

## The White Savior Industrial Complex from a pan-African perspective

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### 1. what is the problem? - White saviourism as an industry.

Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole introduced the term "White Savior Industrial Complex" in 2012 in response to the 2012 documentary film *Kony*. At the time, the film was intended to generate attention for the wars in Uganda and other East and Central African countries in which Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army rebel group were involved.

However, the main focus of the film was on the director Jason Russel, a white American, and his emotions, his perspective and his supposed heroism, for which Cole criticised him. The White Savior Industrial Complex concept analyses the problematic dynamics and effects of "humanitarian aid" by wealthy, white actors in countries of the Global South. Cole writes: "A nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied". The supposed altruism of white helpers is exposed as mere self-presentation and moral valorisation of their own person and follows the colonial-racist dichotomy: poor, needy, passive global South versus progressive, highly developed, active global North. In this way of thinking, Africans are grateful for any help - even if this "help" consists of unqualified 19-

year-olds who want to experience an adventure after their A-levels and do "something good" at the same time. White saviourism contributes to the perpetuation of inequality and injustice and is a neocolonialist practice. Neo-colonialism describes the continuation of colonial dominance by former colonial powers, even after the formal independence of the formerly colonised countries. The term was coined by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana and pan-African revolutionary, in his book "Neocolonialism - the last stage of imperialism". Nkrumah argued that neo-colonialism was based on economic interests and political dominance of Western superpowers and continues to exist in the form of economic exploitation, spiralling debt and political influence. In the context of neo-colonialism, it becomes clear how the white saviour industrial complex follows a capitalist logic of exploitation and that there are clear economic interests behind the white saviour mentality and humanitarian work. Many white saviours are prepared to pay a lot of money to appease their "white guilt" and buy themselves a clear conscience. The so-called aid organisations work primarily for self-preservation, which is in direct contradiction to a long-term and sustainable improvement of the social and political situation in the respective countries of the Global South. They are also part of the Western propaganda machine and drive forward a neoliberal and colonial

agenda. You could say that they are replacing the church as missionaries in Africa. In this way, so-called humanitarian aid is becoming an instrument of neo-colonialism. One example that illustrates how dangerous white saviourism can be in individuals is the case of Renée Bach. She is a white US-American who went to Uganda at the age of 19 and founded the Christian missionary "aid" project "Serving His Children" in 2009. Over a period of five years, she treated at least 940 Ugandan children without any medical qualifications, 105 of whom died. Others only survived with permanent health problems. The mortality rate of 20% in 2011 and 10% in 2013 should have been red flags for the Ugandan health authorities. Despite this, the project's licence was only revoked in 2015 - and even returned shortly afterwards - but without Renée Bach. She went back to the USA when the situation became dicey for her and she had to expect to be held accountable. Two women, Gimbo Zubeda, whose son Twalali Kifabi died in the care of "Serving His Children", and Kakai Annet, whose son Elijah Kabagambe died shortly after treatment, reported Renée Bach. With the help of her lawyer, however, she was able to negotiate a dubious deal in the Ugandan civil court: \$9500 for each of the women. A ridiculous punishment in view of the fact that Renée Bach treated Ugandan children negligently for years, accepted their deaths and in so many cases was actually responsible for them. To date, she has not been prosecuted.

2 What needs to change? - Renée Bach, the symptom of a much bigger problem: White Supremacy

What Renée Bach did did not happen in a socio-political vacuum. The problem is not her as an individual, but the circumstances in which her actions were possible for such a long time. White supremacy describes the racist ideology that white people and their ideas, actions and views are inherently superior and that this supremacy is justified and must be maintained. Renée Bach was socialised in an imperialist, colonial racist country, the USA. She grew up with the racist conviction that as a white woman she is superior to black people and has learnt throughout her life how to use her privilege to avoid being held accountable. This political ideology is not always so explicitly named and taught, but it is deeply rooted in Western societies, often works subtly and is very powerful. From the NGO posters with malnourished black children and the saving white hand that stretches down from the top of the picture like a god, holding out its fingers ready to help, and the advertising text that claims to save a child's life with just a €2 donation.

About the fact that colonial history plays only a minimal role, if any, in the curriculum of German or Western schools and the fact that Western wealth could only be accumulated through the over-exploitation of Africa and enslavement is never mentioned. From medical students who want to do

an internship in Africa at the beginning of their training because "you can do so much there". To global health issues such as the HIV/AIDS crisis or the Covid-19 pandemic: antiretroviral medication or the Covid vaccine could not be produced and made available as a generic drug in Africa at low cost because the anti-human TRIPS agreement does not allow it.

TRIPS stands for "Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights" and is an agreement of the World Trade Organisation that came into force in 1995. It covers patents, copyrights, trademarks, geographical indications, trade secrets and "protective measures against unfair competition".

competition". It works in the interests of Western superpowers and their pharmaceutical industries, which can use it to establish and defend their monopoly position and abuse major health crises for their own profit. White supremacy is an ideology that is not only powerful on the side of the oppressors. The Ugandan authorities also apparently had too much faith in the white saviour, so that they tolerated her over a long period of time or did not check what was happening with "Serving His Children". The legal system is also permeated by this ideology, as Renée Bach has not been found guilty to this day, even though there are numerous witnesses, photos and even tweets and posts on social media written by Bach herself documenting her performing complex medical treatments on Ugandan children - without ever having learnt to do so professionally. Such a scenario would be unthinkable the other way round - an unqualified Ugandan person treating children in the USA, hundreds of whom die, and then getting away with it. 3. how can things change? - Africans will liberate Africa!

The Ugandan project "No White Saviors" (IG: @nowhitesaviors) has been working tirelessly on the case of Renée Bach since 2018, providing information and political education on white saviourism, racism, colonial continuities and African liberation. The African liberation struggle has not ended with formal independence from colonialism - it is in full swing. To come back to Kwame Nkrumah and his political agenda: Pan-Africanism means a united Africa under socialism. Structural exploitation, institutionalised racism, white supremacy and neo-colonialism are inextricably linked to the capitalist economic system. African workers, Black people and People of African Descent worldwide must organise internationally and break the power of imperialist states, big corporations, business lobbies and banks so that structures can also change on a "small" scale. In concrete terms, this means providing direct financial support to grassroots organisations such as NWS on the African continent. For example, the organisation is currently helping to set up another project: the Sankara Pan-African Library, a pan-African library and café, as a place for exchange, joint politicisation and community. We must support such projects with a clear political agenda so that the important work not only around white saviourism, but also in the long term and sustainably for a liberated African society and against neo-colonialism and capitalist exploitation can be continued. Similar projects that aim to

educate the African masses and especially the youth are the Thomas Sankara Centre in Burkina Faso, a pan-African socialist library and political education centre (IG: @burkinabooks). To conclude with a quote from Thomas Sankara, the pan-African socialist revolutionary and first president of independent Burkina Faso: "He who feeds you, controls you." - "He who feeds you, controls you." In the context of development aid, this is a clear point of view and should be considered by all those who are seriously fighting for a positive future for Africa or countries in the Global South in general. Development cooperation should be viewed extremely critically and rejected at the latest when its explicit goal is not ultimately its own abolition.

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