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The Colonial Discourse in Volunteer Tourism and the Exoticization of People and Landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Cycle for Plan Initiative of Plan
International Nederland*

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Abstract

Volunteer tourism is a relatively new trend in development aid. However, it is historically rooted in the colonial discourse and shaped by the postcolonial discourse of development. This research is therefore guided theoretically by the fields of postcolonial studies and critical development studies. By means of a critical discourse analysis, the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland has been analyzed. This has been done to answer the following research question: In what ways are the people and landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia exoticized in the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland? The analysis shows that the videos display the cyclists as White saviors, which renders the native people to the exotic 'Other', incapable of helping themselves. Further, it is shown that the landscapes are displayed as naturally rural, as if they are in an earlier time period or an 'underdeveloped' stage. Because of these findings is argued that this leads to the suggestion that these countries are places where the cyclists are able to have a unique experience and that this exoticization contributes to an imagination in which poverty is seen as inspirational instead of unjust. Moreover, these types of representation increase the gap between the Global North and the Global South, which increases inequality. For follow-up research it is suggested to strive for a more in-depth understanding of these representations and to ask questions such as: Are the development organizations and the participants aware of the problematic nature of volunteer tourism and exoticization?

KEY WORDS volunteer tourism; White saviorism; exoticization; critical discourse analysis; postcolonialism; critical development studies

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Introduction

On January 20, 1949, Harry Truman announced his vision of a 'fair deal' for the entire world in his inaugural address as president of the United States (Escobar, 1995). An essential part of this was solving the problems of 'underdeveloped' areas, a term that was sort of introduced at this moment (Escobar, 1995). This has led to a new understanding of and approach to world affairs, predominantly those concerning less economically accomplished countries (Escobar, 1995). The necessary components to make this possible, according to Truman's vision, were capital, science and technology (Escobar, 1995). However, this discourse and strategy of development actually led to enormous underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression (Escobar, 1995). Recently, a new trend has emerged in development aid (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). It is a trend in which development aid is combined with adventurous traveling, called volunteer tourism. Even though this trend is relatively new, it is historically rooted in the colonial discourse and shaped by the postcolonial discourse of development. Moreover, it is argued to be related to neo-colonialism (Bandyopadhyay, 2019).

Volunteer tourism is becoming increasingly popular (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Examples of this type of traveling are the Kili-challenge of War Child, Hike for Health of Simavi, the Rift Valley Marathon of UNICEF and the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland. It is important to note that these examples all focus, either partially or entirely, on the Dutch market. All of these campaigns have a very similar style in which the emphasis is on the heroism and the personal development of the participants, rather than the actual aid. The focus of this research will be on the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland. Plan International Nederland describes this initiative as an adventurous bicycle trip through beautiful countries for a good cause, and an extraordinary way to explore a country, away from mass tourism (Plan International, n.d.-b). It has been selected for this study because it is consistent with the style of other volunteer tourism initiatives, emphasizing the personal development of the participants and representing them as White saviors. Though the intention of volunteer tourism, and more specifically the Cycle for Plan initiative, is respectable, the result could be that the gap between the Global North and the Global South is actually increased because of this style of these campaigns. White saviorism is namely a form of White supremacy, which is currently leading to major social uprising, as seen in the Black Lives Matter movement. Therefore, it is important to be critical towards this type of initiatives.

Even though this trend is relatively new, as mentioned, it is historically rooted in the colonial discourse. Colonialism is an important historical process in which the current division of the world finds its roots (Dogra, 2013, p. 9). Thus, it is necessary to engage with this part of history to understand the construction of the modern world. Therefore, the postcolonial discourse and the field of critical development studies will be introduced in the next chapter of this study, the theoretical framework. In addition to that, the concepts of othering and exoticization are explained, and a more in-depth description of volunteer tourism is given in this chapter. Then, in the following chapter, method, the analytical framework for a critical discourse analysis offered by Carvalho (2008) that was used to conduct the analysis will be explained. After that, in the analysis and interpretation chapter, it will be argued that the cyclists are displayed as White saviors by representing them as heroes, which renders the native people to the exotic 'Other'. Furthermore, it is argued that the countries are displayed as naturally rural through stereotypical representations of their landscape and through the emphasis that the cyclists put on the beauty of the countries, thus displaying them as if they are in an earlier time period or an 'underdeveloped' stage. Finally, in the conclusion and discussion chapter, it is argued that these aspects lead to the suggestion that Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia are places where the cyclists are able to have a unique, 'bucket list' experience and that this exoticization contributes to an imagination in which poverty is seen as inspirational instead of unjust.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided theoretically by the field of postcolonial studies and Critical Development Studies (CDS). With its emergence in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the field of CDS is a relatively new approach, which builds upon the larger and older field of postcolonialism (Veltmeyer & Wise, 2018). The term postcolonial is used to refer to “all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002, p. 2). As described by Hall (1999):

Postcolonial is not the end of colonization. It is after a certain kind of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation – in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it – it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new. (p. 230)

The history of the world is deeply interconnected and shapes the current order of ‘Global North prosperity’ and ‘Global South poverty’ (Dogra, 2013, p. 9). This division of the world finds its roots in historical processes, most importantly colonialism (Dogra, 2013, p. 10). Moreover, as described by Dogra (2013, p. 10), the majority of the world’s population is influenced by its experience of European colonialism in economic, political, social and cultural spheres. Furthermore, this affects many aspects of society – such as institutions, national boundaries, citizenship, production and consumption patterns and our understandings of ourselves (Dogra, 2013, p. 10). Therefore, it is necessary and inevitable to engage with this part of history in order to understand the construction of the modern world. For this reason, both fields take an interdisciplinary and critical approach to the study of development. They focus on the way the Global South has been constructed by the discourses of development and the hegemonic forms of representations (Escobar, 1995).

This study takes a constructivist approach, thus, emphasizing the constructed and pluralistic nature of reality. This means that representations do not simply re-present facts, but also constitute them (Dogra, 2013, p. 1). The Global North derives its knowledge of the Global South from what it sees, hears and believes about it (Dogra, 2013, p. 1). Development organizations, such as Plan International Nederland, play an important role in this process, since they represent the Global South to the Global North, in which they are seen as legitimate and trustworthy voices of the Global South (Dogra, 2013, p. 2). Further, the mass media used by development organizations, in this case YouTube, play a key role in the

distribution of representations, because they have the ability to shape the dominant discourses of a society (Hall, 2013). Foucault (in Hall, 1992) describes discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (p. 291). The development of such a group of statements, it is apparent in terms such as ‘First’ and ‘Third’ World and ‘North’ and ‘South’ (Escobar, 1995). However, the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ are currently the most accepted terms in this research field, therefore those are used in this research. Yet these types of terms do guide a very specific interpretation of the relationship between them. The introduction of this discourse is often being related to Truman’s speech.

According to Escobar (1995), the Global North has shaped a hegemonic form of representation, which erases the diversity, complexity and historicity of the Global South, thus allowing the Global North to exercise its power over the Global South. The basic premise of the theory of hegemony, as described by Gramsci, is that “people are not only ruled by force, but also by ideas” (in Bates, 1975, p. 351). These representations of the Global South implicitly assume that Global North’s standards are the benchmarks against which to measure the situation in the Global South (Escobar, 1995). The result is a paternalistic attitude of the Global North towards the Global South and the continuation of the hegemonic idea of the Global North’s superiority (Escobar, 1995).

The Exotic Other

This hegemonic representation of the Global South often results in ‘Othering’, which is a key concept of representing through a postcolonial lens. It refers to “the construction and maintenance of differences between categories such as ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘the West’ and ‘non-West’” (Dogra, 2013, p. 12). These categories are historical constructs rather than actual geographical differences (Dogra, 2013, p. 12). As mentioned, the colonial discourse shaped later discourses, particularly that of development. This discourse still lingers and informs the ways of seeing and representing ‘other’ cultures in development aid by continuing to shape the existing global economic structures, power relations and the current state of poverty and prosperity across various regions (Dogra, 2013, p. 13). As such, representations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as ‘Third World’ and ‘underdeveloped’ are the results of Global North’s conceptions about those parts of the world (Escobar, 1995). As Escobar (1995) describes, the Global North lives in a realm of mere representations, which has been

deepened by economics and development. By the act of ‘othering’ through representations of the Global South, the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ can be enhanced. Moreover, the ideological nature of representation allows for powerful representations to become true and accepted, despite their stereotypical and caricatured nature (Dogra, 2013, p. 15).

A very specific form of othering is ‘Exoticization’, which refers to the process in which people of cultures in the Global South are understood as exotic and assumed to be less advanced and uncivilized (Carvalho, 2015). According to Carvalho (2015), colonizers used similar exercises of control to justify domination. Linking cultures to savagery for example, may lead to colonizers feeling less guilty about exercising domination over them, because it could be suggested that it was done ‘for their own good’ (Beserra, as cited in Carvalho, 2015). Nowadays, those exercises of control are stereotyping and discrimination. As described by Shohat & Stam (1994), stereotyping and discrimination are most dominant in the cultural power struggle between the Global North and the Global South. The relationship between exoticizer and exoticized is argued to be similar to the relationship between colonizer and colonized, because they both revolve around the idea of cultural superiority (Beserra, as cited in Carvalho, 2015). The process of exoticization is an important part of volunteer tourism.

Volunteer Tourism

The Cycle for Plan initiative is an example of volunteer tourism and it “can be viewed as a development strategy leading to sustainable development and centering the convergence of natural resource qualities, locals and the visitor that all benefit from tourism activity” (Wearing, 2001, p. 12). Bandyopadhyay (2019) argues that volunteer tourism is related to neo-colonialism, because it focuses on the dominant cultural values of the Global North and it continues to be a significant factor in exploiting the Global South. In fact, it is argued that the real power of the Global North is not its economic accomplishment, but more importantly its power to define, represent and theorize the “Other” (Sardar, 1999). As mentioned earlier, there is still the division between the ‘superior Global North’ and the ‘inferior Global South’ that finds its roots colonial times, in which the Global South is portrayed as ravaged, tormented and abused (Silva, 2004) and the Global North as the rescuers (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). As Bandyopadhyay (2019) therefore fairly points out, it is questionable whether the aim of volunteer tourism is to reduce inequality between the Global South and the Global North, or to force the Global South to stay the exotic place that they are represented as.

Although there recently has been an increase in volunteer tourism research (Brown & Hall, 2008; Mostafanezhad, 2014; Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017), there is still a need for more interdisciplinary critical studies (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Many volunteer tourism studies do acknowledge the significance of volunteer tourism and challenge conventional understandings of socio-economic change in the Global South, however, rarely ever do they describe how the colonial discourse flows through volunteer tourism initiatives. This study expands the current research field by taking volunteer tourism research into a different trajectory by criticizing the exotic representations that are used when advertising for volunteer tourism, as Plan International Nederland does with the Cycle for Plan initiative. As mentioned, it is important to be critical towards these types of initiatives, because of the social uprising White supremacy leads to. In order to do so, the research question is as follows: In what ways are the people and landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia exoticized in the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland?

Method

Corpus

As mentioned, the research object of this study is the Cycle for Plan initiative from Plan International Nederland. Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization, that aims to help girls in ‘developing countries’, by tackling problems such as poverty and inequality from multiple terrains at the same time (Plan International, n.d.-a). They describe the Cycle for Plan initiative as an adventurous bicycle trip through beautiful countries for a good cause, and an extraordinary way to explore a country, away from mass tourism (Plan International, n.d.-b). They offer four different types of journeys: Thailand, Guatemala, Malawi and For Companies, which is in Zambia. Except for Thailand, the bicycle trips are introduced through videos, in which the participants speak Dutch. Because the trip to Thailand is not introduced through a video, it will be excluded from this analysis. For analyzing the ways in which the people and landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia are exoticized, the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was followed, for which the analytical framework of Carvalho (2008) was used.

This method takes the premise that our thoughts and ways of speaking do not neutrally and objectively reflect the world, rather, they play an active role in constructing and changing the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Power, ideology and critique are the three central and constitutive concepts of this method (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 1). The concept of power in a critical discourse analysis usually refers to the use of language by those in power, who are generally responsible for the existence of certain inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 9). The term ideology, in the context of a critical discourse analysis, refers to the more hidden and underlying type of everyday beliefs, which are often disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). Lastly, the term critique refers to the general aim of a critical discourse analysis to reveal structures of powers and to unmask ideologies (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). The more general premise of this method is that discourses contribute to the idea of inequality, which makes it important to uncover them (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10).

Analytical Framework

For this study, the analytical framework for media discourse as proposed by Carvalho (2008) was used in order to conduct a full audio-visual analysis. First, the three videos were transcribed per shot. In this part of the analysis, focus was on the *mise-en-scène*,

cinematography and sound. For the second part of the analysis, the shots were analyzed using the structured format of the critical discourse analysis as proposed by Carvalho (2008). She argues that a comprehensive analysis consists of both a textual analysis and a contextual analysis. However, due to limited time, only the textual analysis will be conducted in this study. As Carvalho (2008) proposes in her analytical framework, a textual analysis takes the following aspects into consideration: (1) lay-out and structural organization, (2) objects, (3) actors, (4) language, grammar and rhetoric, (5) discursive strategies and (6) ideological standpoints. The aspect of lay-out and structural organization is most useful when analyzing journalistic texts, therefore, this aspect has been left out of this study.

Objects, Actors and Language, Grammar and Rhetoric

Important aspects of a critical discourse analysis are analyzed in these steps, such as the notion that discourses *constitute* the realities at stake rather than just *refer* to them (Carvalho, 2008, p. 167), which is particularly evident in observations under the second step, objects. Another important aspect is the fact discourses structure the representations of social actors, which is evident in observations under the third step, actors. At this stage of the analysis the focus is on who is mentioned in the videos and how these actors are represented, i.e. the cyclists and the native people. This is an important aspect of a critical discourse analysis because media texts play an important role in forming an image of social actors and in constructing their relationships and identities (Fairclough, 1995). An important concept to keep in mind in this stage of the analysis is framing power, which refers “to the capacity of one actor to convey their views and positions through the media, by having them represented” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 168). An important form of social influence is having the predominant framing power in a certain issue (Carvalho, 2008, p. 168).

The way actors are represented is significantly influenced by the vocabulary that is used for representing a certain reality, this becomes evident in observations under the fourth step of the analysis, language, grammar and rhetoric. This is an important dimension of the constitution of meaning (Carvalho, 2008, p. 168). Therefore, in this stage of the analysis, attention is given to concepts, vocabulary, metaphors, and lexical choices in the videos. This can reveal underlying ideological presuppositions (Carvalho, 2008, p. 168).

Discursive Strategies and Ideological Standpoints

The fifth step of the analysis, discursive strategies, refers to strategies of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors to achieve a certain effect or goal (Carvalho (2008, p. 169). The term is used to mean a discursive intervention which can happen more or less conscious (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169). The most important intervention that is made is the selection of a perspective of the reality that is talked about, which is an important part of “framing” the reality (Carvalho, 2008, p. 168). This term refers to the structuration of a discourse according to a certain perspective, which, in the production of media texts, involves selection, composition and positioning (Entman, 1993). Selection refers to “the inclusion of exclusion of certain facts, opinions, value judgements etc.” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169). The term composition refers “to the arrangement of elements in order to produce a certain meaning” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169). Finally, positioning involves “constructing social actors into a certain relationship with others, which may, for example, allow them to do certain things” (Davies & Harré, 1990). As Carvalho (2008, p. 169) argues, framing is inherent to the construction of texts, because it is necessary in order to be able to talk about reality. Therefore, the question asked at this stage of the analysis is how reality is framed, and not whether. Thus, in this step of the analysis, attention will be on the way the landscapes are displayed in the videos and what this means in terms of the dominant discourse.

Finally, the last step of the analysis focusses on ideological standpoints. As Carvalho (2008, p. 170) describes in her article, the assumption that ideologies are embedded in discourses is generally accepted in discourse studies. Ideological standpoints can be argued to be the most fundamental shaping influence of a media text (Carvalho, 2008, p. 170). It is important to identify ideologies, because they are the overarching aspect of the text, and they involve motivations and justifications for keeping or changing a certain, usually unequal, situation (Carvalho, 2008, p. 170).

Analysis and Interpretation

In this study, the focus is on the way the landscapes and people of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia are exoticized in the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland. It is argued that the cyclists are represented as White saviors, thus increasing the gap between them and the natives, which leads to the native people being represented as the exotic ‘Other’, who are incapable of helping themselves. Further, the countries are exoticized by the usage of stereotypical imagery of their landscapes and the way the cyclists talk about it. These conclusions will be elaborately explained and supported by the observations below.

White Saviors

The three videos in the Cycle for Plan initiative all have an important characteristic in common: the focus is on the heroism of the cyclists and the opportunity to explore the exoticized country far away from mass tourism. This heroic representation of the cyclists is a classical representation of White saviorism. As mentioned, White saviorism is a form of White supremacy (Sondel, Kretchmar & Dunn, 2019), which has the tendency to display people of color as if they are unable to help themselves (Cammara, 2011). The music chosen in all three videos, which is mostly up-tempo, energetic music, the children running after the cyclists or standing at the side of the road watching them and high fiving them and the thankful and humble native people applauding the cyclists all contribute to this image of White saviorism. The videos thus focus on the personal development of the cyclists, rather than the native people. A quote from the video of Zambia shows the representation of White saviorism very well: “Now you are in the country and you see where the money goes, and why it is necessary.” (Plan International Nederland, 2017; *translated*). The use of the word ‘necessary’ shows the essence of White saviorism, because it assumes that the native people are incapable of helping themselves.

Another factor contributing to the representation of the cyclists as White saviors is the choice of the shots that are used. Many shots show the cyclists biking over dirt roads or biking in the mountains going uphill for example. Some shots even show the cyclists walking next to their bicycles because biking was too heavy. A few shots show close-ups from the wheels of the bicycle riding over dirt roads or they show the cyclists filmed from a low angle, which contributes to their heroic image. And finally, many shots show the cyclists being visibly tired from biking, referring to the difficulty of the tour. This quote from the video of Malawi shows this very well: “The bicycle trip really was like a rollercoaster” (Plan

International Nederland, 2019b; *translated*). Although the cycling itself, the heavy physical exertion, does not directly contribute to the development aid in this case, it is an important symbolic activity. Moreover, the symbolic element of heroism seems to be necessary in this campaign – which shows that (Western) heroism is constructed and does not necessarily follow from the situation of others. This shows the constructed and pluralistic nature of reality, as discussed in the theoretical framework, which means that representations do not simply re-present facts, but also constitute them (Dogra, 2013, p. 1).

This representation of White saviorism is also displayed very clearly in the language used by the cyclists. For example, in the following quote: “It’s not easy, you have to climb every day. And when you finally make it, you’re very, very proud.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019a; *translated*). And this quote: “Terribly heavy, but this is such an experience.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019b; *translated*). The language used in these quotes, ‘not easy’, ‘terribly heavy’ and ‘very, very proud’ refers to the symbolic activity of physical exertion, which contributes to the heroic representation of the cyclists and enhances their image as a White savior. Another example is this quote: “It is a very good way to do something good and at the same time experience Guatemala in a very special and intense way.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019a; *translated*). And finally, the quote: “For that you will bike 600 kilometers, and you will see the potential in making the world better step by step.” (Plan International Nederland, 2017; *translated*). These quotes show, by the use of ‘do something good’ and ‘making the world better’, that the physical exertion does not only contribute to the heroic image of the cyclists, but also to the idea that it actually does something meaningful. After all, the biking 600 kilometers is directly linked to ‘making the world better’. Therefore, the heroism that seems only physical, only becomes meaningful in relation to the problem – in which apparently, White saviorism is necessary to improve the situation.

The Native People

This heroic representation of the cyclists is opposite of the way the native people are being represented. As mentioned, White saviorism has the tendency to display people of color as if they are unable to help themselves (Cammarota, 2011). The exoticization of the native people of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia is mostly displayed in this contrast between them and the cyclists. Moreover, these opposite representations reinforce one another. The bicycle trips are being made even more exotic and heroic by the representation of the natives, and the natives

are being made even more helpless and exotic by the representation of heroism. The contrast between those thus has a meaningful function. Most shots of the native people are shots of children, standing at the side of the road, looking and waving at the cyclists and sometimes high fiving them. Many other shots show them running after the cyclists or looking, smiling and waving at the camera, which builds on the more general stereotype of the poor, but happy, 'Other'. As argued by Lutz and Collins (1993), permitting the projection of the ideal of a happy life through a smile is an important way to achieve the idealization of the 'Other'. In fact, 'photogenic poverty' is shown through the healthy looks and happy expressions of these children (Hutnyk, 2004).

In addition to the children, the adult native people are stereotypically represented as well in the three videos. In the video of Malawi, there are multiple women shown carrying tons or other things on their head, a stereotypical image of African women. The videos of Malawi and Zambia both include shots showing native people dancing in traditional clothes. The display of traditional clothes shows the native people as distinct, but also prove their authenticity (Dogra, 2013). In the video of Guatemala, the adults are shown in front of brightly colored houses, wearing colorful clothes. And finally, in all three videos, these people are shown applauding the cyclists thankfully and humbly. The three videos do not only exoticize the native people of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia, but also their landscapes.

Exotic Landscapes

The representations of the landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia in the videos are classic displays of exoticization. As described by Dogra (2013), the gap between the Global South and the Global North is increased by depictions of rurality to project a timeless and ahistorical Global South. In all three videos, the native people are mainly shown in rural settings. This is a significant form of framing, more specifically composition, because it supports difference shown through a general rurality of the Global South, as found in colonial discourses (Dogra, 2013). Moreover, it sets up a contrast between the rural Global South and the urban Global North, which is related to the notion of Orientalism (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992).

In the video of Guatemala, this exoticization is displayed in the amount of color and nature that is shown, which is a stereotypical representation of South America. The first shot of the video shows mountains surrounding a lake, with intensified blue colors. There are also a few shots of a beach, with many colorful surfboards stacked between palm trees and

hammocks. As argued by Mitchell (1989), nature can be used as ‘an ideological category’, which projects a ‘natural’, ‘rural’, low-skilled, ‘other-worldly’ sphere. The overall effect of this is that the Global South is displayed as naturally rural, without any urban or ‘modern’ elements, and thus putting them in an earlier time period, or an ‘underdeveloped’ stage, which is common in the development discourse. This clearly displays the hegemonic form of representation the Global North has shaped, mentioned in the theoretical framework, which erases the diversity, complexity and historicity of the Global South, thus allowing the Global North to exercise its power over the Global South (Escobar, 1995). The importance of nature in this video is enhanced by the way the cyclists talk about it, for example, in the following quote: “I think it is a very diverse country. Gorgeous nature and very colorful actually.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019a; *translated*). And this quote: “There are so many routes that you’d never be able to get to by bus or by car.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019a; *translated*).

In the videos of Malawi and Zambia, the shown landscapes are dried out red savannahs, which is a stereotypical representation of Africa. They also include shots of exotic animals, such as a wild monkey, giraffes and a leopard. As argued by Campbell and Power (2010) the scopical regime of “Africa” has constructed Africa as a place that is marked by either war and disaster, or exotic natives and animal tourism. The type of lighting that is used is natural sunlight, often a sunrise or a sunset. This also shows a stereotype representation: “Warm heart of Africa”, which is even directly mentioned by one of the cyclists. These representations together show that there exists a very coherent image or expectation of what ‘Africa’ is.

In these videos as well, an important factor contributing to the exoticization of these landscapes, is the way the cyclists talk about it. For example, in the following quote: “By bicycle you are traveling through the country in a very different way than when you are in a car.” (Plan International Nederland, 2019b; *translated*). And the quote: “This was so awesome, so cool!” (Plan International Nederland, 2019b; *translated*). And finally, in the quote: “To get the chance to see a world that you would never be able to see as a tourist.” (Plan International Nederland, 2017; *translated*). In emphasizing the exotic nature of Africa, the distance between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is enhanced (Campbell & Power, 2010). As argued by Spurr (1993), a consequence of this is that “barbarism, madness and disaster are made to seem more natural as Africa and its people are held at arm’s length and become an ‘object of beauty, horror, pleasure and pity’” (p. 59).

Conclusively, the cyclists are displayed as White saviors, by representing them as heroes, rendering the native people to the exotic 'Other', incapable of helping themselves. They are mainly shown in rural settings, which supports a difference between the rural Global South and urban Global North. Further, the landscapes are exoticized as well, by the stereotypical imagery and the language used to talk about it. The overall effect of this is that the Global South is displayed as naturally rural, without any urban or 'modern' elements, and thus displaying them as if there are in an earlier time period, or an 'underdeveloped' stage, which is common in the development discourse. As a consequence, the Global South and its people are "held at arm's length and become an 'object of beauty, horror, pleasure and pity'" (Spurr, 1993, p. 59). These aspects lead to the suggestion that Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia are places where the cyclists are able to have a unique, 'bucket list' experience and the suggestion that poverty is seen as inspiring instead of unjust.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study the three videos of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia of the Cycle for Plan initiative by Plan International Nederland have been analyzed. This has been done to answer the research question: In what ways are the people and landscapes of Guatemala, Malawi and Zambia exoticized in the Cycle for Plan initiative of Plan International Nederland? The previous chapter shows that the most important characteristic of the three videos is that the focus is on the heroism of the cyclists and the opportunity to ‘explore the exoticized country far away from mass tourism’. The exoticization of the native people of those countries is mainly displayed in the contrast between the heroic cyclists and the thankful, humble natives. The cyclists are represented as White saviors, rendering the native people to the exotic ‘Other’, who are incapable of helping themselves. Further, it is shown that the landscapes are displayed as naturally rural through stereotypical representations of their landscape and through the emphasis that the cyclists put on the beauty of the countries, thus displaying them as if they are in an earlier time period or an ‘underdeveloped’ stage.

As described in the theoretical framework of this study, there is still a division between the superior Global North and the inferior Global South that finds its roots in colonial times. This colonial discourse shaped later discourses, particularly that of development, which still lingers and informs the ways of seeing and representing ‘other’ cultures in development aid. The Global South is portrayed as ravaged and abused (Silva, 2004) and the Global North is portrayed as the developed countries who rescue them (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). As Bandyopadhyay (2019) therefore pointed out, it is questionable whether the aim of volunteer tourism is to reduce inequality between the Global South and the Global North, or to force the Global South to stay the exotic place that they are represented as. The results from this study show that the emphasis in the three videos of Cycle for Plan are on exoticization of the countries and the ‘bucket list experience’. This form of exoticization romanticizes poverty, which contributes to an imagination in which poverty is seen as inspirational instead of unjust. Thus, it can be argued that this initiative tries to force the Global South to stay the same exotic place that they are represented as. This is problematic because it could lead to an increase in the gap between the Global North and the Global South. Because, as mentioned earlier in this study, White supremacy is currently leading to social unrest, as seen in the Black Lives Matter movement.

A constraint of this research is that it was unable to encompass the entire representational field. As described by Fairclough (1995), any (media) text simultaneously

represents as well as constructs identities and relations. Therefore, according to Dogra (2013), any comprehensive and dynamic study of (media) texts needs to analyze the entire 'representational field', which consists of representation, production, reception and inter-relations among these elements. However, due to limited time, this study only focused on the level of representation. Although the videos show a clear representation of exoticization and White saviorism, a deeper understanding of this representation would have been achieved with interviews at the level of production. Therefore, this would be a logical step for follow-up research. This more in-depth understanding of this representation could be achieved by asking questions such as: Are the development organizations and the participants aware of the problematic nature of volunteer tourism and exoticization? Furthermore, it will also be interesting for future research to look at the bigger picture and ask questions such as: Why do we still accept the hegemonic benchmark for development that the Global North has set for the Global South?

Even though this study does not analyze the entire representational field or the bigger picture, it does provide insight into the representation of White saviorism and the strategies of exoticization of the people and landscapes in the Global South that are used by a development organization, Plan International Nederland. As mentioned earlier in this study, development organizations are seen as a legitimate and trustworthy voice of the Global South and therefore, they play an important role in either maintaining or discontinuing the postcolonial discourse. Therefore, it is important to be critical towards representations of the Global South by development organizations, in order to discontinue hegemonic form of representation, because it erases the diversity, complexity and historicity of the Global South and allows the Global North to exercise its power over it (Escobar, 1995).

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