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On saviours and saviourism: lessons from the #WEscandal

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, the Canadian-based humanitarian organisation WE was the subject of a funding scandal in Canada that cast a critical light on its finances and mandate. The scandal tarnished the reputations of the organisation and its founders, Craig and Marc Kielburger, who had been lauded as model global citizens for more than two decades. This paper uses the controversy as an example to distinguish between the increasingly disparaged trope of the white saviour and the continuing normalisation of saviourism as an orientation that naturalises philanthropic or charitable approaches to alleviating suffering as both just and effective.

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For more than a decade, the social enterprise and charities currently known collectively as WE have been a fixture in the experience of Canadian students. Through curriculum initiatives, voluntourism, and its annual series of WE Day concerts, Me to WE/WE Charity has become the most prominent vehicle for the ideal of global citizenship in Canada. Just as importantly, WE's co-founders, Craig and Marc Kielburger, have been lauded as model global citizens. In June-August of 2020, however, WE and the Kielburgers became embroiled in a scandal of Canada's governing Liberal party. Shaped by partisan politics, the #WEscandal focused on whether and how a significant sole-source contract to administer a youth grant programme was influenced by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, who both had personal ties to WE and the Kielburgers. The controversy lead to critical investigations of WE, troubling its complex and confusing structure of for-profit and not-for-profit entities in Canada and the United States, querying the role of the Kielburger brothers, whose managing control supersedes WE Charity's governing board, as well as questioning how a youth-oriented charitable organisation has acquired extensive real estate holdings in a lucrative Toronto neighbourhood.

The media's critique of We produced a narrative of the Kielburger brothers as having veered from the righteous path of human rights and development work that they began as teenagers in the 1990s to become a self-serving 'Kielburger, Inc.' (Lilley 2020). As Prime Minister Trudeau reminded the Canadian public (Kirkup 2020), the 'excellent work' of WE Charity should be distinguished from the controversy about how a government grant was awarded. Apart from investigations by independent journalists (Loreto 2020; Brown 2020a), at the height of the controversy, Canadian media did not provide any significant critical analysis of the organisation's mandate to provide development aid overseas, and leadership, diversity, and global citizenship education in Canada. Further, despite the prominence of racism in public discourse at the time, accusations of structural racism and abusive behaviour within the organisation were reported but not

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investigated by the media. The scandal seems to have tarnished the reputations of the Kielburgers and the WE brand, but in ways that reinforce the ideal of humanitarian care which has become central to the rhetoric of global citizenship in Canada. After corporations, school boards, and media partners withdrew from their partnerships with WE, the Kielburgers first announced plans to change WE's governance structure and refocus its energy on international development work, and then announced the closure of the Canadian office of WE Charity with the promise of liquidating property assets to fund their WE Villages development projects (WE 2020a, 2020b).

In this article, I engage with media coverage of the controversy that overtook WE as a result of the funding scandal as a way into examining how global citizenship, in its popular forms at least, continues to be informed by saviourism. I seek to distinguish between the critique of the white saviour, as a stigma attached to an individual mentality or particular methods of humanitarian care, and saviourism, as an orientation, a way of conceiving of relations globally that naturalises philanthropic or charitable approaches to alleviating suffering as both just and effective. I draw together a variety of threads of the criticism of WE to argue that the organisation exemplifies the way global citizenship rhetoric in Canada draws upon humanitarian discourse to posit post-racial compassion while nonetheless reinforcing white supremacy.

WE as exemplar of the global citizenship nexus

WE provides a variety of school-based Global Citizenship Education initiatives, including extra-curricular projects focused on entrepreneurship (i.e., fundraising), curriculum modules and workshops, as well as annual WE Day concerts, in which thousands of students pack into sports arenas to hear pop stars, celebrities, politicians, CEOs, and motivational speakers. While these activities are presented as providing much needed social justice education and personal empowerment, they provide what Andreotti (2006) calls 'soft global citizenship education,' constructing global inequality through a Northern lens that is ahistorical, depoliticised, and ethnocentric, offering simple solutions that reflect Northern paternalism and salvationism (Andreotti 2012). In Canada, WE has come to facilitate what Eglin (2020) characterises as a neoliberal global citizenship 'nexus,' articulated by corporations, international development NGOs, and the UN, as well as through the interconnections among these institutions. WE provides a vehicle through which corporations and schools can make performative their rhetorical commitments to global citizenship.

Further, the structure of WE, itself, exemplifies this nexus, with its for-profit social enterprise, Me to We, focusing on education programming in Canada (as well as the US and UK), and We Charity, providing international development projects in a number of countries, including Kenya, India and Haiti. The two organisations have functioned largely as a single-entity, however, with its education projects in Canada serving primarily as a recruitment and fundraising operation for We Charity and the WE Travel enterprise (Findlay 2020). As Karsgaard (2019) argues in her analysis of a unit that guides students through Craig Kielburger's memoir, the curriculum requires school boards to purchase books from Me to WE and is specifically tied to WE Charity fundraising campaigns while centring Kielburger's experience: 'within this context, global citizenship is framed as personal development through humanitarian action,' simplifying problems of human rights and poverty, as well as their solutions (62). In her investigation of WE's funding history from government sources, Nora Loreto (2020) found that WE has received millions to provide programmes, including the development of curriculum materials for public schools. However, just three years after a 2017 project in which WE was funded to develop learning resources on youth empowerment, the environment, diversity and inclusion, and reconciliation, Loreto could not find any reference to the material on the WE websites and no evidence that the project's goals had been fulfilled.

WE's ties to the corporate community in Canada are just as troubling. The WE Day spectacle, which began in Toronto in 2007 and had grown to an annual series of concerts across Canada, as well as cities in the US and UK, before the Covid-19 global pandemic of 2020 made such events untenable, was dependent upon corporate and media partnerships. Critiques of WE Day as a

commercialised spectacle, functioning to legitimize corporate social responsibility (CSR), have been made for more than a decade (Newbury 2010; Jefferess 2012; Atkinson 2013; Findlay 2020). As Justin Ling (2020) revealed during the #WEscandal, however, WE did not regard corporations as a source of funding for its development and education projects but marketed itself to those corporations specifically as providing a 'halo effect.' In its pitch to companies, WE claimed that its youth-oriented programmes improve brand reputation for corporate partners and 'can drive consumer exploration, consideration and purchase of products and services' (qtd in Ling 2020). For a fee, corporations gained access to the WE Day stage to present themselves as global citizens, placed the WE logo on their products, and/or were able to collaborate on school curriculum that presented them as socially responsible community actors.

Although Eglin (2020) does not include media as one of the institutions comprising the global citizenship nexus, corporate mainstream media was an integral partner for WE, providing the Kielburgers a platform for their articulation of feel good global social responsibility via syndicated newspaper columns and national telecasts of WE Day events, among other forms of promotion. Just 10 months before the #WEscandal, a national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, published its annual promotional insert for WE Day, with articles highlighting WE's partnership with a major bank (Cohen 2019), a national telecommunications company (Wing 2019), and the philanthropic initiatives of Microsoft (Galt 2019). WE's business model carefully cultivated, and helped to package, global citizenship as a tenet of corporate culture, helping to produce these corporations as benevolent actors. Further, by cultivating partnerships with prominent national broadcasters and newspaper chains in Canada, and by threatening litigation against journalists that critiqued the organisation (Cheney 2000; Craig 2015; Kerr 2018; Boynton 2020), WE was largely able to shield itself from public scrutiny until the 2020 scandal.

Prior to the scandal, which required the Kielburgers to carefully parse the separate entities of WE, delineating between for-profit and charity, WE was promoted as a single entity; the social enterprise Me to We and the development NGO WE Charity shared a website (we.org) and the various elements of the organisation existed on social media as a single @WEmovement. Me to WE was formed in 2008 as a vehicle for funding the charitable entity, then known as Free the Children. Initially, the Kielburgers claimed that 50% of Me to WE's profits would be donated to WE Charity, with the for-profit enterprise selling a variety of goods and services, including clothing and food products produced in WE Charity's project countries, motivational speakers and workshops, and its travel business. In 2020, they claimed on their website that the social enterprise had directed 90% of its proceeds to the charity over the past five years (Me to We 2020a).

In reality, the social enterprise earned almost as much by selling products and services to WE Charity as it 'gave' to the NGO. Kate Bahen of Charity Intelligence (2020) noted that since 2009, WE Charity has paid Me to WE at least $11 million, more than half what Me to WE is registered as donating to the charity, and WE admitted that between 2015 and 2020, WE Charity had received just $1.3 million more from Me to WE than it had paid to the social enterprise for promotion and travel services (Brown 2020b). While their extensive real estate holdings came as a surprise to many, the organisation was transparent in projecting itself as a business and interpellated their youth target audience as globally-conscious consumers. For instance, in bold letters on the WE Travel website is the acknowledgment that 'We didn't start as a travel company' (Me to We 2020b); through volunteer or cultural immersion trips, citizen-consumers are promised the opportunity to 'get to know a country, its culture and its people' and 'become a part of their story of change.' The blending of the for-profit and not-for-profit entities reflects the way WE posits global citizenship as a consumer lifestyle brand, actively promoting individual empowerment through entrepreneurship. As such, they epitomise the way global citizenship facilitates a neoliberal 'enterprise of the self' (Eglin 2020, 12).

The (white) saviour mentality and saviourism as orientation

Over the past decade, and especially after Teju Cole's (2012) scathing critique of Kony 2012, the figure of the white saviour has increasingly been invoked as a means of criticising certain expressions of humanitarianism. Typically, the 'white saviour complex' is conceived as a complex only in psychological terms, reflecting a mentality. As a derisive epithet, the term 'white saviour' serves to stigmatise the messianic or dangerously naïve attitudes of individuals, such as Kony 2012s Jason Russell or Renee Bach, a white American woman without any medical qualifications who managed a treatment centre in Uganda where more than 100 children died (Mwesigwa and Beaumont 2019). The problem lies with the way their apparent altruism is actually a performance of self-interest, the desire to be the hero in a rescue narrative. The white saviour is defined by their paternalistic attitudes towards suffering others, their lack of meaningful knowledge or skills (Hughey 2014), and, significantly their belief that providing aid or care will provide self-fulfilment (Malkki 2015).

As such, the label, 'white saviour,' often functions to distinguish self-serving or specifically harmful forms of humanitarian care, such as international adoption or short-term voluntourism by unqualified Northern youth, from more legitimate forms of development practice. As a mentality, the 'white saviour complex' is something that individuals must come to recognise in themselves and seek to unlearn. Janine Guarino (2018), for instance, narrates her journey from being inspired by the Kony 2012 campaign to coming to interrogate her white privilege as a US citizen in Uganda, this narrative culminating in the resolve to do development work in better ways. To the extent that white saviourism was invoked in the media during the WE Charity controversy, it was limited to the voluntourism enterprise, focusing on how these projects are ineffective and identifying how WE Travel emphasises the learning or growth of Canadian participants as well as the status and opportunities they accrue from these travel experiences (Klaassen 2020; Paradkar 2020). In this way, the epithet of the white saviour becomes a way of stigmatising certain expressions of humanitarian care as 'bad,' yet reaffirms the responsibility of 'fortunate' people in the global North to help 'unfortunate' people in the global South.

Teju Cole (2012) invokes these themes, highlighting, for instance, the way white saviourism becomes a means of fulfilling an emotional need for white people, and how it relies on sentimentality, affirming enthusiasm over efficacy. However, this only provides one facet of Cole's critique. His characterisation of saviourism as an 'industrial complex' recognises how this mentality functions within a history and structure of geo-political power. The complex is not (only) psychological but social, political, and economic. The problem with the white saviour mentality is not just that it only attends to 'hungry mouths' or 'child soldiers' but that attention to the spectacle of the sufferer elides the complex structures that produce their suffering, including IMF-imposed structural adjustment programmes that were 'economically devastating' for many African countries, problems of governance and infrastructure, and the strategic and purposeful harm done by US foreign policy. 'The White Savior Industrial Complex,' Cole writes, 'is a valve for releasing the unbearable pressures that build in a system built on pillage. We can participate in the economic destruction of Haiti over long years, but when the earthquake strikes it feels good to send $10 each to the rescue fund.' The 'complex', then, must be understood as the way the mentality is produced within, helps to maintain, but also serves to mask an unjust material structure of inequality. Cole does not distinguish between good, genuine humanitarians (i.e., good white people) and self-indulgent, ethnocentric and paternalistic ones (i.e., bad white people), as popular critiques of the white saviour mentality in the global North tend to do, but, instead, highlights how saviourism constructs the idea of global poverty.

Cole's invocation of whiteness reflects the historical, colonial idea of the 'white man's burden' but also complicates it. He identifies in one of the tweets that saviourism caters to the emotional needs of 'white people and Oprah,' recognising that Black/POC celebrities also model, and are interpellated within, this saviour complex. Further, he foregrounds how he, as a Nigerian

immigrant in the United States is nonetheless 'implicated in these transnational networks of oppressive practices,' in ways benefiting from them as a US citizen. Yet, his engagement with *New York Times Columnist,* Nicholas Kristof's response to his tweets reveals how saviourism continues to be a means of enacting whiteness. Kristof is an influential proponent of 'soft' global citizenship; for instance, he appeals to Americans to gain cultural experiences of difference afforded through education abroad and humanitarian work (Feldscher 2014; Kristof 2014). Although Cole clarifies that he does not regard Kristof as racist, Kristof's comments reveal the paradoxical way that humanitarian care is conceived of as colour-blind at the same time that, in this case, it purposefully marginalises Black African voices. In his response to Cole, Kristof is dismissive of the 'discomfort and backlash among middle-class educated Africans' to the Kony 2012 campaign, asserting that 'it seems even more uncomfortable to think that we as white Americans should not intervene in a humanitarian disaster because the victims are of a different skin color' (qtd. in Cole 2012). For Kristof, humanitarianism becomes a means for whiteness to be constituted through the performance of what I have called a post-racial sensibility (Jefferess 2011, 2015); hence, for Kristof, it is the Black, African man who complicates the 'real' problem of alleviating suffering by introducing the politics of race.

In the Canadian context, Sunera Thobani (2007, 148) argues that white people 'are constituted as tolerant and respectful of difference and diversity, while non-white people [are] instead constructed as perpetually and irremediably monocultural, in need of being taught the virtues of tolerance and cosmopolitanism under white supervision.' This reflects the historical construction of whiteness in North America as a status or position in part conferred through the performance of charitable acts. As Susan M. Ryan (2004, 48–9) argues, in the late nineteenth century, the white racial designation and its privileges depended to some extent on whether one needed help or was in the position to help others. Acts of compassion across class or racial difference exhibited by the benevolent white person paradoxically required, and naturalised, the image of the supplicant black body (67). As such, ethical action focuses on the act of care, disregarding historical and ongoing structures that produce suffering, and, specifically, white privilege and complicity in those structures.

Cole argues that Kristof 'does not connect the dots or see the patterns of power behind the isolated 'disasters.' All he sees are hungry mouths … All he sees is need, and he sees no need to reason out the need for the need.' The idea that Kristof can only recognise the suffering of others, and is unwilling or unable to acknowledge in any meaningful way the causes of that suffering reflects white saviourism, as a 'mentality.' But I think it also reflects how saviourism is an orientation. Sara Ahmed (2007, 150–1) writes that an orientation is about 'starting points,' the point from which the world is understood to unfold. As an orientation, whiteness provides the starting point that determines 'what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do "things" with' (154). Saviourism is a manifestation of this history of whiteness as an orientation. Saviourism connotes the way that in the global North, the global South is defined as (having) a problem, the global citizen or humanitarian is constructed as the solution to that problem, and the way it is the 'saviour' who has the power to delineate these roles and this relation.

I make the distinction between a mentality – a psychological complex – and an orientation to emphasise the way saviourism is not a personal foible but a discourse that produces relations. As Jason Hickel (2017) notes, while the nations of the North have, to some limited degree, acknowledged the violence of a colonial past, in these 'rich nations' the relationship between themselves and the global South is now defined, overwhelmingly, through the story of development aid: 'This story is so widely propagated by the aid industry and the governments of the rich world that we have come to take it for granted.' As Hickel explains, however, aid, as a flow of money and resources into the global South, is dwarfed by the money and resources that flow out to the global North. For instance, in 2012 the people/nations of the global North 'gave' more than $126 billion in development aid to 'poor countries,' but more than $3.3 trillion left these states through debt repayments, the profits of multinational corporations, and illicit capital flight, much of that a result of

an unjust international system of trade. It is this structure that produces 'need,' yet saviourism overwrites this real relation, a 'complex' of government, schooling, and NGOs propagating the story that the North gives to the South rather than takes. My individual renunciation of the *mentality* of the white saviour does not extricate me from the way saviourism provides an *orientation* for making sense of, and acting within, global order.

WE and the orientation of saviourism

At the peak of the #WEscandal, 19 July 2020, Amanda Alvaro, a regular pundit on Canadian national television network CBC news political panels, posted two short videos on Twitter in support of WE, testifying to her personal experience of 'literally standing on Kenyan soil with [the Kielburgers] and [seeing] first-hand how awe-inspiring, how honestly life-changing their work is.' She argues that the controversy does an 'egregious' disservice to the 'golden child of charities in Canada.' Decrying how 'cancel culture' threatens to decimate the organisation, she asserts that 'WE has *created communities* across the world, health care, and education … *actually making communities function*' (emphasis added). This rhetoric overtly echoes white supremacist colonial ideals, constructing people in the so-called developing world as ignorant and incapable, dependent upon the benevolent tutelage of, in this case, (white) Canadians to provide order and possibility.

Her comments, however, are only less carefully worded than the marketing appeals of a wide range of humanitarian organisations. For instance, Partners in Health (PIH) (2020a) describes how, through a Global Affairs Canada partnership, PIH in Malawi and Sierra Leone 'empower' thousands of girls and women to 'realize their right to health.' Similarly, an August 3 World Vision Canada tweet reporting on a Myanmar woman who completed Development Canada funded training on hygiene, nutrition, and breast-feeding, implies that the health of her baby can be attributed to that training. I highlight these two examples because they appeared in my Twitter feed in the days immediately after Alvaro posted her rant, and because they reflect saviourism as an orientation, naturalised in the rhetoric of the marketing appeal of Northern humanitarian NGOs. While the language used by PIH and World Vision is certainly less demeaning than Alvaro's, they nonetheless reflect the way people in the global South are represented only in terms of their 'need', and how their possibilities in life are presented as dependent upon the education and aid provided by Northern NGOs. The orientation of saviourism defines the actors (e.g., fortunate and unfortunate, donor and beneficiary) and their relation to one another as defined by the responsibility the 'fortunate' have to ameliorate suffering. Indeed, the cause of need is projected on to the needy; it is their ignorance (of hygiene and nutrition) or their inability to assert their right to health that limits their possibilities.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have entrenched saviourism as an orientation, focusing debate on how to provide aid most effectively, rather than transforming the systems and structures that produces suffering and inequality. 'The real problem with the "aid effectiveness" craze is that it narrows our focus down to micro-interventions at a local level that yield results that can be observed in the short term,' wrote a group of fifteen economists in 2018 (Alkire et al. 2018): 'Aid projects might yield satisfying micro-results, but they generally do little to change systems that produce the problems in the first place. What we need instead is to tackle the real root causes of poverty, inequality and climate change.' In addition to the causes and conditions that Cole identifies or that Hickel describes as the outflow of wealth from the South to the North, historical dispossession and ongoing displacement of people from their land (i.e., for industrial agriculture, mining, and wildlife preserves), the exploitation of labour, neoliberal austerity programmes that have decimated education and health care, as well as ineffective and harmful development projects – both micro and macro – make up a complex accounting of the ongoing history of impoverishment.

As Yves Engler (2020) argues, the scandal that should be the focus of public attention is the way corporations, newspapers and television networks, school boards, politicians, unions, and celebrities 'enabled' WE, and in so doing celebrated a mode of social action that is not only ineffective but a

key element in sanitising the ongoing imperial exploitation of the global South by the Canadian state and corporations. For example, association with WE allows corporations like PotashCorp, an extraction company accused of taking advantage of the conflict in occupied Western Sahara, Dow Chemical, a company with a long history of environmental and human rights abuses, as well as exploitative communications and financial institutions to present themselves as socially responsible (Jefferess 2012; Ling 2020; Loreto 2020).

The aid effectiveness framework, in contrast, constructs WE as an outlier within the development industry. For instance, Rebecca Tiessen (2020) points out that unlike other Canadian NGOs, that are officially accredited and adhere to the Canadian Council for International Co-operation's Code of Ethics and Operational Standards, WE Charity does not allow external evaluations of their work, and hence their claims to effectiveness are limited to 'self-professed good intentions, slick advertisements and carefully crafted mission statements.' WE describes the impact of its work in terms of brand reach, the number of rafikis they have sold, the number of female artisans they employ, and the number of travellers who have visited WE destinations (Me to WE 2020a). With regard to their WE Villages initiatives, they claim to have provided more than 1 million people access to clean water and sanitation, more than 30 000 women 'tools to gain economic self-sufficiency,' and enabled farmers to produce more than 15 million nutritious meals. Such measures seem impressive, but they provide no meaningful gauge of whether or how WE Charity makes the lives of people in their project countries better, never mind genuinely alleviate the causes of poverty.

Although WE Charity may be an outlier in the Canadian development scene in the way Tiessen (2020) describes, its work is nonetheless indicative of the orientation of saviourism rather than only a saviour mentality, a label used to disparage the organisation or its founders. WE's emphasis on quantifying its impacts is by no means unique in the Canadian development industry (see, for instance, Care Canada 2020; Partners in Health 2020b). Further, the five pillars of development that WE Villages (2020c) concentrates upon – education, water, health, food, and opportunity – are common to a great many like-organisations, and reinforce the framework for the MDGs, as well as the first six goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). WE Villages (2020b) claims not to utilise a charity-framework, instead enacting an 'asset-based approach' that is community-focused and designed and implemented through partnership. They claim that this sets them apart from conventional development initiatives, but, of course, it reflects the current rhetoric of the industry. This rhetoric, as Alex de Waal (1997, 4) argues, is self-justifying: what he calls the 'humanitarian mode of power' defines 'what is moral and what is true.'

Foregrounding whiteness and racism

Saviourism is historically associated with whiteness; it is constitutive of whiteness. However, critiques of the white saviour mentality often narrowly understand the problem only in terms of representation; the spectacle of the white body, surrounded by Black and Brown children in the voluntourist selfie, becomes the focus of concern, not necessarily the kinds of work voluntourists do (Gharib 2017; Kuo 2017). For instance, Radi-Aid's popular campaign against stereotyping in the aid industry promotes 'ethical' guidelines for representation, ultimately affirming saviourism as an orientation (Jefferess 2013; Radi-Aid 2020). Rather than limiting analysis to the way the white saviour functions as a trope in humanitarian communication or positing it as a mentality that can be 'unlearned,' saviourism needs to be understood in the context of racial capitalism. Jodi Melamed (2015, 77) explains that capitalist relations

> require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race.

Development initiatives that focus on providing education and empowerment imply that the problem to be remedied is the ignorance and incapability of those constructed as in need. This programming, and its rhetoric, presumes, and reinforces, 'differing human capacities' without overtly referring to race. Similarly, through the rhetoric of 'giving back' or 'making a difference,' organisations like WE affirm at every turn that the ability of (privileged) Canadian youth to 'change the world' is simply a result of fortune. This orientation refuses to recognise historical and ongoing racism as part of the 'problem' or as informing the apparent 'solutions'.

Craig Kielburger is an exemplar of the trope of the white saviour figure. For instance, in his homage to Kielburger in *Readers Digest*, Nicholas Hune-Brown (2015) begins by presenting Kielburgers' origin story, foregrounding his altruism and compassion. Kielburger's narrative remains 'vital,' Hune-Brown argues, as a model for all of us of 'what one person can do when he decides he wants to change the world.' Kielburger is presented as unique but the story is structured through a long-established formula. As Hughey (2014) argues in his study of the trope in film, white saviours struggle for an egalitarian society absent racial prejudice, yet these narratives nonetheless minimise racial inequality and defensively refuse to acknowledge white privilege, while also constructing people racialized as not white as culturally and morally dysfunctional. Hune-Brown's tribute to Craig Kielburger, like Craig's appearance on Oprah or his profile on the US television news magazine *60 Minutes*, makes a spectacle of Kielburger, as white saviour, while avoiding any overt engagement with the race and class privilege that makes him able to travel the world as a human rights advocate.

In his feature on the MTV series Cribs (Haddon Strategy 2012), Craig, clad in a tight t-shirt, is the focus of the camera's gaze as he provides a tour of a Me to We complex in Kenya. The video repeats to a new generation the key tropes of both the humanitarian appeal and the European colonial travelogue. Indeed, it is produced as if Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical 'How to Write About Africa' (2019) was used as a guide. The video provides multiple images of sunsets and animals. Craig remarks on being in 'the middle of nowhere Africa.' The Kenyan staff speak and act only on Craig's command, interactions with a Maasai warrior opening and ending the tour. He performs the role of the humanitarian informant, though little is said about We Charity's work; he asserts the authority to speak of and for Africa. For instance, he explains to the viewer Maasai culture, in terms of their 'difference', while he also asserts himself as native, taking a swig of cow's blood for spectacular effect. His description of the complex plays on contrasts with what the presumed viewer in the US and Canada takes as normal at the same time that it is shameless in its detailing of extravagance.

It is this brash confidence, exhibited as a teenager when he shamed Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien into a meeting about child labour or as an established humanitarian celebrity before the House of Commons Finance Committee during the scandal, that has been lauded; Craig has had schools named for him and been inducted into the Order of Canada. He epitomises what Daniel Coleman (2006) calls white civility, a key feature of the settler-colonial myth-making of the Canadian nation; he presents a tireless, muscular, straight masculinity that nonetheless exhibits compassion and care, and ironically, considering examples like the Cribs video, a model of selflessness. The paradox of the way the humanitarian post-racial sensibility reinforces white supremacy is revealed in his origin story: Craig was inspired to activism as a result of the compassion he felt for murdered labour activist Iqbal Masih, and his visit to South Asia was facilitated by guide and mentor, Alam Rahman, a Bangladeshi-Canadian human rights activist. Yet, the narrative reduces Masih to an object of pity, the suffering Pakistani child, while Rahman functions as a peripheral character in a narrative of Kielburger's white humanitarian self-making (Kielburger and Kielburger 2004).

Kielburger's performance of whiteness, as saviour figure, reflects the way in which saviourism masks structural racism within the social systems that perpetuate it (e.g., schooling, international development, Canadian media). It is significant that at a time when racism was prominent in public discourse due to the activism inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, accusations of racism within WE received little attention. While the CBC reported on the experience of racism shared by former WE employee Amanda Maitland (Merali 2020), the media avoided

further investigating the claims or demands articulated in a petition directed to the Kielburgers by AntiRacistWE (2020), a BIPOC-lead group of former employees. Similarly, while a number of Black WE Day speakers came forward to identify that they were not offered payment for their labour and knowledge-sharing by WE – in contrast to members of the Trudeau family and other white speakers – their experiences were not widely reported and did not prompt further investigation (Chisholm 2020; CityNews 2020). Further, accusations of corruption, abuse, and threats in WE Charity's Kenya office by a Kenyan employmee, that were abruptly recanted, were only reported in independent media (Brown 2020c). Similarly, reporting by Obiko Pearson, Bochove, and Herbling (2020) in December of 2020, detailing accusations of the use of corporal punishment at WE Charity supported schools in Kenya, voluntourists building the same wall over and over, or WE's accumulation of luxury properties in Ecuador, India, and Kenya did not produce public concern.

Like other corporations and NGOs in the weeks following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020, WE published a statement decrying racism, but the campaign organised by AntiRacistWE prompted them to make public statements more specific to their organisations. Significantly, however, the Kielburgers only acknowledged 'that structures and people are impacted by unconscious bias and that we are not immune to the multigenerational systemic racism inherent in our global community' (Kielburger and Kielburger 2020). The Kielburgers utilise the passive voice, only acknowledging that they are impacted within a global community in which there is some abstract systemic racism. The emphasis on 'unconscious bias,' with its presumption of a lack of intention or will (Institute 2020), side-steps some of the specific accusations about policy, administrative decisions, and the behaviour of Marc Kielburger and other senior staff that AntiRacistWE presented in their petition. It is not simply ironic that an organisation that claims to have been a leader in human rights for 25 years and that has been contracted to provide 'diversity and inclusion' training in Canadian schools exhibits structural racism within its organisation, practices, and indeed, responses to accusations of racism.

Yet, again, WE is not unique. Despite the long history of the critique of the development project as white supremacist and neo-imperial, as well as the structural racism within Northern-based humanitarian organisations (Goudge 2003; Kothari 2006), saviourism as an orientation continues to shape the way in which white/Northern people conceive of global relationships through humanitarianism, as ethic. During the same period as the scandal, multiple reports and op-eds circulated, emphasising how race and racism shape the Northern development industry, from the way in which it is designed in the interests of the North to the way organisational structures of NGOs reinforce white privilege, to the way BIPOC staff, and particularly local staff, are exploited and marginalised while nonetheless used to promote these organisations as leaders in inclusion and diversity (Anonymous 2020; Khan 2020; McVeigh 2020). These exposés of racism within humanitarian organisations need to be understood, I think, as reflecting the way saviourism, as an orientation, is fundamental to maintaining racial capitalism.

The frenzy to expose the Kielburgers as corrupt or WE Charity as untrue to the spirit and practice of development work ultimately reinforces saviourism as a way of making sense of global inequalities. Pheng Cheah (2006, 11) argues that the new cosmopolitanisms that have gained prominence in the early twenty-first century – in other words, global citizenship – promise a freedom that is 'inaccessible to the majority of the world's population, who inhabit the other side of the international division of labor' and are both 'generated by, and structurally dependent on, the active exploitation and impoverishment of the peripheral majorities.' They reflect not only the mentality of the saviour but saviourism as an orientation. Among the lessons of the #WEscandal is that global citizenship, as an initiative to extend loyalty from 'self, family, clan and nation … to see not only what they have in common with the rest of the world's people but … in a crucial sense "we" are all in it together' (Eglin 2020, 9–10), must not be beholden to the legacies of these cosmopolitanisms.

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