got paid or got the stipend that my colleagues didn't.

Her Britishness meant she could be trusted; one of her jobs in a country in the global South had been to monitor payroll, despite not having a finance background. She thought that she was deemed trustworthier simply by virtue of being British, and that she then benefitted materially from this assumption. It was on this basis, she said that international staff were paid more than local, it was assumed they brought "international expertise". And in line with the Secret Aid worker column, one of the keys to achieving this international label according to Interviewee G was to have a passport from the global North. That a British woman of Indian origin can access this power highlights that there is not always a strict binary system in operation between 'white' and 'other' but a more complex arrangement of power that in this instance relates to nationality.

This is also emblematised in the conceptualisation of expertise. As development can be about implementing supposed universal ideas, some international development workers operate in countries they have no or little knowledge of. Five of those interviewed had not been to India before working there and admitted they had no prior knowledge of the country and three said that while they conducted extensive research on India, they rarely visited the country. Echoing this, interviewee P who was born, grew up in and is based in India worked in development for decades, and described the phenomenon of international staff working in contexts they are unfamiliar with in unfavourable terms. They said when "development interventions are conceived and then implemented, they [the international workers] show both arrogance and what I would call technocratic fundamentalisms". Therefore, as nationals from a 'developed' country like Britain, professionals are seen to have transferable "technical knowledge", they are bestowed an epistemic excess that depicts them as more capable than people who are born in India.

Similarly, Interviewee H, who was born and had worked in India, described the imbalance when young people from the global North came to work as an intern at the organisation she worked for in India:

> They thought because they had studied and they were coming from the West they had all the solutions. […] It was very fascinating to see that lot of people who are coming from the West and [who] want to try their ideas thought that they had the most brilliant idea without even realising that it might not work […] if you're not basing it in the context or on the local knowledge.

In this instance, we are given the viewpoint of someone from within the country: individuals from "the West" arrive assuming they have all the knowledge needed. As she states there was little consideration for the context but rather a belief among people from "the West" that their ideas would be "brilliant". This highlights how similar to Interviewee G's explanations, within the parameters of British organisations, people from the global North assume they and/or are assumed to have superior knowledge or skills to the people from the countries they are working in. Interviewee H, who worked for an Indian organisation, challenged this and Interviewee G believed it was encouraged and perpetuated in the organisation she talked of. The categorisation of the international and the power that arguably comes with this can be understood through nationality: if you are from the global North, you are much more likely to be classed as international.

Thus, nationality can allow access to either epistemic superiority or, if from the global South, relegate individuals to being seen as having an epistemic deficit (Koch 2020). Nationality can determine whether you are seen to possess the "thematic competency" that is assumed necessary for occupying a senior position in development programmes (Bian 2022). Thus, "nationality serves as a label to differentiate epistemic agents, and the differentiation obviously has notable consequences for their respective status" (Koch 2020, p. 482), where leading positions are "usually held by nationals of the respective donor countries, while national staff are employed for executing tasks" (Koch 2020, p. 484 see also Bian 2022).

## Location and Education

However, access to an international job role is not only shaped by nationality, it is also related to location and, in turn, educational qualification. Discussions with participants revealed that simply being based in development offices in the UK would enable them to access this title. Interviewee C retold experiences comparable to those outlined above:

> In the global North there is this perception that their knowledge is in some ways superior […] than in the global South. […] When I was working at [name of development organisation] I didn't feel like my knowledge was less or my contribution was less but when we worked with partners in developing countries, there was that unequal power relation […] I think that's true across various think tanks where I have friends as well […] I do think that often these relationships are built on the expectation of partnership and that there is this sort of unequal relation.

Interviewee C was born and grew up in India but through her explanation we can see that working for a development organisation based in London, she believes,

afforded her a level of respect and power she would not have had if working for an Indian-based international non-governmental organisation. In fact, she says that she saw unequal power relations between people in London and "partners in developing countries" and she believed that if she had been working in an organisation in India and partnering with the prominent British development organisation she would have "been in a subordinate position compared to colleagues". Crucially, amongst participants, this distinction was only felt by people born in India, not by people from Europe, the USA or Britain, regardless of their phenotype. For those born in India, all of whom could be described as phenotypically brown, being classed as international was possible if working in an office based in "the West", but that if the same person were to work within India, for instance, they might be classed as a local or less than those working in the office in "the West". Thus, as Interviewee C pointed out, one of the key differences deciding who is international and who is local can be whether a professional from the global South is based in an office in the USA, UK or Europe or if they are based in the country they are working on.

Yet, this is not the full picture: how might such an individual from the global South come to work in the global North in the first place? For those from India, it appeared to be connected to the forms of knowledge they are seen to possess, which seems to at least partly, if not completely, be determined by where they were educated.

Interviewee F, a woman from India who works in India with domestic and international organisations (including DfID), explained that there was a difference in how people were treated depending on where they went to university:

> Within the organisation […] if there was someone who has studied from the [UK] or any other institute abroad, there was a difference in how they were treated […] even though they had […] much less experience of the grassroots they were […] given more weighted [sic] than […] the others.

Although the category international is not referenced, Interviewee F recounted an assumption she came across, where if a development worker had studied in the UK, then they would be seen to have the capability and knowledge superior to people educated in non-UK institutions, even though as Interviewee F pointed out they might not have much knowledge of the local context. This too might enable individuals born in the global South to more easily access a job in the global North, suggesting location and education are intimately connected. Interviewee F explicitly stated there was a difference in how people "were treated" depending on the educational institute they went to and where in the world this was. She argues that this counted more than experience or "grassroots"' knowledge. Therefore, Interviewee F suggests a "Western" education affords people to be treated better and more knowledgeable than others working in development.

In addition to this, it appears that some local staff might be aware they have to conform to an international system that is predicated on European/Western superiority and technical expertise. Interviewee F explained that there was an understanding and even internalisation among Indian staff of the power imbalance at the heart of this international/local divide:

> Indians do have a mentality of feeling inferior to […] people who come from the West. […] If you can't speak English you're not considered as intelligent, it's that's the […] mentality there is. I think that kind of […] impacts the behaviour and attitude as well.

Interviewee F says that there is still a feeling among some people that they are inferior to people from "the West", meaning this notion might also be reproduced by some people in 'developing' countries or at least in India. This was also a finding in other studies; in an interview with a development worker in Tanzania, Koch (2020) found one individual in Tanzania who criticised their "disadvantaged position in the competition for consultancy" as they were classed as a local but did so on the basis that the international label should not just be reserved for "foreigners", pointing to the "epistemic credibility of Tanzanian professors with reference to their academic training at an elite institution in the global North". This, Koch notes, suggests that the "superiority of 'international' over 'local' knowledge seems even internalised by those who aim to criticise epistemic power relations" (2020, p. 485). Though importantly accepting this logic was also explicitly rejected and actively challenged by some local staff in interviews conducted for this paper, these findings nevertheless demonstrate that certain forms of Western education are seen as legitimate means to demonstrating epistemic superiority in the context of development.

My analysis complements and is complemented by existing work which finds there is a hierarchy determined by "who can afford" markers such as the "status symbols of institutional education", where attending such institutions signifies that they possess "thematic competency" (Bian 2022, p. 4). Koch notes that in development the "prevailing formal and informal assessment criteria" include "academic qualification, reputation of training institutes and international experience' (2020, p. 485) and thus having gone to a Western educational institution is taken as a marker that individuals will have the knowledge needed to be an international worker. These credentials can give access, though on a contingent basis as will be seen in a moment, to the epistemic excess that is available to international workers. Therefore, though it may not be common to see local nationals occupy the highest levels of leadership (Bian 2022), the acquisition of "North American or European citizenship or educational credentials" (Benton 2016, p. 270) does allow people born in so-called developing countries to become international development workers.

What this shows, along with the previous subsection, is that institutional standing and attendant material benefits do not always simply map onto a binary between 'white' and 'other'. Instead, what is needed to be considered international is varied and relational but whether it comes down to nationality, geographic positioning via education, there is a persistent idea that people from "the West" and institutions in "the West" have knowledge needed for development.

## The Persistence of Phenotype: Proficiency and Pigeonholing

However, the above findings do not invalidate existing studies on race and development organisations, which suggest that phenotype plays a significant role in the category of the international (White 2002; Goudge 2003; Kothari 2006a, b; Heron

2007; Loftsdóttir 2014; Rivas 2018; Benton 2016; Bian 2022). Indeed, from the interviews I conducted it was evident that racialisation embedded in the international and the local exists *alongside* forms of racialisation more explicitly concerned with phenotype.

When asked directly whether race played a role in development, nearly all participants that I interviewed answered that it did; they would note that a significant number of white people occupied senior positions and/or comment on the lack of racial diversity in development organisations they were working in or had worked. Participants also spoke the assumption that people of colour are less capable than their white counterparts (including people working in organisations that are situated in the global North and global South, respectively) and that if they were of Indian origin, they were often pigeon-holed; assumed to only have knowledge about India— even if this were not the case—and less so about other countries. Thus, international workers of colour are not necessarily seen to always possess "technical expertise" in the same was as those who are phenotypically white, they may not be thought of as having the epistemic deficit that local workers do but neither are they always seen to have the excess possessed by other international workers.

Therefore, while there is a racialised differentiation between international and local staff that does not always directly tally with phenotype, it is also true that the terms 'expert', 'expatriate' and 'consultant' are not race neutral in a biological sense (Kothari 2006a, p. 15) and this applies to the international/local divide as well. Indeed, though nationality or education are ways to access this whiteness, as Benton notes in her work about humanitarianism in African countries, "black experts are often in the place of proving their expertise; the white expert's whiteness [if applied to the findings in this article we might say this is phenotypical whiteness] is often sufficient proof for hers" (2016, p. 271). Therefore, within the category of international there continues to be a form of racial stratification where a level of power is afforded to people who are phenotypically white over those who are not. This can exist alongside aforementioned forms of racialisation, showing the complexity and knottiness of racialisation in development.

## The Shifting Nature of Whiteness

The above findings show that the divide between international and local can be shaped by at least three factors, alongside skin colour, it is through nationality, location and/or educational background that people of Indian origin from the global North and people born in India, when neither are not phenotypically white, can occupy this category. The means by which individuals access the category international might seem, as Bian points out, to be "color-less" but they are underpinned by racialisation (2022, p. 11). Power and material advantage are attainable through the category international for those who might be considered phenotypically brown because whiteness is a political and social construction that can be accessed by people who are not phenotypically white.

Each of the categories outlined above is underpinned by and representative of an epistemic superiority: individuals are assumed to possess specific European/Western

technical expertise, which can also be described as thematic knowledge, if they are from "the West", or have been educated in "the West" or if they are phenotypically white. If we return to Hall's (1988, 2000) and others' (Fanon 1952; Frankenburg 2001; Bucholtz 2008) work on racialisation, we can make sense of how this relates to race. It is a belief in cultural difference, one of racism's "two registers", and how it connects to epistemic difference which can persist in so-called post-colonial societies (López 2005) that matters here. In development, the assumed superiority of European/Western knowledge can be traced back to a colonial history where perceived knowledge was often embroiled with ideas of racial superiority (Adas 1989; Smith 1999). There is now pressure on people who are not phenotypically white to "prove their Western connections and 'whiteness' through demonstrating their expertise" if they wish to be classed as international (Bian 2022, p. 10). Whiteness, then, is accessed via specific conceptualisations of knowledge in development. It is possible to see from interviews that people who are from Britain or who have been educated in institutions in "the West" are considered to have superior knowledge and are able to access power that is constituted by and through whiteness. People of colour from the global North may be able to access this category through nationality, while people from the global South must be based in Britain or have been educated in the global North. But in both cases, it is an epistemic supremacy at work that is grounded in whiteness, where upbringing, education and/or nationality are representative of "cultural apparatuses" (López 2005, p. 13) that individuals can conform to. In the contemporary world of development, expertise is coded in a racialised way.

It is likely that this has a class and caste element to it. This is because wealthier, higher caste people born in India will have more opportunities to be educated in universities in the USA or in Britain, for instance, places where fees are high and there are a limited number of scholarships. Further work needs to be conducted on the relationship between the backgrounds of these professionals who attend Western universities; however, for the moment, it is possible to note that in this specific context, the ability of an individual to access whiteness is at least partly dependent on their education, which is arguably shaped by educational opportunities determined to some degree by class and caste positioning (Seth 2007). One of the reasons this matters is because as we have seen, this distinction between the international and the local has material impacts. Thus, ideas of whiteness arguably further entrench class and caste inequalities.

However, as noted these are not the only forms of racialisation that manifest in development at a micro-level: race also works in a biologically defined way and this cuts across the international/local divide. People who are phenotypically white are afforded easier and more constant access to the category of international, it also often places them as superior—whether formally within the organisational structure or more 'informally' in day-to-day interactions—to other internationals who are not phenotypically white. For example, existing scholarship shows that women of colour working in development organisations find it difficult to address racism and that white staff believe they cannot be racist because of the work they do (Rivas 2018). It is possible to surmise that people who are phenotypically white have more straightforward, guaranteed routes to power and material wealth, and may be paid more than other international staff, specifically those who are not phenotypically white,

and that this too is related to class, namely there is likely a class barrier for those who are phenotypically white and who may want to work in development. Therefore, these different forms of racialisation create a complex, shifting web of power, whereby "racialised power is configured into hierarchies, not simply between the dominant and subordinate categories of people but also among them" (Brah 1996, p. 3) and that is changing and relational, affording some internationals privilege in the forms of epistemic excess and material privileges at certain times and denying it at others.

## Conclusions

> Sometimes organisations or governments want to see an international face but I find in India that's a lot less because they have some absolutely brilliant people throughout the organisation or […] in the country […]. For very specific things they may ask [for an international face because] […] there is a symbolic component, they have a workshop or a meeting and we have this international guest so one of the roles you fill is upgrading a bit the status of the event because there's somebody from outside.—Interviewee O

Consider the above quote, we now know the 'international face' could, in theory, refer to a range of people. It might apply to anyone from the global North and/or people from the global South who are able to conform to certain epistemic hierarchies in the European/Western development complex (embodied in the idea technical, thematic expertise), including people who would be considered phenotypically brown. Steeped in whiteness and arguably class and caste, this racialised divide between the international and the local has a material outcome. It thus appears to be a function of the intersection between race and capitalism (Du Bois, 1935; Brodkin 2000), where racialisation in development shapes and is shaped by peoples' position in capital relations.

However, the term 'international face' might also mean someone classified as having white skin pigmentation. According to participants in this study, and in line with existing analysis (White 2002; Kothari 2006a, b), power and knowledge within development organisations is still concentrated in the hands of people who are phenotypically white. Thus, flanking the unsteady nature of who is international and who is local are forms of racial discrimination at the micro-level that belie the idea that anyone can be classed as international at all times.

These findings demonstrate the different processes of racialisation—respectively formed in line with a particular strand of 'racism's two registers' (Hall 2000)—that can lie at the heart of material inequalities. This arguably has two implications. Firstly, we might see such processes of racialisation as constitutive of development work, this means they cannot necessarily be solved through institutional process such as diversity and inclusion programmes or efforts to ensure that people of colour occupy senior positions. Rather, it rather speaks to the more fundamental way that race and material inequalities are constitutive of one another and reveals how

dominant development agendas and technical knowledge facilitate this relationship. Secondly, and relatedly, thinking beyond development, these findings suggest that unpicking the way processes of racialisation and racialised inequalities are enmeshed with 'rational' modes of knowing helps us to see the complex forms of racialisation in operation; how they play a role in producing produce inequalities might otherwise be considered race neutral. From this vantage point, we can begin to consider more broadly not just how to treat the symptoms of racialised inequalities but also the causes, to eventually move beyond race altogether (Gilroy 2000).

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author states there is no conflict of interest.

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