

MA dissertation for the MA Postcolonial Studies  
Goldsmith's College, University of London  
handed in on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Reg No: 33023558

## *White* charity

### *Whiteness* and myth in German charity advertisements

contents:

- Introduction	p. 2
- Chapter I: Whiteness	p. 6
- Chapter II: Barthes' Mythologies	p. 11
- Excursus	p. 21
- Chapter III: Analysis of charity advertisements	p. 23
- Conclusion	p. 31
- Bibliography	p. 33

acknowledgements

I want to thank Anne, Annika, Carolin, Daniel, Dominique, Erdem, Fenja, John, Michael, Oscar, Peter and the Stabi lunch community for inspirational ideas, helpful tips, proof reading, practical support and cheering up.

## Introduction

“Meanwhile, not nearly enough work is being done on those who hold the power and pull the strings.... Let the poor study themselves. They already know what is wrong with their lives and if you truly want to help them, the best you can do is give them a clearer idea of how their oppressors are working now and can be expected to work in the future.” (George 1976: 289, quoted in Hutnyk 1996: 12)

In Germany, as well as in other European countries, streets, tube and train stations are clustered with billboards full of different kind of advertisement. Especially around Christmas time about 50% of those ads are operated by Charity or Aid NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations), but even all year round, charity ads constitute a bigger percentage of billboard ads. Generally speaking, one perceives only few pictures of *black*<sup>1</sup> people in German advertisements. Except for a few highly sexualised or exoticised images of *black* people in commercial German billboard ads, charities basically have a monopole on portraying *black* people in public space.

Elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, I have offered an in depth visual analysis of these images. As this essay is to be taken as a continuation, I hereby shortly summarise the conclusions of the precedent essay to clarify the starting point for this analysis.

Out of 84 charity advertisements<sup>3</sup> I collected, 58 display *black* people. In these images, three major topics were recurring over and again: poverty, illness or invalidity, and flight. Other repetitious

---

1 I use the terms '*black*' and '*white*' as social and political constructions, which are bound to time and space; not as a description of skin colour (Dyer 1997: 49). I use italics to mark them as constructed. As my visual analysis, focused on *black* people defined as “with African roots and routes” (Gilroy 1995), I stay with this definition in this essay as well, in order not to confuse the reader. I am aware of the definition of the term '*Black*' with capital B, referring to a political category of resistance, including all people of colour “who because of their appearance fall victim to racisms or projections” (Philipp 2006: 11, translation TK). In large parts of my work, *Black* can be seen as analogue to *black*, as *whiteness* uses the same strategies towards its various Others, there are merely different stereotypes. With the term '*white*', I refer to all people who gain from the power of *whiteness* (definition follows).

I do not consider these categories as homogeneous, as they include hierarchies and are intertwined with other categories such as gender, class, sexuality, age and physical ability.

2 Kiesel (2006)

3 I deliberately focus in this whole essay on billboard advertisements. I do not want to confine the discussed charities to the position they represent in their ads, but discuss their ads as part of a indeed public discourse. In my opinion, the billboard ads are chiefly responsible for how the public perceives charities and alongside the whole topic of 'development cooperation'. For an in depth discourse analysis of fundamental publications of *Misereor* and *Brot für die Welt* I refer to Philipp (2006). While proportionally only very few people read publications or browse the websites of the charities, the ads reach daily millions of city dwellers. People who view them, cannot chose to see them, the images are rather forced upon the viewer. While one decides to watch TV, buy a magazine or listen to the radio, one cannot decide not to see the ads while out on the street. At the same time, the image is experienced in a short time sequence and the viewer mostly does not get the opportunity to look at details or read small letter inscriptions or titles. S/he rather doesn't concentrate completely on these pictures, as s/he is coming from and going to somewhere and has probably other things in her/his mind. Because of the high presence of these advertisements, they contribute to the establishment of a clean conscience of the entire German society, even for those who do not give donations. The two biggest players in charity billboard ads *Brot für die Welt* and *Misereor*, received in 2005 together donations of around 123 Mio Euro. That is 1,50 Euro per German per annum.

themes were the depiction of a) *black* people as natural or in a natural environment, b) *black* people as naked or with few clothes on, c) *black* people as passive, d) *black* people as needy and not being able to help themselves but d) dependent on the *white* subject/charity/donor, e) *black* people as inhabitants of a stone age: without technology, cities or complex systems, f) *black* people as grinning, g) *black* people as speechless, h) *black* people as anonymous collectivity (not as individual) and i) *black* people as producer of agricultural products.

As I could identify a general focus on deficiencies of *black* people, I argued that charities construct them as inferior and 'underdeveloped'. This constructed inferiority was furthermore reinforced by a preferable depiction of children<sup>4</sup>, a camera perspective that was in half of the cases chosen from an upward angle, and a choice in light and colours that created a rather dark atmosphere and thus highlighted misery. Additionally, as if being in a panopticon<sup>5</sup>, *black* people are exposed to the *white* gaze. Be it the '*black* kid as grinning' – which is often perceived as a positive exception – or rather the '*black* kid as picking up rice out of the mud', in either case s/he is fixed on rigid stereotypes. With Pieterse (1992) et al., I discussed the genealogies of these images and as a result concluded that charities on the one hand draw on stereotypes of colonial times as well as on racial theory and on the other hand use or help to create new stereotypes. However, in any case it is the charities and their designers who speak for, define and construct the identity of the represented *black* subject. In addition, it seems that their strategy follows the rule that their images remain on a humanitarian level and never include a political dimension. I concluded that through images charities are able to very subtlely communicate ideas “which had they been put in words would have been unacceptable” (van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2001: 1).

*White* people, on the contrary, are only depicted in three ads, twice as women consumers of fair trade products and once as *white* women demonstrating. *White* men are completely absent from all advertisements. However, as I will argue later, *white* people are always present through the superiority that is suggested in the images. That *black* and *white* people are never portrayed together in one image, confirms Pieterse's observation that the *white* imagery of *black* focuses on domination instead of dialogue (Pieterse 1992: 10).

The fact that *white* people are absent or – as I will argue later – *invisible* in these posters is not an obstacle but rather a reason to extend the analysis. Arguing with hooks (1989 quoted in McClintock 1995: 7f), Morrison (1995: 125, in Wollrad 2005: 123) and Spivak (1999: 1), it is necessary to not only analyse the representation of the Other<sup>6</sup>, but to deconstruct power in itself. Hence, in this essay, I will redirect the perspective onto the *white* subject. *Whiteness*, and not only *blackness*, has to be analysed as a racial construction in this context. My focus lies on the question of how the hegemony

4 Pieterse warns us that “[t]he hierarchy of age overlaps with and reinforces the hierarchy of race.” (Pieterse 1992: 171).

5 In this case the notion of being able to see without being seen is more important than the notion of having a centralised location of surveillance.

6 In the Lacanian definition: in the relation to the Other, the subject gains identity (Ashcroft et al 2000: 170). Hence, I understand 'othering' as “the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'” (Ashcroft et al 2000: 171).

of *whiteness* is accomplished, manifested and re-established through these very advertisements and which strategies are used to reach and to hide this goal at the same time. My hypothesis is, that a shift of perspective, from the *imagined* to the *imagining*, that means from the representations to the producers of the representations, is indeed very fruitful and opens up new spaces for political intervention.

I hereby draw on the *Critical Whiteness Theory*, which in the past two decades arose in the context of Gender Studies, Black Studies and Postcolonial Studies. While *Critical Whiteness Studies* managed to establish itself in the academic landscape of the United States, in Germany one could until recently hardly find any publications regarding this topic at all. Only in the last years, a monograph<sup>7</sup> and several anthologies<sup>8</sup> to *Whiteness/Weißsein*<sup>9</sup> in Germany have been published.

I comprehend the images of *black* people employed by charitable *white* German NGOs as a discourse and as part of a wider discourse.<sup>10</sup> A discourse on the 'Third World'<sup>11</sup>, on the concept of development and on Self and Other in a wider context. I understand discourse as a practise and as a space, which is limiting what is speakable, what is considered as truth and where knowledge is generated. Following Goudge (2003: 120), I believe that social as well as material inequalities are created and reflected in discourse. Here, I am not so much interested in how this discourse came into existence, but rather what truths are created and how it is yielding power relations (see Ziai 2004: 172f). Having analysed already the textual, respectively the visual level of this discourse, I consider the *Critical Whiteness Theorie(s)* as helpful to go beyond this first layer of interpretation. I appreciate the approach to focus more strongly on power and address issues of participation, profit and strategies. With Hall, I believe on the possibility of multiple readings of images. The analysis of charity ads with *whiteness* has to therefore be understood as one suggestion of interpretation.

---

7 Eske Wollrad (2005): *Weißsein im Widerspruch*

8 e.g. Eggers, Maureen Maisha et al (eds) (2005): *Masken, Mythen und Subjekte*; Tißberger, Martina et al (eds) (2006): *Weiß – Weißsein – Whiteness*, with earlier articles in Steyerl, Hito & Guitérrez Rodríguez, Encarnación (eds) (2003): *Spricht die Subaltern Deutsch?*, and cybernomads (2004): *The Black book*. I am aware of the pertinence of *black* German contributions to the topic in the last 25 years, namely May Ayim, Dagmar Schultz and Katharina Oguntoye, but locate the starting point of a wider interest of both *black* and *white* German authors – who are with very few exceptions women – in the last few years.

9 There is a discussion going on within the German discourse, which term to use best. While some authors (e.g. Walgenbach or Tißberger) stay with the American-English term *whiteness* as in their eyes there is no appropriate translation and the term *weißsein* can be understood as essentialising, others (e.g. Arndt) plead for a separate German term to point out the differences to the American situation (see Wollrad 2005: 48ff). Again others (e.g. Wollrad) who use the term *whiteness* when talking about the American context and the term *weißsein* when talking about Germany. It seems that the term *weißsein* has been established as the most acknowledged terminology. As I am writing in English, I will use the term *whiteness* in this essay. However, I am aware of the specific German situation (tabooing German colonialism, missing of Postcolonial Studies and Black Studies, taboo of term 'race';...).

10 The apparently beneficial discourses on aid have not to be seen as in a vacuum (Goudge 2003: 12), but embedded in a system of production of knowledge and meaning which transgresses boundaries of culture, politics, religion, law and media. It is important to clarify from which position charities talk. It is not only a privileged position, but charities have to be considered as an instance of morality within this privileged position.

11 I am not happy with the terms 'Third World' and 'First World', as they include hierarchies on the one hand and suggest homogeneous groups of countries. Due to the lack of alternatives, however, I use the terms in quotation to demonstrate that I question their concepts.

Following Dhawan and Castro Varela (2003: 280) I believe that a political localisation clarifies that the subject position of the author stands in direct correlation with the location from where s/he intervenes intellectually. Especially writing about such delicate topics as racism or *whiteness*, it is indispensable that I position myself and clarify my background.<sup>12</sup> I consider it a privilege and a difficulty to have to position myself. It is a privilege, because as a *white*, male, middle class, heterosexual author, I am usually not expected to speak about my background. Rather, it is widely not questioned that we (*white* males) speak and write about everything as if from an objective perspective. It is a difficulty, because unlike other authors, I can neither argue via my race nor via my gender that the topic of *whiteness* is important for me to approach because of my suppressed identity.<sup>13</sup> The only *white* man whose political localisation to *whiteness* I came across was Richard Dyer (1997), who also argues via the structural vicinity of homosexuals as oppressed to *black* people as oppressed.

Growing up in an almost exclusively *white* quarter of a West-German town, and being raised in a middle class, Christian environment, the “drip drip effect of racialised ideas of superiority and inferiority” (Goudge 2003: 42) strongly shaped my thinking and was a taboo at the same time. During my education, I only learned to recognise racism “in individual sets of meanness” and “never in invisible systems” (McIntosh 1997: 98). I profited unconsciously, and still profit – in so many cases still unconsciously – from the structural, material and psychological privileges of *whiteness* as well as masculinity. Having had – partly initiated through my parents – past involvements in *white* dominated 'development cooperation' and international youth exchange, backpacking experience in the 'Third World' and studies in anthropology, in short a left-wingish, liberal background, I was only reassured that 1) all the people are the same and 2) racism is a problem of others and not mine. Only in recent years through contact with *black* people and *black* writing, I (partly) acknowledged in which bleb I am living, how I myself am racist, from which power structures I am benefiting in my daily life and how I – alongside the *white* dominant society – manage to deny these very structures.

Keeping my position in mind, I argue from a political standpoint, from which all acknowledged injustice should be fought against because it is injustice.<sup>14</sup> In this sense I am following Wollrad (2005: 25) and regard this academic work not as intellectual stimulation, but rather as a contribution to a political fight for which the amelioration of living conditions of all and concerned and the attempt to destroy injustice are the goals.

The billboard advertisements of charities are on the one hand the major topic of this essay and were the original motivation to write it. On the other hand, they serve representatively as an example for the *white* liberal discourse. In order to analyse them with *whiteness*, I am discussing in the first

---

12 I understand this self-positioning not as something which is preceding this work. Instead, I consider it as an integral part of it, which justifies its length.

13 see Wollrad (2005: 182)

14 see Kappeler (1994: 77), in Wollrad (2005: 182)

chapter its concepts and characteristics and explain where I see the merits and the limits of the current *Critical Whiteness* debate. In chapter II, I extend this approach by depicting Roland Barthes' theory of *mythologies*. I relate it to the debate and demonstrate how his semiological method can be made fruitful as an analytical foundation to *whiteness*. A short excursus about post-colonial global politics and economy forms the transition to the last chapter, in which I am applying the theoretical results of the former chapters to my example of the charity ads.

## Chapter I: *Whiteness*

“...the subject is extremely difficult to talk about because many white people don't feel powerful or as they have privileges that others do not. It is sort of asking fish to notice water or birds to discuss air.” (Frances E. Kendall 2001<sup>15</sup>)

definition and characteristics of *whiteness*

To speak about *whiteness*, it first needs to be defined. Browsing through the books and articles of *Critical Whiteness Studies*, I realised that a whole range of different definitions is used. I understand *whiteness* first of all as an analytical category to examine power relationships. It is based on a racialised categorisation of the world whose initiating force it is at the same time (Wollrad 2005: 21). It considers itself normative, however disavowing the very fact. *Whiteness* is guaranteeing a subject status to people it considers *white* (Wollrad 2005: 52f). It has to be viewed as a flexible category, which was constructed by a political motivation, it has to be reconstructed and can be gained, lost or bought. As it is not a natural category, it carries the notion of becoming (dt. geworden) (Wollrad 2005: 37, 60, 80, 127, Arndt 2005b: 343, 351). *Whiteness* functions independently from self perception and beyond the institutional level (Arndt 2005b: 343). Wollrad (2005: 127) understands *whiteness* as a relational category which has no essence in itself. I agree with her that it takes shape in contrast to non-whites and has to be seen in relation to other analytical categories such as gender, class and sexuality. However, I would argue with Frankenberg (1997: 632, italics in original) that “*whiteness* does have content inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself.” A particular characteristic of *whiteness* is that it is widely not viewed as a relevant category at all or is simply perceived as a-paradigmatic (Wollrad 2005: 125 et al). The analysis of *whiteness* has to therefore pay increased attention to the invisible normality which *whiteness* is creating (Arndt 2005a: 27, Arndt 2005b: 346). The last key characteristic of my

---

15 <http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/beginnings/Kendall.htm>

definition of *whiteness* is that it is a relatively privileged location (Wollrad 2005: 127). Relatively, in the sense that there is to be considered a hierarchical social strata within the category *white*, with hegemonic, subordinated, marginal and complicit *whitenesses*.<sup>16</sup> *White* privilege yields “certain identities, attitudes and points of view” (Frankenberg 1996a: 56, quoted in Wollrad 2005: 127, translation TK) and includes a wide range of immaterial as well as material advantages. Wollrad's (2005: 38ff) distinction between *whiteness as something* (power or dominance) and *whiteness as somebody* (ambivalent *white* identity) includes not only the totality of the *white* system of power – which is often difficult to grasp – but simultaneously redirects the view to the *white* subject as profiting political actor.<sup>17</sup> The power of *whiteness* is created and manifested through an interplay between individual daily life of the *white* subject and a wider cultural, legal, political, economical and social context of the *white* collective. In contrast to the hegemonic research about racism in Germany where both, the concept of bodies as social construction and the occupation with responsible perpetrators of racism is erased<sup>18</sup>, *Critical Whiteness Theory* clearly names responsible perpetrators of social inequalities: the *white* subject.

the *white* subject<sup>19</sup>

*White* people are setting standards of humanity<sup>20</sup> and as they see themselves as the apex of 'civilisation', they consider *white* as the measurement of what is human (Goudge 2003: 49). *White* people are defining normality and consider themselves neutral at the same time (McIntosh 292f). They are experiencing and portraying themselves and the people of their 'race' as individual and normal and meanwhile fix the rest of the world as their property and make it immobile (Arndt 2005b: 340). Although they presuppose a *white* superiority (Wollrad 2005: 119, Goudge 2003: 19), they declare all people as equal and through the filter of colour-blindness<sup>21</sup> are unable to see particularities and power differences (Arndt 2005b: 340, Goudge 2003: 20, 49), as well as unable to name causes and consequences of processes of racialisation (El Tayeb 2005: 8). *White* people deny

16 Transferring Bob Connell's (2005: 77ff) idea of the multiplicity of *masculinities* to the concept of *whiteness*. He argues that not all men fit in the category of *hegemonic masculinity*, but still enjoy material and immaterial privileges through the *partriarchal dividend*.

17 Several authors (Wollrad 2005: 34, 84; Morrison 1995: 74, Fanon 1982: 60, 224, Barthes 2000: 155, Sandoval 1997: 89, 98f) consider that also the *white* subject is fixed in the racialised system and suffers because of hierarchies. I am aware of this fact, however I would regard it as extremely dangerous to talk about *white* disadvantages of the system without mentioning the wages of *whiteness*. This would come close to the psychoanalytical strategy of *positioning oneself as the victim*. Although I understand the argument that *white* people as well would have an interest in abolishing the rigid system, I hereby focus on the *white* subject as gaining through *whiteness*.

18 Wollrad (2005: 117-124) reviews that *white* German research about racism tried with the *cultural turn* to replace the focus on race with the focus on culture. It contributed at the same time to the process of making *white* power invisible.

19 I turned the decision over in my mind, whether to use the term '*white* people' or the term 'we'. By using the term 'we', I would impose a notion of delinquency on all readers which is not intentional. However, using the term '*white* people', it may seem that I distance myself from this group and objectify my own position as researcher. This is not the aim.

20 Standards by which *white* people are bound to succeed and others are bound to fail.

21 Colour blindness is understood in dominant German discourse as anti-racist (El Tayeb 2005: 8). Morrison argues that ignoring race is understood as graceful (in Arndt 2005b: 347).

their privileges and their position of power and disavow their history and involvement in colonialism, imperialism and neo-imperialism (Nghì Ha 2005: 105, Arndt 2005b: 25, Wollrad 2005: 126) and their material as well as their psychological dependency on the Other (Tißberger 2006: 88). At the same time, they consider themselves as the only subject of history and have been taught to not see themselves as oppressor (McIntosh 292). Despite all that, *white* people position themselves as powerless victims (Goudge 2003: 50).

privileges

Resulting from this particular position, *white* people profit from a whole range of privileges. Peggy McIntosh was addressing this topic for the first time in 1988. She listed 46 *white* “unearned assets” (McIntosh 1997: 291), which she encountered in her daily life. This list has since then been extended by many authors. It includes practical and public as well as psychological privileges, material as well as immaterial ones.<sup>22</sup> I want to keep in mind two important aspects of the discussion around privileges. First, McIntosh distinguishes between two kinds of privileges. One kind “one would want for everybody in a just society [... and which] make [one] feel at home in the world” and the other kind which “give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive [... and which allow one] to escape penalties or dangers which others suffer” (McIntosh 1997: 295). I consider this distinction important, especially as I have the impression that many authors in *Critical Whiteness Studies* refer to privileges only according to McIntosh's first definition. Second, Tißberger argues that privileges have the function in the system of *whiteness* to define what is considered 'normal': “[T]hose who do not profit from them [the privileges] appear as outside the norm. Their placement outside the norm renders them as 'different'. The difference of those outside the norm is necessary to maintain the normality inside; in other words, the term 'normality' would not make sense without conceptions of what is 'not normal' or of ab-normality” (Tißberger 2006: 87).

Whereto with the concept of *whiteness*?

In the US American *Critical Whiteness Studies*, two fractions can be distinguished. “The new abolitionists” on the one hand, and the “Critical Pedagogues” on the other (Wollrad 2005: 38f). While the former, represented most renownedly through Noel Ignatiev and David Roedinger takes side for a *materialistic* approach. Their goal is the abolishment of *whiteness*. The latter's approach is considered *ethnographic*. All the authors I was quoting so far consider themselves to be “Critical Pedagogues”. Following Wollrad (2005: 40, translation TK) their goal is “to mark whiteness in order to take away the status of being 'aparadigmatic'. By acknowledging and positioning whiteness as integral component of dynamics of racialisation, it cannot act any more as the signature for

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed list see McIntosh (1997: 293/4), Wollrad (2005: 193/4).



humanity as such.” Through strategies of marking, deconstructing, de-essentialising, historicising and analysing *whiteness*, its power, its hegemony and the social inequalities which it creates are deliberately challenged (Piesche 2005: 16f). Wollrad (2005: 21, translation TK) considers the “decentralisation of whiteness a political act of criticising relationships of dominance.”

#### focus of *Critical Whiteness Studies*

The *Critical Whiteness Studies* are not to be considered as one faculty in the academic landscape. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary approach and scholars from a wide range of Humanities and Social Sciences are involved in this field. Accordingly, different methodologies are used – with discourse analysis and historiography as the most prominent, while much significance is attributed to *Black* knowledge production (Wollrad 2005: 33, 119). Another characteristic is the interest in subjective experiences. One focus of study is the construction of bodies, another is the question how *white* people see Self and Other. The emphasis so far is laid on the historical production of becoming *white*, where inclusions and exclusions of individuals or groups are examined. In general, I would say, the focus on the individual identity level takes turns with the focus on legal, social or political issues of a collective on a national level. Both, however have a strong focus on daily issues. In the German context, an astonishing high proportion of the writing about *Critical Whiteness* are about academic faculties and how the power of *whiteness* is buttressed and manifested through knowledge production in the academia, which thus became a “space of violence” – e.g. through silencing *Black* knowledge (Kilomba 2005: 81).

#### critique of *Critical Whiteness Studies*

The main achievement of *Critical Whiteness Studies*, is in my opinion the shift from 'racism as a discussion on *white* extremists or *black* people' – what Arndt (2005b: 348) refers to as the “isolation of the problem” – to the whole of the *white* society. To acknowledge that *whiteness* is denied out of a “putative liberal attitude” (Arndt 2005a: 27, translation TK) and that “these myths of denial” are “not more innocuous than those of racist confessions” (Arndt 2005b: 340, translation TK) opens up the political space to clearly name the various kinds of violences and responsibilities for it. According to Tißberger (2006: 91) and El Tayeb (2005: 7f), it is the liberal dominant culture itself who creates a racist atmosphere in Germany and who prohibits the relativisation of the dominant position.<sup>23</sup>

At present, the *Critical Whiteness Studies* however, show some deficits. I believe that the field where they are currently applied is too narrow and that they can be made fruitful on a larger level. First, global issues are not addressed. With the exception of topics of migration, authors of *Critical Whiteness Studies* usually remain with their writing within national boundaries. Hence, topics such

<sup>23</sup> see colour blindness

as international economics or politics, or issues such as 'development' or tourism, which I consider highly structured by racialised ideas, are missing on the agenda. Secondly, on a related issue, not enough attention is drawn to material benefits of *whiteness*. Due to the strong focus on identities – whose importance I do not want to neglect – issues such as the global distribution of wealth are not addressed. Our present day situation where the poorest countries are predominantly inhabited by *black* people and the richest countries predominantly by *white* people (Goudge 2003: 24) might seem too obvious to mention. However, I would argue that it is indeed necessary to put discussions about '*whiteness* and capitalism' as well as '*whiteness* and neo-liberalism' on the agenda.<sup>24</sup> Not talking about these relationships means to disavow that racism “is the preeminent instrument for exploitation” (Tißberger 2006: 91). Third and last, I am missing a deeper structural analysis of how *white* power is constituted. Authors of *Critical Whiteness Studies* focus mainly on the historical roots of knowledge and power constellations. Issues of e.g. the invisibility of *whiteness* or its constructed neutrality are addressed, but it is not explained how they are achieved and maintained. Merely a few writers use a psychoanalytical approach to the topic in order to give more elaborate explanations.

#### *whiteness* and psychoanalysis

Tißberger and Kilomba are the most prominent representatives of the psychoanalytical approach towards *whiteness* in Germany. They mainly draw on theories and writings of Kristeva, Fanon, McClintock, Gilman and Butler. Analysing *whiteness*, they focus on six psychological strategies how *white* people deal with their situation as the dominant group.

First, the strategy of *denial*. *White* behaviours that contribute to power differences, power differences as such (“myth of sameness”<sup>25</sup>) and privileges which go along are denied in order to not let them appear as aggression (Tißberger 2006: 91). Second, the *abjection*, which according to McClintock (1995: 71) “marks the border of the Self”: What is not considered 'normal' but impure has to be expunged (Kristeva, in Tißberger 2006: 89). Thus, the space of normality is constructed. Third, the *projection* of desires, fears or own problems onto the Other stabilizes the system and “serves the *white* subject's material and psychic well-being” (Tißberger 2006: 94). Four, *white* people fantasise about the Other and as they have the power of representation make themselves believe that their *fantasies* are “true, valid, authentic, authoritative” (Kilomba 2005: 81). Five, through denying the own *white* participation in the production and profit of power relations and through asserting 'negative' or weak aspects of the Self onto the Other *whiteness* is able to *position itself as a victim* of the colonial system (Kilomba 2005: 80, Goudge 2003: 50). Six, however at the same time, *white* people use the strategy of *blaming the victim*: e.g. when the Other addresses the injustice of the system, s/he is considered as hypersensitive and too emotional (Arndt 2005b: 347,

---

24 Merely the journal *iz3w* include these topics, they however do not find their way into the *Critical Whiteness Studies*.

25 bell hooks (quoted in Arndt 2005b: 347)

Kilomba 2005: 82f). Together, these strategies allow the “*white* subject to look at itself as morally ideal, correct, virtuous, honest, democratic, impartial” (Kilomba 2005: 80).

## Chapter II: Barthes' Mythologies

“The literal meaning of myth is not to reflect an objective world view; in fact it is expressed how the human comprehends himself in his world.” (Rudolf Karl Bultmann 1941: 22, translation TK)

In the last chapter, I criticised *Critical Whiteness Studies* as concentrating solely on genealogies and discourse analysis and not examining structures that underlie *whiteness*. Some authors mention a “grammar” (Wollrad 2005: 19) or a “pattern” (Goudge 2003: 20), but do not point out how it can be analysed and deconstructed. Roland Barthes offers a structural analysis of myth as a tool of production, conservation and manifestation of power, which is used by dominant groups. One has not to believe in all principles of structuralism to consider (parts of) his theory helpful for the analysis of *whiteness*. I therefore do not consider his theory of myth as a rigid system, but as an auxiliary tool.

The essays which Barthes collected in his book “*Mythologies*” (1957, first English translation in 1972) originate from a series of articles he published between 1954 and 1956. Discussing various myths of French daily life in the first part of the book, he develops a methodology how to deal with myths in general in his last chapter “*Myth today*”. I came across Barthes during my MA in Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmith's College in London. Although I found him really fascinating, I forgot about him again until I read a short quotation about myths in Arndt (2005b: 340). His theory deals with strategies of dominant societies to establish an unquestioned hegemony. I therefore consider his mythology a very fruitful approach in order to understand and deconstruct the way *whiteness* is exercising power. Below, I am outlining the main ideas of Barthes' theory.

Barthes starts with defining that “myth is a type of speech” (Barthes 2000, 109)<sup>26</sup>, it “is a type of speech chosen by history” (110). All kinds of things could be a myth. Myths carry a message and consist of written or pictorial forms and can be analysed with semiology. Barthes draws on the theory of semiology of his countryman de Saussure, who developed it a few decades earlier while he was studying linguistic systems. However, according to Barthes it is not enough to simply transfer the methods of formal science semiology from linguistics to mythology, but instead we

---

26 if not stated differently, all page numbers in this chapter refer to Barthes (2000)

have to consider ideology<sup>27</sup>- as a historical science: because mythology “studies ideas-in-forms” (112).

Saussure's method of semiology is concerned with the relation between two terms: the *signifier* and the *signified*<sup>28</sup>, while the former is expressing the latter. The third term, the *sign*, “is the associate total of the first two terms” (113). A linguistic example might help to clarify the relation: The *signifier* would be the acoustic image, e.g. the sound 'pen'. It is by definition empty. The *signified* would be the concept, in this case the 'idea of a tool to write'. Only together, they constitute the *sign* – the word 'pen' (113). Only when the *signifier* carries the *meaning* of the *signified*, we can speak about the *sign*, which is then full as it has *meaning*. In this example, that means that the acoustic image does not mean anything in itself until the *concept* is assigned to it.

Myth as “a second-order semiological system” (114), follows the same pattern as language, which Barthes considers a “first-order semiological system”. The two systems are interlinked as in myth the full *sign* of the first-order systems constitutes the *signifier* of the new system. In the graph, 1.-3. relate to de Saussure's system of language; I.-III. to Barthes' system of myth. In order not to confuse the terminology of the two systems, he names the *signifier* of the mythological system *form*, the term *signified* changes to *concept* and the *sign* to *signification*.

1. signifier	2. signified
3. sign (meaning) = I. signifier (form)	II. signified (concept)
III. sign (signification)	

Transferring this scheme to the subject of *whiteness* can have the following result. The *signifier* of the first-order system is the *colour black*. The *signified* would be an idea of categorisation that classifies people according to their skin colour, hence a *racialisation*. As “an associate total” of the two, I consider the *racialised black subject* as the *sign*.

27 Barthes is not defining the term ideology clearly. I consider his vague use of terms as one of the greatest deficits of his study. Following Ziai (2004: 70ff) I read Barthes' notion of ideology as a fixed world view that rests upon fixed assumptions. It operates universalising, naturalising, rationalising and distorting (content as well as language) and is at the same time not aware of its own constructedness, particularity and involvement in power structures. Barthes examines the bourgeois ideology. I however argue that his methodology is transferable to other systems of domination, including *whiteness*.

28 Barthes wrote these essays in his early writing period, which is considered strictly structuralist. He acts on the assumption of naturalness of phenomena, thinks in binary oppositions and considers truth as objective. As a post-structuralist later on, he changed some of his viewpoints.

Barthes relies in his theory on a transcendental *signified* which has a constant, universal meaning. I consider it important however, to acknowledge meaning as constructed and to take its historicity into account. As *Critical Whiteness Studies* focuses on the process of *becoming* and on genealogies of knowledge, it is justified to transfer Barthes concept to *whiteness* while emanating from a historically constructed *signified*.

Barthes' central observation is that when the meaningful *sign* of the first-order system “becomes form, the *meaning* leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. There is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from *meaning* to *form*, from the linguistic *sign* to the mythical *signifier*” (117). The *form* can therefore not be a symbol.<sup>29</sup> Summarising this process, Barthes argues that “the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth” (114).<sup>30</sup>

Barthes uses an example to demonstrate how the two systems are interlinked. He analyses the image of a 'young black man in French uniform who is saluting' and considers this image as *meaning*. Simultaneously, the image signifies “that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag” (116). Here, one has to consider the second-order system: “there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a *signified* (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the *signified* through the signifier” (116). Barthes continues that “the essential point in all this is that the form does not suppress the *meaning*, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal. [...] The form of myth is not a symbol: the Negro who salutes is not the symbol of the French Empire: he has too much presence, he appears as a rich, fully experienced, spontaneous, innocent, indisputable image. But at the same time this presence is tamed, put at a distance, made almost transparent; it recedes a little, it becomes the accomplice of a *concept* which comes to it fully armed, French imperialism: once made use of, it becomes artificial” (118).

Returning to *whiteness*, the *sign* of the first system– the *racialised black subject* – carries *meaning*. Emptied by becoming *form*, it results in the *de-historicised, racialised black subject*. Hence, the *form* (perceived as *black subject*) has strong similarities to the first-order *signifier* (*black*) as it is deprived of its meaning, it is impoverished. In the second-order system of this example, I suggest to use ***white superiority***, which is based on a hierarchical order, as the *concept*.<sup>31</sup> The outcome is

---

29 an object that carries as meaning in itself

30 The foundation of Barthes' theory is the division of language into a *language-object* and a *metalanguage*. He defines that the *language-object* is original and myth can get “hold of it in order to build its system” (115). Myth, however, is using a *metalanguage*, “in which one talks about the first” (115).

I criticise this division and argue with Foucault, that all phenomena, including language, are constructed. While Barthes argues that everything can become mythified, Foucault would argue that everything is myth. (see Bendix 2006). In my opinion it is possible to still use Barthes' theory, although I am not in accord with his definition of language.

31 The idea to use ***white superiority*** as a *concept* derives on the one hand from the results of the visual analysis of charity images, and on the other hand from reading about *whiteness* in general. In either example, issues of superiority and inferiority play a major role. As Barthes argues that a mythologist has to be able to name *concepts* in order to decipher a myth (see below), I propose for the use of ***white superiority*** as a *concept* in this model.

In my eyes, there is an important difference to note between the nature of the *concept* and the nature of the *signified*. In the linguistic system, the *signified* is associated haphazardly with the *signifier*. In myth however, an intentional

finally a *signification*, which is a *de-historicised, racialised, inferior, black subject*. As the de-historisation nullifies the process of racialisation, what is eventually left for the viewer to perceive<sup>32</sup> is the *inferior black subject*.

Barthes is discussing three major effects which myths achieve: 1. the naturalisation of the *concept*, 2. the erasing of the dominant name and 3. the de-politisation.

### 1. naturalisation

Unlike what one might first suggest, myth is not hiding anything. Rather, the *concept*, taking over the *form*, distorts “what is full, the meaning” (122). Its history is deprived. This leads to a paradoxical situation “in the mythical signifier: its form is empty but present, its meaning is absent but full” (124). This duplicity (full *meaning* + empty *form*) of the *signifier* is finally responsible for how the *signification* is perceived, namely as a notification or a statement of fact. In my example, neither the process of racialisation nor the process of de-historisation is visible in the *signification*. The inferiority of *blackness* seems as a fact and not as a product of ideology. The intention, by which the myth is defined, is “frozen, purified, *made absent* by [its] literal sense” (124, italics in original). The fact makes the intention seem innocent. The strength of the myth is visible here, as it is playing on the analogy between the two components of the mythical *signifier*: the *meaning* and - the always partly motivated - *form*.

Concentrating on the role of the mythologist, Barthes proposes tools how to decipher a myth. Her or his goal would be to understand the distortion. Understanding that myth is not hiding something, but that it is an inflexion, it is possible to unfold its *concept*. Focusing on the mythical *signifier* as a whole (*meaning* + *form*) one is able “to connect a mythical schema to a general history, to explain how it corresponds to the interests of a definite society, in short to pass from semiology to ideology” (128f).

In a first-order semiological system, the “intention of the myth is too obscure to be efficacious, or it is too clear to be believed”, in a second-order system, however, myth is able “to escape this dilemma: driven to either unveil or liquidate the *concept*, it will naturalize it” (129). This transformation from history to nature is according to Barthes of central importance. The myth-

---

assignment is the case as hierarchies have to be transported.

32 Barthes notes here that the *concept* appeals to a certain audience and has to be appropriated by the reader/listener. I appreciate this acknowledgement of historical and societal circumstances and the negation of the existence of universal myths. As Barthes is considering historicity, in this case, he can be seen as a post-structuralist.

A very interesting question, which Barthes is not answering is the question why readers of a myth are associating a *concept* with a *form*. In my opinion, the *concept* needs driving forces behind it to define, or to create a link between a *form* and the *concept* in the first place.

I consider methods of analysing repetitions in a discourse through discourse analysis and becoming aware of genealogies important approaches to answer this question. Through historicising *whiteness* it becomes clear that the myth of *white superiority* is a historical product of the last centuries. People around the world learned to appropriate it, as it is not understood in itself.

consumers therefore understand the intention of the *concept* as factual and without any “interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is not read as a motive, but as a reason” (129). Back to the example of French imperialism, Barthes explains that “everything happens as if the picture [of the young black soldier] *naturally* conjured up the *concept* [French imperialism], as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the *signified*: the myth exists from the precise moment when French imperialism achieves the natural state” (129f, italics in original).

The trick of naturalisation is not necessarily meant to leave a lasting impression. Barthes assumes that its action is “stronger than the rational explanations which may later belie it” (130). The represented causality is artificial or contingent, but buttressed by its naturalisation. Myth is not considered innocent speech because it tries to hide motives and intentions, but because they are made to appear natural.

What is to be remarked here, is that first of all, myth is motivated. According to Barthes, myth is not developing accidentally, but because of an intention.<sup>33</sup> *Whiteness* has to be seen from this perspective, too. However, if the myth of ***white superiority*** would clearly state its aims, it would be too easy to see through it and both, oppressed and oppressor, would unmask it rapidly. Instead, *whiteness* is made invisible by transforming its intention into a fact. Practically speaking, it pictures an assumed historically achieved supremacy – e.g. economic-political dominance – as a natural characteristic of *white* superiority<sup>34</sup>. The signifier of *black* inferiority seems to naturally conjure up ***white superiority***, it seems to buttress the concept. *Whiteness* as an interpretation of the world, which entails a distribution of privileges and power, manages through myth to appear as a natural system.

As Barthes described, *whiteness* builds its power on the direct impact of myth, as it is rationally not difficult to dismantle it later on. I would argue, however, that in addition it is the constant repetition which makes one believe the myth, the so called “drip drip effect” (Goudge 2003: 42).

## 2. erasing of the name

Barthes is analysing the dominant position of the bourgeoisie in the French society. He observes that while it is quite easy to name its role and power in the economical sphere, the bourgeoisie has difficulties acknowledging itself as political fact. However, “[a]s an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation, from economic man to mental man” (138). Barthes considers this invisibility a very important characteristic of dominant positions and argues that myth is a central tool in order to reach it. With

---

33 I understand the term 'intention' not as something, can be directly attributed to one person. It is therefore not subjective. Rather, I consider statements as intentional that follow one direction.

34 The dominant perception of European history as one continuous line from Ancient Greece to the European Union for example, buttress the idea of natural ***white superiority***.

this background, I argue that *whiteness* behaves structurally the same way. While the economic power is clearly visible and simultaneously reason for pride and justification for superiority, playing a dominant role in post-colonial global politics is hardly admitted by *white* governments. On the ideological level, *white* power simply disappears. In particular, links between the economical or political sphere and the ideological one are silenced or strictly denied (e.g. racism as instrument for exploitation).

Barthes discusses that the power of the bourgeois social class is made invisible. I argue that *whiteness* can be seen analogue. Both names disappear. The dominant culture leaves no space for another morality, another art or another culture. Ideologically, so Barthes, all other groups or classes in society have to borrow from the dominant class. This allows the dominant ideology to make itself appear as universal. Barthes continues that it “can therefore spread over everything and in so doing lose its name without risk: no one here will throw this name of bourgeois [or *white*] back at it” (139). I would argue that the erasing of the name *whiteness* achieved, as a result, that it is harder to denominate actors and to allocate responsibilities. One example of this phenomenon is that racism is usually not discussed as a specific *white* problem, but in the context of universal xenophobia. Another example would be that *white* people are not accused for institutional racism as they are not considered responsible for the (natural) system. Following Barthes, the anonymity of power plays an important role in the (inter)national “unwritten norms of interrelationship” (140). *Whiteness* is thereby able to peacefully live neutralised without attracting attention from intellectuals or resistance from oppositionals.

Barthes argues that “the further the bourgeois class propagates its representations, the more naturalized they become. [...] It is therefore by penetrating the intermediate classes that the bourgeois ideology can most surely lose its name” (140). Hence, examining representations through which *whiteness* manifests itself is extremely important as this process of trying to get rid of its name is the central process of the dominant class in transforming (historic) reality into a (natural) image.

### 3. de-politisation

Barthes' conclusion that myth has primarily de-politicising qualities is an extremely important cognition for the analysis of *whiteness*. With the *de-historicised, racialised, inferior, black subject* as *signification*, the myth of ***white superiority*** simply states facts instead of giving genealogies. Barthes explains: “In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all the dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it has no depth, [...] things appear to mean something in themselves”



(143). The power of *whiteness* is based on the connection of visual characteristics (e.g. skin colour) with an ideological system of hierarchical classifications (e.g. racialisation). However, through the process of making the ideological level invisible, the message that *white* racial superiority is natural remains. To reach this goal, *whiteness* is not only de-politicising and de-historicising, but has to essentialise to a high degree. This is achieved for example through stereotypisation.

Barthes argues that only the oppressor is able to use myth to de-politicise.<sup>35</sup> The oppressed have no possibility to naturalise their history through myth as they do not have the means to implement it. This means that it is not important to have access to *metalanguage*, what Barthes considers a pre-condition, but instead to have access to resources to diffuse myths through discourse. I would argue therefore that the oppressed could have myths, just not the power to circulate them.<sup>36</sup> Yet, I agree with Barthes on another difference why myth is rather utilised by the dominant group: the oppressed are not aiming at an eternalisation of the as-is-state, but rather have an interest in its transformation. *Whiteness* is able to use myth, as it has an interest in portraying society and international order as immobile and eternalise present power relations.

### ***rhetorical forms***

Barthes outlined ***rhetorical forms***, which he considered important tools of myth. Sandoval compares them to Fanon's *methodology of the oppressed* and calls these forms together the “rhetoric of supremacy”<sup>37</sup> (Sandoval 1997: 86). A common strategy of these rhetorical figures is the transformation of history into essences. They make the dominant subject generate and accept “a multilevel, profound alienation-in-consciousness as a natural state of being” (Sandoval 1997: 96). Their goal is the immobilisation of the world. In order to reach it, however, “they must suggest and mimic an universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions” (155). Another goal of myth is that all humans should recognise themselves in images that have been beforehand fixed and rigidified by myth itself. *Whiteness* with its claim to universality shares these defined goals. As *whiteness* builds on a system of racialised categorisation and power relations and as it focuses on essences, Barthes' ***rhetorical forms*** can be applied to its analysis.

---

35 His argument is based on the distinction of *language object* and *metalanguage*, as according to him the oppressed have no access to *metalanguage*. As I disagree with this distinction and consider both kind of languages as constructed, I modify the argument.

36 see also Amin (1989: 104)

37 Sandoval compares Barthes and Fanon and realises that they have a lot in common. She supposes that Barthes must have known Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask*, since he wrote his *Mythologies* seven years later (Sandoval 1997: 106 footnote 12). Fanon focuses more strongly on the psychological consequences of colonialism on the colonised; whereas Barthes concentrates on the strategies of the dominant colonising society. I consider Fanon highly important for both the development of Postcolonial Studies and *Critical Whiteness Studies*. However, as in Postcolonial Studies, Fanon is frequently referenced and Barthes is widely unknown (Sandoval 1997: 96), and especially as I purposely study the strategies of the dominant society, I set my focus in this work on Barthes' *Mythologies*. I agree with Sandoval, calling Barthes one of the masterminds of *Critical Whiteness Studies* (Sandoval 1997: 96f).

First, *the inoculation*. This figure is a protection “against invasion by difference” (Sandoval 1997: 88). It functions through “admitting the accidental evil” within the dominant group, and thereby “conceal[ing] its principal evil. One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil” (150). Sandoval adds that the inoculation works homeopathically. According to Arndt (2004: 3), through this figure, difference is acknowledged in order not to have to question *whiteness* as a whole. She argues that “inoculation manifests itself in the so called “colour blindness”, which is built on the tendency that Whites neither notice their White cultural identity, nor reflect or mark it” (Arndt 2004: 3, translation TK).

Second, *the privation of History*. “Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates” (151). Myth is not questioning the root or the genealogy of its content, but rather portrays it as eternal. According to Sandoval the estrangement from history “deprives (Western) consciousness of any responsibility for what has and will become”, it creates and even encourages a “passivity-in-consciousness” (Sandoval 1997: 89). This passivity prevents the dominant subject to recognise her/his own ability of intervention and therefore de-politicises her/him.

With *whiteness*, the *white* history of dominance and its present power position is neglected and a neutral view of history free of power relations is constructed. Simultaneously, the Other is deprived of her/his own history. Through this privation of history, *whiteness* achieves therefore a naturalisation and through the depersonalisation diverts attention from actors. With a quote from British Prime Minister Blair, Goudge demonstrates both aspects: “These forces [modernisation] driving the future do not stop at national boundaries. Do not respect tradition. They wait for no one and no nation. They are universal” (Blair 1999, quoted in Goudge 2003: 164).

Third, *identification* is the reduction of all Otherness to sameness. Where the Other cannot be denied or ignored, the dominant society tries to imagine her/him as same. Barthes however regards the strategy of exoticising as an emergency strategy when this reduction is not possible: “The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home” (152). Through exoticism, a location for the dominant imagination is created. Simultaneously, this *rhetorical form* permits the dominant “subject to situate and “identify” itself as living at the center and best of all that yet is” (Sandoval 1997: 91).

I would argue that exoticising is a common strategy of *whiteness*. As a result it constructs a *white* centre with various peripheries around it, in which for example *black* people find themselves represented as objects. However, with the form of identification, Barthes goes one step further than simply discussing exoticism. This form implies a constant rearrangement of the imagined locations of centre and periphery through strategies of assimilation and rejectionism. Not to forget, however, is that *whiteness* keeps the power to decide with which strategy to encounter the Other.

Four, *tautology* is the definition of “like by like” (152), e.g. “History is History” or “Truth is Truth” (Sandoval 1997: 92). Barthes argues that this strategy is commonly used in emotional situations of

crisis, e.g. fear, anger and sadness, in which the dominant society is lacking explanations. It is perceived as containing causality, whereby meaning is merely frozen into place. This strategy, however, has to “take refuge behind the argument of authority” (153).

Products of historical events are made invisible through *whiteness*, thus causal explanations disappear or are reduced. Here, Barthes' division of myth into the first-order system and the second-order system comes into play again. While in my previous example, the *concept (white superiority)* is made absent, a characteristic of the signifier (*black*) is explained with its *signified* (racialisation). Concluding, *black* people are poor because they are categorised as *black*; or *white* people say the truth because they are categorised as *white*.<sup>38</sup> The authority Barthes talks about, is produced in the case of *whiteness* through an establishment of a pseudo-objective science as well as through the dominant discourse.

Five, *neither-norism*, is used as a ***rhetorical form*** to move between two opposites and reject both at the same time. “[R]eality is first reduced to analogues; then it is weighed, finally, equality having been ascertained, it is got rid of” (153). The effect of this strategy is an activation of an “independent “neutrality” in consciousness” (Sandoval 1997: 92), as well as an immobilization of values, of life and of destiny: “a final equilibrium [...where] one no longer needs to choose, but only to endorse” (153). Sandoval concludes that an apparently higher moral stance results as a consequence. Through the subject's seeming neutrality the dominant order is manifested and supported.

Barthes explains with this ***rhetorical form*** one way through which *whiteness* achieves the neutral stance that so many writers comment on. Practically, this form is often applied through the strategy of silence. By not tying oneself down to one position *white* people are able to construct themselves as morally neutral and of higher morality. Wollrad (2005: 178f, translation TK) argues that through this “retentiveness – gladly constructed as abandonment of power – power is also reconstituted.” Silence as “aggressive pattern of refusal” (Arndt 2005b: 347) leads ethically as well as politically to an approval – and in the case of *whiteness* as well to the profit – of unequal power relations. Finally, *neither-norism* is a tool to de-politicise people, to render them passive.

Six, *the quantification of quality*. With this figure, myth is able to economise intelligence through the reduction of quality to quantity. Thus, reality is understood more cheaply. Values or even reality itself are judged “according to the quantity of effects produced [... which] are understood to be measure, degree, depth, and magnitude of goodness” (Sandoval 1997: 92f).

Barthes as well as Sandoval keep their explanations for this ***rhetorical form*** quite short, so I have difficulties to transfer it to *whiteness*. In my eyes, *whiteness* developed in a strong relation to capitalism. Hence, it adopted the values of *higher, further, faster* and uses them as units of measurement and as norms at the same time. Many characteristics which *whiteness* defines as different are therefore measured by these criteria of quantification.

---

38 Kant's phrase “The reason, to presume Nigger and Whites as basic races, is evident in itself” (quoted in Wollrad 2005: 19), is a prominent example of such a tautology.

Seven, equivalent to the tautology, *the statement of fact* is directed towards “a self-evident appearance of eternity” (154f). It focuses on the essence of the dominant ideology: on “universalism, [on] the refusal of any explanation, [and on] an unalterable hierarchy of the world” (154). The use of proverbs is a common form of this figure; its foundation is common sense. Consequently, it represents the reality of the dominant subject as the only existing reality and therefore encourages her/him to speak with certainty. This speech appears as “the most innocuous, innocent, and straightforward containers for common sense, [it however] contain[s] all the force of supremacism (Sandoval 1997: 94).

In this last *rhetorical form*, Barthes addresses two important strategies of *whiteness*. First, the transformation of an opinion into a fact, something subjective into something objective. Second, the arrangement of these putative neutral facts as common sense. Myth can easily spread through common sense and it is again the dominant order, *whiteness*, which is controlling this tool. Verbal resistance to a sentence such as “we all know that *black* people are lazy” is much more difficult as to a sentence such as “my personal opinion is that *black* people are lazy”, as one has to argue against an imagined and auxiliary “*we all*”.

#### role of the mythologist

According to Barthes, a mythologist has to “*be able to name concepts*” (120f) in order to decipher its myth. As the *signified* is quantitatively poorer than the *signifier*, it can have a whole variety of *signifiers*. Without this repetition, it would indeed be difficult to decipher a myth. I do not want to limit the myth of *white superiority* to advertisements of German charities, but argue that it is recurrent in German (and other Western countries') daily life: in media, culture, politics as well as in interpersonal relationships.<sup>39</sup> The *signifier* vary each time, the *signified* however stays the same. Foucault's methodology of discourse analysis – which *Critical Whiteness Studies*, among others, make use of – offers helpful tools for the mythologist to point out repetitions.

The mythologist is easily able to justify her/his activities in deciphering myths as s/he is unveiling an tool for the establishment of power relations, which s/he considers unjust. Still, deciphering is only possible by understanding the rhetoric of supremacy, Sandoval (1997: 86) argues, as it is this very rhetoric which “structures and naturalizes the unjust relations of exchange that arise within and between colonizer and colonized communities.” I understand the deconstruction of *whiteness* in this framework. As it is addressing inequalities and has an emancipatory approach, I consider it with Barthes as a political act of resistance. The mythologist therefore “participate[s] in the *making* of the world” (156, italics TK).<sup>40</sup> The mythologist, however, stays excluded as s/he cuts her/himself

---

39 Prominent events in the last year were e.g. the festival 'African Village' in the zoo in Augsburg (2005), the dance show 'Africa, Africa' in Berlin (2006) and the reality TV show 'Wie die Wilden' (like savages) in sat1 (2006).

40 *making* in the sense of *transforming* in contrast to *eternalising*

“off from all the myth-consumers” (156). Barthes argues that the mythologist has to estrange her/himself from society in order to liberate its myth.

Sandoval remarks that Fanon is less pessimistic than Barthes about the subject engaging in the *methodology of the oppressed*, as s/he forms part of a “new, original, revolutionary cadre that is cross-racial, cross-class, and cross-nation” (Sandoval 1997: 101). Fanon therefore does not stop in his methodology at the steps of (1) reading and (2) deconstructing signs of power, but encourages the mythologist to (3) remake “signs in the interest of renegotiating power”; (4) to commit “to an ethical position through which all signs and their meanings are organized in order to bring about egalitarian power relations” and (5) to focus on the “mobilization of the four previous technologies in differential movement through mind, body, social body, sign, and meaning” (Sandoval 1997: 101).

### Excursus<sup>41</sup>

The exploitation of the 'Third World' by the 'First World' did not end with the independence of the former colonies. During the last decades the economical exploitation continued, accompanied by politics of betrayal and dominance. Countries in Africa, Asia and South America became cue balls of the super powers in the cold war. During the same time, a pseudo-democratic global system of political and economical organisations has been created in which the predominantly *white* countries manifested their power. I do not want to lump together the different organisations such as the UNO, the World Bank, the IWF or the WTO, however what they have in common is an unprivileged and disadvantaged position of 'Third World' governments and social movements.

Interestingly, charities and the 'development industry' arose during the same time with these institutions.<sup>42</sup> In the last decades, Africa became poorer, not richer as suggested by the charities (Jakobeit 2001: 449, Goudge 2003: 14). The notion of 'development' which is promoted by the charities is a single-edged picture and detracts attention from a major part of relations between the 'donor' and the 'receiver'.

While the exploitation of raw materials, the trafficking of weapons, a non-sustainable lifestyle, the debt dependency or the exploitation of the global division of labour (e.g. sweat shops)<sup>43</sup> are topics which are occasionally addressed in the dominant discourse (however never in charity ads), I want to remind that the current exploitation goes deeper than that. They are often directly related to and caused by the unjust global system. Through neoliberalism, a whole range of goods, including water, seed, pharmaceuticals and intellectual properties have been capitalised. By and large

41 In order to visualise some of my arguments in the following chapter, an excursus about current global economy and politics is helpful.

42 Philipp (2006) however argues that especially the Christian charities have a history, reaches back to colonial times as missionaries were active in comparable fields: e.g. missionary schools or missionary hospitals.

43 see e.g. <http://www.saubere-kleidung.de>

companies and the predominantly *white* populations of the 'First World' gain. With three short examples, I want to address different fields which are strongly influenced by international politics. Analogue to the profit, *white* people gain from racism is perceived 'normal' (Strohschein 2005: 507), the profit *white* people gain from neoliberalism is rendered invisible.

### 1. AIDS medicine

In the TRIPS agreement of the WTO member countries, intellectual property rights are regulated. One area that is highly affecting people in poor countries is the patenting of medicines and health care. Bound through bilateral TRIPS-plus agreements, governments of 'Third World' countries have to forbid local companies to produce patented medicine generically (see Oxfam 2002) and make it publicly available for a fraction of the price they are sold now. 'First World' corporations, including e.g. German Boehringer Ingelheim, who produce antiretroviral medicines charge excessive prices and are according to TAC (2003) “directly responsible for the premature, predictable and avoidable deaths of people living with HIV/AIDS.” Jakobeit (2001: 449) argues that the lapse of whole generations of employable people – beside the human tragedies – does enormous harm to local economies.

### 2. biotechnology

Shiva (undated) argues that through these very patent regulations, global corporations are able to take over local food processing. Biotechnological mutated seed, which was only possible to be developed through bio-piracy, plays an important role in making small farmers dependent on global corporations. Through the capitalisation of food production, a shift to the exportation of cash crops “has reduced [local] food security” (Shiva undated).

### 3. food surplus dumping

A third example is the exportation of European and North-American food surplus. The agricultural sector is highly protected and extremely subsidised in both the EU<sup>44</sup> and the US. Poor countries around the world that applied for loans from the World Bank, have been forced to open their domestic markets through *structural adjustment programs*. Through abolished import taxes, enforced by the WTO since 1995, European and North-American companies are now able to sell their subsidised agricultural products for a fraction of the domestic price (Sharma 2005). They therewith destroy local markets and intensify dependencies. According to Shiva (undated) not only local business, but also bio-diversity is wiped out by floods of food imports.

Surplus dumping is not only practised by corporations, it is a favourite strategy of international charities, US AID is an example.<sup>45</sup>

Related to food distribution, I want to end this little excursus by returning to the issue of charities. Hunger and malnutrition are recurrent images in their ads and it appears as if we live in a world of scarcity and shortcoming. Ziegler is of another opinion when he states that with the world's current

---

44 The EU subsidised its agriculture in 2001 with 41,53 billion Euro; see <http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/trade/subsidies/2002/10stopdumping.pdf>

45 Documented in the Jihan El Tahri's Dominant7/Arte documentary: The famine business (2003).

capacities, 12 billion people could be nourished. Hunger and its consequences are therefore caused by the asymmetrical distribution and the destruction of food in the rich countries. Ziegler argues that “a child which is dying of hunger today, is murdered”.<sup>46</sup>

### Chapter III: Analysis of charity advertisements

“Images play a crucial role in the definition and control of political and social power,... The supremely ideological nature of imagery determines not only how others think about us, but also, how we think about ourselves.” (Pratibha Parmar quoted in Hall 1994: 14)

In this last chapter I finally return to the advertisement of charitable organisations in Germany. My aim is to deconstruct the “pictorial architecture of power” (Pieterse 1992: 22) through demonstrating how the charities as part of a liberal, Christian, *white* German society contribute with their advertisement to a manifestation of the power of *whiteness*. By using *whiteness* as an analytical category, I point out how the portrayed images are ensnared in a wider system of power relations, identity formation and global politics.

violence

Hutnyk argues that charity as a system has its share in the construction of 'underdevelopment', as without charity, Africa<sup>47</sup> “might not be portrayed as being so poor” (Hutnyk 1996: 53). He recognises poverty as “possibly the major foreign trope” (Hutnyk 1996: 56), and considers charities as responsible actors in seeking out, foregrounding and representing decay (Hutnyk 1996: viii). In this context, I believe it is appropriate to speak about charity advertisements as a discourse which perpetrates violence. Apart from the generation of stereotypical images, the charity industry exerts power in defining where and what is poverty<sup>48</sup>, and who has the right to live her/his life the way s/he wants to.<sup>49</sup> Escobar (1995: 103f) regards the image of a poor *black* person as encoded with “a

46 <http://www.welt.de/data/2006/01/23/835218.html>, translation TK

47 Hutnyk writes in his case about the city of Calcutta, but I think it is warrantable to transfer the argument.

48 Jakobeit (2001: 448) points out that one has to distinguish between poverty and misery, as not all living conditions that are different to Western Europe have to be automatically considered as poor. Here, the criticism of postdevelopment has to be allowed for. The essence of this wide field of writing is according to Ziai (2004: 168) the refusal of a Western model of 'development' and a revaluation of non-industrial societies as having equal rights to exist. Criticisms of postdevelopment do not call for an “alternative development, but for alternatives to development” (Ziai 2004: 168, translation TK).

49 I am aware of the criticisms against ideas of postdevelopment. Especially dangerous in my opinion is the romanticisation of non-industrial societies (see e.g. Kiely, Ray (1999): *The last refuge of the Noble Savage. A critical assessment of postdevelopment theory*). However, I appreciate that questions of alternatives to the universalisation of Western lifestyles are addressed.

whole economy of discourse and unequal power relations” and names it “a violence of representation”. Using the notion of violence is often considered as exaggerated, as these advertisements are 'only' harmless images, which simply generate donations for a good reason. This is in my opinion belittling the consequences representations can have. Embedding these images in a wider system of *whiteness* and taking Wollrad's (2005: 19, translation TK) argument into consideration that “also fictions can have real effects”<sup>50</sup>, one has to address issues ranging from the viewer's intertwining in power relations, her/his privileged position and its usage, to discriminations of Others in interpersonal contacts.

superiority – inferiority

In their advertisements, charities build on notions of a racialised system, in which “natural inferiority or superiority” is understood to be detected in “visual evidences” (Wollrad 2005: 119, translation TK). Through their displayed characteristics, environment, and social position, *black* people are positioned as the inferior Other of the *white* German society. Following Said, this process of othering contributes to the hegemony of *white* power (Goudge 2003: 159). In charity posters, however, this process of rendering the Other as inferior, is reinforced by the notion of 'whites helping blacks'. Through the focus on aid, mercy and charity, *white* people do not learn to see themselves as oppressor. In contrast, a one-sided dependency is suggested and buttressed through the reduction of the *black* subject on deficiencies. Tißberger (2006: 89) argues that “if it were not for the racial [...] other as inferior, there would be no whiteness [...] that can claim superiority.” This very construction of the Self is a central aspect of the process of othering, however it is silenced in the advertisements just as the submission of the Other. Nghi Ha (2005: 105) deems both essential strategies of the dominant German society.

Through the notion of 'development, which is frequently used in charity ads', the notion of a natural evolution from 'un/underdeveloped' to 'developed' is strongly present (Ziai 2004: 93f). With Ziai (2004: 167), I argue that the concept of evolution, with paternalistic politics as a consequence, strengthens the claim for *white* superiority. While this very claim for *white* superiority has been explained racially in colonial times, in today's charity advertisements it is naturalised and made invisible.

invisibility

As I discussed earlier, *white* people are virtually absent in charity ads. They seem to have no connection to the depicted issues. The only relationship between *First World* and *Third World* mentioned is the charity based donor – receptor relation. Historical as well as present relations of

---

<sup>50</sup> Collette Guillaumin's phrase that “Race does not exist. But it kills people.” (quoted in Arndt 2005b: 342) can be taken as exemplary for what I have in mind with the terms fiction and effects.



colonialism, neocolonialism, neoliberalism, exploitation, international politics, consumerism, tourism, global cultural politics, etc. are completely lacking. By addressing merely the topic of charitable aid and not defining it as the “soft edge of an otherwise brutal system of exploitation” (Hutnyk 1996: ix), but as something inherently positive, a relationship of “exploitation is hidden from sight” (Spivak 1987 in Hutnyk 2003: 26). The absence of *whiteness* as well as the fade-out of its involvements in imperialism and colonialism is considered as a central strategy to neutralise the dominant *white* position (Wollrad 2005: 126; Pajaczkowska, C. & Young, Lola 1992: 202). What is characteristic about *whiteness* here, however, is that “its presence articulates itself via absence” (Wollrad 2005: 31, translation TK), as even when *whiteness* is not mentioned, it can be presupposed. Still, in the discussed images, *white* people as oppressor or aggressor have been erased from the picture. It remains the invisible, unnamed assumption of the *white* subject as acting morally responsible and merciful.

#### subject status

The paradoxical characteristic of *whiteness* (*white* people are missing in the discussion, but are gaining a subject status at the same time) is clearly visible in charity ads. Through the construction of the *black* Other as passive and needy, *white* people are constructed as active subjects. *White* people are perceived as the only subjects of history: they 'develop', help and promote the history of *black* people.

The *white* viewer who regards these advertisements, experiences this active subject position directly, yet unconsciously. S/he has an “assumed and unquestioned right to gaze; to gaze without acknowledging that one is a part of what is happening; to stay apart and to judge; to judge and to invariably find something wrong or something lacking – it is this look, which travels from North to South” (Goudge 2003: 125). Following Foucault, Mulvey et al, this voyeuristic gaze is a strong symbol of power. It “can embarrass, humiliate, humble and shame. It can produce fear, slavery, desire, love, hate, indifference, masochism and sadism” (Denzin 1995: 47).

#### privileges

*White* people who consume the *black* subject on charity ads are allowed various privileges. Partly, they can be attributed to McIntosh's first category of privileges “one would want for everybody in a just society” (McIntosh 1997: 295). Obtaining subject status with its positive consequences for one's psyche, definitely belongs to this category. Another privilege of this kind is the “privilege to speak” (Kilomba 2005: 81).

Behind the idea of *white-people-helping-for-black-people's-'development'* lies the privilege of freedom of movement, which is denied to the people depicted. However, the “freedom of

interference” (Goudge 2003: 17), which comes along this idea, is rather to be attributed to the category of privileges that “give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive” (McIntosh 1997: 295). Yet, another privilege which is coherent here is that *white* people are invisibly constructed as competent experts who provide solutions.

A last privilege I want to discuss is the ambivalent privilege of consumerism. Two out of three posters who portray *white* people, show them as consumers.<sup>51</sup> On one hand consumerism could be viewed as belonging to McIntosh's first category of privileges, the possibility and the right to consume should according to the capitalist logic be universal (Amin 1989: 103). Goudge (2003: 7) however, argues that “Western consumerism contributes cumulatively to deepening poverty in much of the 'Third World’” as it is build on an exploitative system, and according to Deleuze “the workers of the rich countries necessarily take part in the plundering of the third world” (Deleuze and Parnet 1977/1987: 146, quoted in Hutnyk 1996: 11).<sup>52</sup> Therefore I consider the privilege to profit from the contemporary capitalist system of consumerism as belonging to McIntosh's second category of privileges.

normativity - universalism

According to McIntosh (1997: 292f), *white* people consider themselves as normative, average and ideal. While *white* people define what is normal and meanwhile set themselves equal to normality or as a-paradigmatic, racialised Others are defined as particular or specific (Kilomba 2005: 82f). In charity ads, this phenomenon is visible as charities write certain qualities and characteristics – such as poor, needy or passive – into the *black* skin. Therewith, *black* people are positioned outside of normality.

Through the notion of aid, however, *white* people allow Others to be like them. The 'theory of modernisation' – which is implicitly present in each and every of these advertisements, has the goal to organise and structure the world according to the *white* paragon (Arndt 2005a: 27). 'Development' is suggested as a “desirable condition” (Ziai 2004: 126), whereas *white* capitalist societies are set as standards of humanity. Through the focus on deficiencies of the depicted *black* people, charity organisations define what they need and what is 'good' for them: they define a desirable normality. Simultaneously, charities construct the German society as the universal measurement and as goal for the 'development' of the 'underdeveloped'. This logic follows an eurocentric world view which sees itself as universal, relegates the rest of the world, into rigid positions and defines what is good for it.

psychoanalytical analysis

---

51 I acknowledge that they consume fair trade products. As *black* people are never portrayed as consumer, these images manifest the binary opposition of *white* people as consumer and *black* people as producer.

52 Arguments that poor *white* people would suffer in the first place from a global fair trade system as they could not afford their standard of living any more and luxury products would be reserved for the rich, are frequently heard. These arguments however include a strong sense of **white superiority** and do not question global inequalities.

Above, I discussed how the conventional *Critical Whiteness Studies* occasionally use a psychoanalytical approach to analyse *whiteness*. I propose that this approach can be also applied for my analysis, as charities use some of its strategies.

*blaming the victim*: By not addressing external or historical reasons for misery, but portraying it as inherent characteristic of *black* people, charities put the blame of poverty on *black* people themselves. This follows a neo-conservative logic<sup>53</sup> wherein the 'underdeveloped' carries her/his own responsibility for her/his 'underdevelopment' (Hansohm & Kappel 1994: 36, Goudge 2003: 6, Jakobkeit 2001: 451). Goudge (2003: 38, 50, 60) and Hutnyk (1996: 56) argue that it is a common strategy in the 'development industry' to place the blame within national boundaries and meanwhile neglect external factors.

*denial*: In order to portray *whiteness* as innocuous, the strategy of denial is used in multiple ways. First, it is suggested that *white* people are part of the solution and not part of the problems of *black* people (Goudge 2003: 50, 57). Charities alongside dominant German discourse deny a negative impact of colonialism and imperialism and emphasise values of *white* humanism and mercy.<sup>54</sup> Young and Pajaczkowska (1992: 202) argue that this very “denial of imperialism” underlies the absence of *whiteness*. Typically for *whiteness*, the focus stays on the *black* subject, while *white* actors are not named. However, it is suggested that both have equal opportunities.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, not only history, but also today's power differences are denied.

Wealth in Germany is not depicted in any of the advertisements and so charities deny that there has to be seen a link between poverty and wealth. According to Goudge (2003: 15), charities “allow us [the *white* people] to kid ourselves that we [...] are not exploiting anybody as we are there by definition to 'do good'.” By unilaterally portraying *black* people as dependent on *white* generosity, charity organisations deny that *white* people are dependent on *black* people in various different ways.<sup>56</sup> Goudge (2003: 160) focuses on the material dependency, in which as a result both, the *white* comfort and *white* privileges rest upon exploitation practices.<sup>57</sup> Both Khanna and Tißberger highlight the psychological dependency, as “the idea of sustaining a modern self (...) is constitutionally invested in creating a primitive and colonized other” (Khanna 2003: 100, quoted in Tißberger 2006: 90).

Last but not least, through the focus on the Otherness of *black* people, charity ads deny that they

---

53 According to Hansohm & Kappel (1994: 36) a popular view of neo-conservative administrations such as Thatcher or Reagan.

54 It is to note here, that Philipp (2006: 53ff) argues that German charities have their own colonial history as they have to be related to missionary organisations. Missions claimed similar values. This relation, however, is not addressed.

55 Structurally, it comes close to the phenomena of colour blindness I discussed above.

56 The dependentistas, a group of scholars within postdevelopment theory argue that “the West was and still is both dependent on, and responsible for, the 'underdevelopment' of the rest of the world” (Goudge 2003: 169).

57 The basis of this work is an understanding of history, regards slave trade and colonialism as engines for European and North-American industrialism the richness derived from it. (see Hansohm & Kappel 1994: 44)

consider *white* people as the norm.

*projection*: The denial of one's own dependency on the Other results in a projection onto the Other. Practically speaking this means that as it is psychologically and politically not possible to acknowledge a *white* dependency on the *black* subject, charities construct the depicted *black* people as dependent. Tißberger (2006: 91) argues that this strategy of projection is used in a more general sense, through “transfer[ing] internal conflicts (e.g. contradictions within a society) on to others.” After the piecemeal dismantlement of the social care system in Germany, poverty is a rising issue in internal debates. Hence, with the projection of poverty into the African Savannah charities support a conservative discourse within Germany and position the whole country as rich.

In the last chapter, I argued with Barthes that through a de-politicised understanding of the world, *whiteness* evokes passivity of the *white* subject. In charity advertisements, in contrary, *black* people are portrayed as passive. I assess this phenomenon as another form of projection.

*abjection*: Following Kristeva (in Tißberger 2006: 89) charity organisations mark *black* people as different, declare them as impure and position them in “certain threshold zones” (McClintock 1995: 72) outside the norm. Through this process of abjection, a *white* German normality is constructed. McClintock (1995: 72) argues that “[a]bject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without”. Charities portray *black* people according to this logic: they are rendered abnormal, however, stay available for *white* psychological and material needs.

*fantasies*: The one who has the power of representation, has the possibility to diffuse her/his fantasies. For example, I select one fantasy of the colonizer: the muteness of the colonized (Kilomba 2005: 81). Out of all the analysed material there is not one advertisement in which a *black* person is uttering something her/himself. Constantly, the charities silence *black* subjects and speak in their name. Other fantasies which charities are able to diffuse through their representational power and their access to resources are e.g. the fantasies of *black* people as objects, as passive, as apolitical<sup>58</sup> or as inherently happy.<sup>59</sup>

## Barthes' Mythologies

I deem charity ads as promoters of the myth of *white superiority*. They form part of a narrative that is needed for the construction of an illusory *white* identity (Goudge 2003: 170). The images of racialised *black* people can be considered as *form* in Barthes' system of myth; as a medium for the

58 With the reduction of *black* subjects on suffering, the *white* fantasy that *black* people are apolitical is nourished. The existence of political resistances and a complex network of local NGOs, social movements and political projects is therewith ignored.

59 One favourite topic of depiction is the '*black-kid-as-grinning*'. Hutnyk (1996: 57) questions the depiction of '*poor-as-beautiful*'. Goudge (2003: 148f, 169) argues that this positive essentialism has to be seen as a strategy of power, as both positive and negative stereotypes fix the Other in rigid stereotypes.

concept of **white superiority**.<sup>60</sup> The advertisements thereby construct *de-historicised racialised, inferior, black subjects* whose displayed characteristics of poverty, illness and passivity seem inherent. Charities simply state facts, instead of giving genealogies. Hence, *white* superiority and with it *black* inferiority are portrayed as a natural condition and not as historical constructions. I would argue that exactly through images as those employed by the charities, *whiteness* manages to neutralise itself, position itself as universal and erase its name: the representation of *black* people and the non-representation of *white* people become naturalised. The effect of this naturalisation is a de-politisation of historical processes, and additionally a de-politisation of the viewer. Simultaneously, charity organisations essentialise political processes with their *blaming the victim approach*. Through the focus on humanitarian issues and the neglect of political influences, they draw a picture of reality as 'happening automatically'. It encourages the viewer to be passive as the 'acting forces' appear depersonal. Reacting to this 'natural' process seems to be the only possibility of action. Although charities claim to *transform* the world, they portray the world as immobile and eternalise present power relations. The final result is a construction of blackness as a metaphor, a myth and an imaginary place (Hutnyk 1996: 2) for *white* dreams, desires and denials.

Barthes' methodology helps to expose the myth of **white superiority** narrated by charity organisations, as the mythologist is able to mark *whiteness* and to circumvent a further naturalisation. The **rhetorical forms** he outlined, offer in this case helpful tools to point out the distorting effects of myth:

*inoculation*: Through the acknowledgement of only small portions of difference – which in addition is defined by the charities – a questioning of the own privileged position of *whiteness* can be circumvented. Charities always portray difference as inferior, thus, a danger of subversion can be foreclosed. According to Barthes' argument, charities have to be held responsible for this inoculation, they therewith buttress the power of *whiteness*.

*privation of history*: Charities use this rhetorical figure in two different ways. First, they portray *black* people as natural people who live in a stone age environment and do not concede them a historical past. Through the *white* power of definition – *black* people are betrayed of their history. Second, by not discussing a *white* history which led to the portrayed 'underdevelopment', *white* people are discharged of responsibilities and *black* people can be blamed. This logic is necessary in political processes order to grant *white* people the illusion of generosity and moral greatness. Charities in Germany are to a high percentage located in a Christian spectrum and appeal to notions of pity, mercy and compassion. The act of donating has a religious value for the donor and is strongly associated with alms – which carries an undertone of hierarchies. Through a one-sided

---

60 I want to remind the reader that Barthes considers myth as motivated and all *concepts* as intentional, also applies for charities.

construction of history and through not talking about a duty on the one side and a right on the other – which would imply a notion of reparation rather than donation – a good conscience instead of a guilty conscience is made possible for the *white* subject.

*identification*: In the case of charity advertisements, the identification with the Other fails. Therefore Barthes' proposal of exoticism as evasion comes into play. With the invisible assumption of *white* as normal, *black* people can be expelled to the peripheries. The representation of *black* people as exotic on the other hand, manifests the presumed central position of *whiteness*. The power of *whiteness* is visible in an arbitrary, “complex and ambivalent interweaving of assimilationist tendencies and rejectionism” (Goudge 2003: 157). Through the concept of 'development cooperation'<sup>61</sup> – in which charities define how development should take place – charities offer *black* people the opportunity to become like *white* people. At the same time, however, they visually confine them to the edges of humanity.

*tautology*: The message of the advertisements is: '*Black* people are poor, because it is like this'. Causalities are not discussed, hence charities manage through this ***rhetorical form*** to naturalise their definition of the *black* subject. Charities enjoy authority, first, as they depict themselves as (*white*) experts, who work “out there” (see Goudge 2003: 163) and second, because of the repetitious character of their advertisements, their own discourse.

*neither-norism*: Charities keep silent in their ads about current global political structures. One reason might be their philosophy that a shut mouth catches no flies, which lets them operate problem-free inside Germany: it lets them cooperate with governmental institutions as well as corporations. However, keeping silent about present forms of exploitation, unjust terms of trade and an unequal distribution of power, implies accordance with them. Not to forget that the viewer – and the designer – of charity ads profit from these very global structures. This ***rhetorical form*** contributes again to the de-politisation of *white* Germans as it confirms their political passivity as acceptable. By not taking an unequivocal stand on political issues, charities are able to appear as a high morality which awards them another degree of authority.

*quantification of quality*: Charities seem to justify *white* superiority through a reference on the quantity of technology it generated, or contrarily, on the lack of technology of the Other. Having no modern technology, or being depicted as such, seems a reason to be rendered inferior. The multitude of technological devices is thus seen as the tool to measure the quality of life.

*statement of fact*: Analogue to the figure of tautology, charities are able to position their assertions as truth. Subjective world views are through the usage of the 'statement of fact' represented as

---

<sup>61</sup> An interesting question to follow for a further research would be the similarities, connections and interweavings between the myth of *whiteness* and the myth of 'development'.

neutral and objective. Backed by the institutions of the churches and the state, charities managed during the last decades to attain a certain credibility. Buttressed through this authority, it seems that charities only reproduce common sense, whereas they contribute in spreading the myth of *white superiority*.

During the analysis, I realised two interesting aspects, which conducting further research on would be worthwhile.

First, the myth of *white superiority* can be considered as a meta-myth. It consists of, retells and is intertwined with several smaller myths. In the case of charity advertisements, it draws for example on the myth of 'underdevelopment' or the myth that the charity industry fundamentally changes the world.

Second, similarities between the results of the psychoanalytical analysis and Barthes' structural analysis stroke me. Several psychoanalytical figures could be found in Barthes' rhetoric; e.g. the figure *blaming the victim approach* in the form *privation of history* or the figure *abjection* in the form *identification*. Not for nothing did Sandoval name the two systems the *methodology of the oppressed*. While the psychoanalytical approach seems to be more commonly known, at least among the German academia, I often encounter resistance against the transfer of psychoanalysis into cultural studies. Critics might be interested that a structural analysis reaches similar results.

## Conclusion

“[...] the judgement 'good' does *not* originate with those to whom 'goodness' is shown! It was rather 'the good' themselves, that is to say the noble, powerful, higher placed and higher minded, who felt and positioned themselves and their actions as good.” (Nietzsche 1977: 109)

I consider the main achievements of this work as following:

First, I added Barthes' mythology to the *Critical Whiteness Theory* as a tool to examine how the myth of *white superiority* is able to naturalise history, to render itself invisible and to make itself appear as universal at the same time. Additionally, to extend *whiteness* as analytical category and to apply it to topics of charity, 'development' and representation succeeded inasmuch as the basic characteristics of *whiteness* could be retrieved.

Second, the notion 'charity advertisements as part of the liberal *white* German discourse', could be put into another perspective. I demonstrated that it is precisely its “bulk and depth” that *whiteness* owes its “force and power” (Arndt 2005b: 349, translation TK). Seeming innocuous and having

noble intentions does not immunise against racist thought and practise. Charities are, following Goudge (2003: 43), not responsible for the accrual of *whiteness*, but they are a mighty actor in the manifestation and reproduction of its power.

Third, with the analysis of *whiteness*, it was possible to show how *white* oppressors are functioning and which strategies are used. Especially the use of psychoanalytical figures and Barthes' *rhetorical forms* proved to be very helpful tools to unmask their underlying assumptions. Out of my own position as profiting from *whiteness*, I followed Spivak's suggestion and moved away from “dramatis[ing] victimage” to an “auto-critical vigilance” (Spivak 1990: 230, quoted in Hutnyk 1996: 12). Turning away from the represented *black* subject to *white* strategies which underlie these very representations revealed several personal patterns of behaviour that astonished and questioned me various times. Marking *whiteness*, resulted in the awareness of the interweaving of racisms, material inequalities and political injustices.

Undeniable, this essay constitutes a criticism against charity organisations. It is intentionally not written as a constructive critique, as I am not only questioning the way charities ask for donations, but likewise their concepts of 'development cooperation'. While the focus of this essay was laid on the former, an analysis how the latter is connected to the power of *whiteness* would be an interesting topic for further research.<sup>62</sup>

What next?

A next step, according to the 'critical pedagogues' of *whiteness* would be a program to educate *white* decision makers as well as the *white* public about the outcome of such a study. Through a rational line of argumentation, *white* people might acknowledge their position and start rethinking their actions, thoughts and involvements.

Barthes and Fanon offer a different next step. Fanon invokes to “remak[e] signs in the interests of renegotiating power” (Sandoval 1997: 101). Barthes goes further and asks us to become subversive activists and to “mythify myth” (Barthes 2000: 135). According to him the best subversion is the one that disfigures codes instead of destroying them.<sup>63</sup>

In the case of charity advertisements, this practise is already used. Adbusters – who distort messages of billboard ads through adding or changing details – revolt against stereotypical depiction and question norms reproduced by charities. Adbusters *talk back* to advertisements. They unveil and challenge the power of definition and render possible decentralised, plural and diverse representations of the Self as well as of the Other.

This way of subversion, of “forc[ing] the ossified conditions to dance by singing them their own

---

62 Ziai (2004: 369) argues that the paradigm of 'development' changed after the “crisis of development” in the 1980s. This change of paradigms was not visible in the analysis of the advertisements of charities.

63 Barthes, in: autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppe et al (2001)



melody”<sup>64</sup>, is often quickly put aside as an unproductive method. I admit, that these subversions only happen rarely and merely reach a limited number of people. Still, I agree with Klein that it is dangerous to see adusting “solely as harmless satire, a genre that exists in isolation from a genuine political movement or ideology” (Klein 1999: 308). It is rather a tool among others (Klein 1999: 309).

Concluding, I argue that the result of this essay is to perceive reality as political. Political in a double sense that a) what I perceive as reality has historical roots, although it might appear as natural. It is formed by intentions, structured by a system and narrated for example through daily myths. Resulting, b) I as subject, am able to take part in shaping reality through becoming political myself: questioning representations, privileges or power structures. Be it in the classroom, the street, in daily encounters or on the screen, it is not lacking possibilities to mark *whiteness* and to reveal its strategies.

## Bibliography

- Amin, Samir (1989): Eurocentrism. London. Zed books.
- Arndt, Susan (2004): Weiß-Sein, Roland Barthes *la vaccine* und die afrikanisch-feministische Literatur, <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/ffz/dld/arndt04.pdf> (10.09.06).
- Arndt, Susan (2005a): Weißsein. Die verkannte Strukturkategorie Europas und Deutschlands. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt, Susan: Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p.24-29.
- Arndt, Susan (2005b): Mythen des *weißen* Subjekts: Verleugnung und Hierarchisierung von Rassismus. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt, Susan: Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p. 340-362.
- Ashcroft, Bill; Griffiths, Gareth; Tiffin, Helen (2000): Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts. London. Routledge.
- automome a.f.r.i.k.a. Gruppe/Luther Blissett/Sonja Brünzel (2001): Handbuch für Kommunikationsguerilla. Berlin. Assoziation A.
- Barthes, Roland (2000/1957): Mythologies. London. Vintage.
- Bendix, Daniel (2006): Deutsche Bevölkerungspolitik in den Ländern des Südens. Eine

---

64 translation TK: „...man muß diese versteinerten Verhältnisse dadurch zum Tanzen zwingen, daß man ihnen ihre eigne Melodie vorsingt! Man muß das Volk vor sich selbst *erschrecken* lehren, um ihm *Courage* zu machen.“ Karl Marx 1943/44: „Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie“ [http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01\\_378.htm](http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_378.htm)

- genealogische Perspektive. Unveröffentlichte Magisterarbeit. Otto-Suhr Institut für Politikwissenschaft. Freie Universität Berlin.
- Bultmann, Rudolf (1941): Neues Testament und Mythologie. Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung. München. Kaiser.
  - Connell, R.W. (1995): Masculinities. Cambridge. Polity/Blackwell.
  - Denzin, Norman K. (1995): The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze. London. Sage Publications.
  - Dhawan & Mar Castro Varela (2003): Postkolonialer Feminismus und die Kunst zur Selbstkritik. In: Steyerl, Hito & Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Encarnación: Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? Migration und postkoloniale Kritik. Münster. Unrast. p. 270-290.
  - Dyer, Richard (1997): White. New York. Routledge.
  - El Tayeb, Fatima (2005): Vorwort. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt, Susan: Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p. 7-10.
  - Escobar, Arturo (1995): Encountering development: The making and the unmaking of the Third World. Princeton, N.J.. Princeton University Press.
  - Fanon, Frantz (1982): Black Skin, White Masks. New York. Grove Press.
  - Frankenberg, Ruth (1997): White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness. In: Delgado, Richard & Stefancic, Jean (eds): Critical Whiteness Studies. Looking behind the mirror. Philadelphia. Temple University Press.
  - Gilroy, Paul (1995): Roots and routes: Black identity as an international project. In: Griffith, Ezra E.H.; Blue, Howard C.; Harris, Herbert W.: Racial and ethnic identity: psychological development and creative expressions. New York. Routledge.
  - Goudge, Paulette (2003): The Power of Whiteness: Racism in Third World Development and Aid. London. Lawrence & Wishart.
  - Hansohm, Dirk & Kappel, Robert (1994): Schwarz-Weiße Mythen. Afrika und der entwicklungspolitische Diskurs. Münster/Hamburg. LIT Verlag.
  - Hall, Stuart (1994): Rassismus und kulturelle Identität. Ausgewählte Schriften 2. Hamburg. Argument.
  - hooks, bell (1996): Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies. New York. Routledge.
  - Hutnyk, John (1996): The Rumour of Calcutta. Tourism, Charity and the Poverty of Representation. London. Zed Books.
  - Jakobeit, Cord (2001): Entwicklungshilfe-Politik in Afrika. Welche Hilfe zu welcher Entwicklung. In: Arndt, Susan (ed.): Afrikabilder. Studien zu Rassismus in Deutschland. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p. 447-457.
  - Kiely, Ray (1999): The last refuge of the Noble Savage. A critical assessment of

- postdevelopment theory. In: *The European Journal of Development Research*. 11 (1), p. 30-55.
- Kiesel, Timo (2006): Representation of Black people in Charity advertisements in Germany. Unpublished.
  - Kilomba, Grada (2005): No Mask. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt; Susan: *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p. 80-89.
  - Klein, Naomi (1999): *No logo: no space, no choice, no jobs: taking aim at the brand bullies*. London. Flamingo.
  - Van Leeuwen, Theo & Jewitt, Carey (eds.) (2001): *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London. Sage.
  - McClintock, Anne (1995): *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York/ London. Routledge.
  - McIntosh, Peggy (1997): White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies. In: Delgado, Richard & Stefancic, Jean (eds): *Critical Whiteness Studies. Looking behind the mirror*. Philadelphia. Temple University Press. p. 291-299.
  - Morrison, Toni (1995): *Im Dunkeln spielen. Weiße Kultur und literarische Imagination*. Rheinbeck bei Hamburg. Rowohlt.
  - Neverdeen Pieterse (1992): *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven and London. Yale University Press.
  - Nghi Ha, Kien (2005): Macht(t)raum(a) Berlin – Deutschland als Kolonialgesellschaft; In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt; Susan: *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p.105-117.
  - Nietzsche, Friedrich (1977): *A Nietzsche Reader*. London. Penguin Books.
  - Oxfam (2002): US bullying on drug patents: one year after Doha. [http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/briefingpapers/pp021112\\_bullying\\_patents](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/briefingpapers/pp021112_bullying_patents) (08.07.06)
  - Pajaczkowska, C. & Young, Lola 1992: Racism, Representation, Psychoanalysis. In: Donald, J. & Rattansi A. (eds): *Race, Culture and Difference*. London, Sage. p.198-219.
  - Philipp, Carolin (2006): *Weißsein* in den Grundlagendokumenten von Misereor und Brot für die Welt. Unveröffentlichte Magisterarbeit Politikwissenschaft. Universität Potsdam.
  - Piesche, Peggy (2005): Das Ding mit dem Subjekt, oder: Wem gehört die Kritische Weißseinsforschung. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt; Susan: *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p.14-17.
  - Sharma, Devinder (2005): *Trade Liberalization in Agriculture. Lessons from the First 10 Years of the WTO*. Brussels. APROVED.

- Shiva, Vandana (undated): War against nature and the people of the South. [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Globalization/War\\_Against\\_Nature\\_VF.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Globalization/War_Against_Nature_VF.html) (02.07.06)
  - Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999): A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a history of the vanishing present. Cambridge MA. Harvard University Press.
  - Stroschein, Juliane (2005): Als *weiße* Studierende in einer *weißen* Universität: erste Positionierung. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha; Kilomba, Grada; Piesche, Peggy; Arndt, Susan: Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland. Münster. Unrast Verlag. p.506-513.
  - Tißberger, Martina (2006): The Project(ions) of 'Civilisation' and the Counter-transferences of Whiteness: Freud, Psychoanalysis, 'Gender' and 'Race' (in Germany); In: Tißberger, Martina; Dietze, Gabriele; Hrzán, Daniela; Husmann-Kastein, Jana (eds): Weiß – Weißsein – Whiteness. Kritische Studien zu Gender und Rassismus. Frankfurt am Main. Peter Lang Verlag. p. 85-104.
  - Treatment Action Commity (TAC) (2003): Reducing the Prices of Antiretroviral Medicines. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.tac.org.za/Documents/DrugCompaniesCC/20031028-CompetitionComm-furtherq-and-a.htm> (08.07.06)
  - Wollrad, Eske (2005): Weißsein im Widerspruch, Feministische Perspektiven auf Rassismus, Kultur und Religion. Königstein. Ulrike Helmer Verlag.
  - Ziai, Aram (2004): Entwicklung als Ideologie? Das klassische Entwicklungsparadigma und die Post-Development-Kritik. Hamburg. Schriften des Deutschen Übersee Instituts.
  
  - <http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/beginnings/Kendall.htm>
  - <http://www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/trade/subsidies/2002/10stopdumping.pdf>
  - [http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01\\_378.htm](http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_378.htm)
  - <http://www.saubere-kleidung.de>
  - <http://www.welt.de/data/2006/01/23/835218.html>
  - <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/ffz/dld/arndt04.pdf>
- (all websites viewed on 10.09.06)