The Pontis Foundation: Partly Disrupting the Development Discourse Through Partnership

Abstract

The article analyses the hierarchising and sanctifying effects of the development discourse. First it presents this discourse using secondary sources and then it applies critical discourse analysis to several texts and interviews to analyse whether the Slovak NGDO the Pontis Foundation follows the development discourse in terms of sanctifying development and hierarchising cultures. The analysis thus adds to the agency/structure discussion by analysing one actor in relation to the discourse. It also adds empirical results to the alreaedy existing critique expressed in regard to NGOs and their lack of partnership. Whereas the analysed texts are very much in accordance with the hierarchising discourse, in the interviews the respondents avoid hierarchisation and hierarchise cultures only after direct questions have been asked or when adhering to linearity in relation to South Korea. The respondents both reject and accept the term 'development' and blame its usage on external material and discursive pressure.

Introduction[1]

'To speak is to do something' (Foucault 2002: 230). Foucault's famous dictum found its way into development studies three decades ago with a set of articles and a book that were written by Arturo Escobar (1984, 1988, 1995). Since then the field of discourse analysis in the discipline has grown in size (e.g. Abrahamsen 2000; Crush 1999; Dahl 2001; Ferguson 1994; Gasper – Apthrope 1996; Grillo – Stirrat 1997; Noxolo 2006; Ziai 2004, 2006, 2014; Marcussen – Bergendorff 2003).

This case study applies Theo van Leeuwen's method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and makes the claim that a Slovak NGDO called the Pontis Foundation to a great extent follows, but also disrupts, the development discourse by putting 'us' above 'them' and also by sanctifying 'development'. The study thereby contributes to the debate sparked by the post-development approach over the monolithic nature of the discourse. One of its aims is to show how one's actor development discourse differs from what has been identified as *the* development discourse by

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1   This study is part of a larger research for my PhD thesis that compares Austrian and Slovak development
     discourses.

Escobar, Ziai and others. In this sense the study refines the theoretical understanding of the way discourses work.

Another sub-field of study that gained prominence in recent years has been the study of non-governmental 'development' organizations. These actors have been understood as a part of the governmental structure and analysed mostly from an anthropological perspective (see, e.g., Crewe – Harrison 2002; Eriksson Baaz 2005; Lewis – Kanji 2009; Tvedt 1998). The analysis shows that one NGDO is a receiver (and a carrier) of the development discourse rather than its producer and thus adds to the theoretical understanding of the governmentality approach that points to the importance of lower level actors for power relations.

This study also fits within the 'new' donors research field that includes not only countries such as China or South Africa, but also the 'new' member states in the European Union – e.g. Poland, Romania, and Slovakia (e.g. Drążkiewicz-Grodzicka 2013; Gažovič 2012; Horký – Lightfoot 2013; Horký 2010; Oprea 2012). However, it does not focus in any way on the specific character of these donors; nor can be the claims made here generalized so that they would apply to Slovakia as a donor (for such an approach see Gažovič – Profant forthcoming) or even to the whole NGDO sphere in this country. On the other hand the importance of the study lies in the fact that it applies the postcolonial and discursive approach to an NGDO from a 'new' donor in a way that has not been done before.

Thus, this text could be seen as an important contribution to all three of the (sub-)fields mentioned above. It is a discourse analysis of an NGDO from a country that is usually perceived as a 'new' donor.

More particularly, the study is important for analysing the Pontis Foundation. Although it is probably unknown to the international fora, it is one of the most important NGOs in Slovakia. Pontis is a successor of the Foundation for a Civil Society that was founded as Charter 77 New York in January 1990. A part of the civil society leadership that fought against the semi-authoritarian ruler Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s, Pontis became one of the most well-known representatives of the cooperation between the civil society and the private sphere in Slovakia. In the 'development and democratisation' field Pontis engages in projects in the Northern Africa region, the Balkans, the Eastern Partnership countries and Kenya and competes with other Slovak NGDOs for grants from the government. Whereas most of Pontis funding comes from corporate sources, in the field of 'developmen' cooperation and education, their main donor is the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC). Pontis is also an active member of the Slovak NGDO Platform

There has been no research about Pontis as an individual actor. Non-mainstream media criticized Pontis for being part of the 'infrastructure of the Slovak neoliberalism' (Chmelár 2005), for disregarding the killings of civilians in Iraq or of Serbs in Kosovo (ibid.) and for accepting money from the US government, the National Endowment for Democracy and the alleged terrorist sponsor the Center for Free Cuba (Myšľanov 2008). Besides that, there is not much theoretically anchored research of Slovak NGOs either, and this study could be seen as filling this existing gap.

The analysis tries to answer the following question: How does the Pontis Foundation's discourse differ from the development discourse? The aim of my study is to show whether Pontis follows the development discourse or not, and if not, the study asks in which instances the discourse of Pontis differs from the development discourse. I argue that whereas the analysed texts follow the development discourse very closely, the respondents sometimes disrupt it. However, they succumb to it as if they were under pressure to do so (from the official discourse) or when they are replying to less direct questions. This sheds light on a more general theoretical question about the way discourses function and about the way we might want to perceive NGOs in power relations.

The text follows a simple structure: first, I present the theoretical underpinnings and the methodological tools I used, and then I conduct the analysis. At the end I summarize the results. The text revolves around two key effects of the development discourse – hierarchisation and sanctification. Also at the end of some of the analytical parts I added some of the relevant results of a discussion about this analysis with the respondents to the interviews.

Theory

This research is based on the post-structuralist perspective of the world. It is not necessary to present here all the elements of this philosophical strand (for a useful elaboration of it in relation to social science see, e.g., Rosenau 1992). Here I will only try to argue for the importance of discourse analysis and the agency/structure duality.

Concerning epistemological questions, the positivist approach takes an external view of society (Hollis – Smith 1991: 1) and tries to explain reality. It 'holds that science should be concerned only with observable entities that are known directly to experience' (Giddens 2009: 13) and assumes the existence of neutral facts, which are to be separated from values.

According to the internal view, however, reality is socially constructed. It is mediated to us through discourse. Foucault defines discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 2002: 54). The main point to be made about discourse is that it is something like a membrane between the individual's mind and the rest of the world. Every object in the world is assigned a meaning through this membrane, through the discourse. 'An object that is

not assigned any meaning is not an object. It is totally nondescript, invisible, even nonexistent' (Jäger – Maier 2009: 44). According to Van Leeuwen (2008: vii) 'all discourses recontextualise social practices.'

Foucault's goal in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* is 'to discover the structural rules governing discourse alone' (Dreyfus – Rabinow 1982: 16). Already in this book (e.g. Foucault 2002: 230), but especially in his later work (e.g. Foucault 1982), Foucault distances himself from discourse as a structural force that would fully determine individuals' actions and considers the freedom to act to be a constitutive part of power.

The result of this debate for my research and for my ontological position is that we need to study both structure and agency, but we need to focus on structure as it has a great impact on the way we act. That is my goal as well. I study structure – the development discourse – but I also pay attention to the expression of the structure in the agency of the people (Pontis employees), which may differ from the original structure and thus change it.

This duality is also expressed in the post-development debate. Especially Escobar has been criticised for seeing the development discourse as 'singular' (Cooper – Packard 1997: 10). Therefore 'it is convenient to talk of there being several coexistent discourses of development' (Hobart 1993: 10). Whereas Cooper, Packard, Hobart and many other critics make an important and hard to refute point that Escobar himself accepts, he argues 'that their own project of analysing the contestation of development on the ground was in great part made possible by the deconstruction of the development discourse' (Escobar 2000). This analysis aims both ways. It acknowledges that the development discourse cannot be unitary in all its instances, and it seeks to show how different it actually is from what could be identified as the core of the development discourse (see the next sub-section).

Post-development theory, which makes up the paradigmatic basis for this research, is critical of the development discourse and its effects. According to Escobar: 'The development discourse […] has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World' (Escobar 1995: 9). Post-development scholars agree with, e.g., the world-system theorists when they state that the global South is part of a global structure that leads to material exploitation. But what they added to this and other positivist approaches is the idea that it is important to also focus on the discourse that creates the ground for the material outcomes of the North-South relations. Regarding the problem of hierarchisation, they followed especially the postcolonial approach based on Said (1979). Meanwhile, in their veiw, the question of sanctification focuses on the problem of the emptiness of the positively connoted term 'development' (see, e.g., Sachs 1992) and on its productivity in uniting the different meanings of the term that enables

cooperation of otherwise potentially oppositional actors (Ziai 2013: 133). I deal with these issues in greater detail in the following section.

The development discourse

In this section, I will first very briefly present the core assumptions of the development discourse, then I will clarify the relation of the notion of partnership to the development discourse and in the last part of this section I will focus on its effects (hierarchisation, sanctification) that have been criticized by authors from the postcolonial and post-development positions

The development discourse consists of four core assumptions. The first (the existential assumption) is that one needs to accept that 'there is such a thing as "development"' (ibid.: 127) and use it as a grid through which we read reality. The second (the normative assumption) is that '"development" is a good thing' (ibid.). A society that is 'developed' is positively evaluated and the one which is 'developing' or 'less developed' is negatively evaluated. Development as a process is also positively connoted leading, e.g., to a better quality of life. The third (the practical assumption) is that '"development' can be achieved' (ibid.). Within the development apparatus it is assumed that people can 'develop' and achieve this normative goal. The fourth (methodological assumption) is that 'units (states) can be compared according to their "development"' (ibid.). This implies that there is a scale (the level of development) and the units can move along this scale as they could be more or less 'developed'.

Ziai further identifies three more assumptions that belong to what he calls the classical development paradigm, which was dominant from the 1950s to the 1970s and 'still is very influential' (ibid.). However, as this study, my earlier research on Fair Trade (Profant 2010) and also Ziai's research (Ziai 2004) show, not all of these assumptions hold, especially in the ranks of the less official part of the apparatus (e.g. NGO workers). These assumptions specify that the goal of development is 'developed' countries, i.e. the countries of the West; the process is the path that was undertaken by these countries – the path of economic growth, modernization and industrialization; and the legitimization of this process is based on expert knowledge that can explain how one achieves 'development'.

A reader might protest at this moment and claim that 'development' is nowadays about partnership and participation (i.e. it is not based on expertise, but on a democratic decision) and it aims at poverty reduction and sustainability (and not large scale industrialization and mass consumption). Such an objection would be questionable, though, for two reasons. First, not only is the practice not always as participatory as one might wish (Cooke – Kothari 2001; Crewe – Harrison 2002), but the partnership is actually not reflected at the level of personal identities

(Eriksson Baaz 2005), or at the discursive level (Dahl 2001; Noxolo 2006). Second, despite sustainability being another development discourse buzzword (Scoones 2010), the 'developed' countries are those with some of the least sustainable consumption patterns on the planet.

Yet, the cracks in the discourse exist and therefore Ziai (2014b) speaks of a progress towards incoherence in the development discourse that began in the 1980s. Simply put, the main idea of the partnership approach is incompatible with the classical development paradigm from the previous era. Indeed, 'if people were to decide for themselves what "development" means for them and how it should be reached, this would be a fundamental contradiction to some of the rules of formation (enunciative modalities, objects and concepts) and it would constitute a clear break from the development discourse' (Ziai 2006: 48, my translation).

Despite the participatory approach dating back to the era of colonial 'development' (Hickey – Mohan 2004), partnership can be seen as a response to the postcolonial critique of paternalism as well as a critique of the way the Structural Adjustment has been conceived. Coming from the international organizations such as the OECD and their policy documents (e.g. the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness), this approach was supposed to replace the passive Other with an equal partner. Alleged aid dependence was another problem that was supposed to be tackled by this new policy. However, 'the language of "partnership" […] is oddly blind to the unequal basis on which such aid partnerships are formed' (Crewe – Harrison 2002: 22) and according to critics it serves 'a more instrumental purpose' (ibid.: 70). Apart from the apparently progressive ideas within the rhetoric of partnership, it also enables donors to attribute any failure to the partner, since in this rhetoric, the partner is at least equally responsible for the failure as the donor partner, if not completely responsible for it.

Still, rather than speaking of a unified development discourse, one might want to identify competing sub-discourses such as the sustainable development or the partnership discourse. The question to ask is then: Does the *idea* of partnership prevail over the rules of formation of the development discourse that places development experts above partners or the participating population? The (scant) existing literature on partnership mentioned above seems to suggest that it does not, even at the level of discourse, and I claim here that the same principle applies to the discourse of the Pontis Foundation.

In the following sections, I will focus on the function 'that the discourse under study must carry out in a field of non-discursive practices' (Foucault 2002: 75). However, instead of 'functions', I will talk about 'effects'. This term is better for referring to the idea that Foucault developed in his later work – that power is also 'non-subjective' (Foucault 1978: 94), i.e. that

people (subjects) as carriers of a discourse can unwittingly reproduce a way of looking at the world, and this world-view often has powerful implications.

I will deal here with two effects of the development discourse. First (as already mentioned), it sanctifies 'development'. As Esteva notes: 'Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner' (Esteva 1992: 4). The word 'always implies a favourable change... from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better.' (ibid.: 10).

This then results in the definitions analysed by Gilbert Rist. He quotes the Report of the South Commission, which was presided over by Julius Nyerere, and which defines development as 'a process which enables human beings to realize their potential, build self confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfilment...' (Rist 2008: 8). A 'development' project then by definition becomes a project that leads to the realisation of the potential of human beings, etc. The problem with most of such 'pseudo-definitions,' though, is 'that they are based upon the way in which one person (or set of persons) pictures the ideal conditions of social existence' (ibid.: 10), and the number of failed projects and their terrible consequences, e.g. in the infrastructure sector, put into question the idea that this assumption should be made prior to any project. Simply put, one wishes 'development' to be something which it often is not. Nonetheless, this does not change the definition or understanding of 'development'. It always implies a favourable change, and it always positively modifies any noun to which it is added as an adjective. This is its discursive effect in the field of non-discursive practices. Therefore Sachs (1992: 30) defines it as an 'empty plus'.

Second, the development discourse hierarchises cultures. The hierarchical feature remains the most important continuity with the colonial discourse. 'The basic structure of both discourses is the division of the world into the progressive, dominating part and the backward, inferior part' (Ziai 2006: 39, my translation). The discourse keeps its Eurocentric character with the European nations at the top of the ladder of social evolution.

As Escobar (1995: 41) writes: 'Development proceeded by creating "abnormalities" (such as the "illiterate," the "underdeveloped," the "malnourished," "small farmers," or "landless peasants"), which it would later treat and reform.' It is these abnormalities which create the grid that specifies the object. First, objects have to become visible. One needs a particular specification through which objects can emerge as objects. But of course (as also my interviews show) this grid could be different.

The effect of hierarchisation is similar to that of the colonial discourse. The people in the North together with their elites are constructed as modern, enlightened, and progressive in relation to the backward, irrational Other. This serves their self-esteem.

At the same time, hierarchisation serves the purpose of domination. It is the hierarchical divide that makes the 'development' interventions possible. Only if the Other is constructed as inferior can the superior Self intervene in the Other's life to lift him up from his situation. Only if the Other is inferior can the superior expert come and use her knowledge, because she knows what is good and what will benefit the Other (see, e.g., Ziai 2006: 40). This domination then is the basis for the exercise of power not only over local populations (which may also be beneficial), but also over countries which offer their resources or products to the global market. This could be the case of the good governance discourse and the relation between the IFIs and these countries (see, e.g., Gathii 2000), or of NGDOs that depoliticize power relations and go abroad on the basis of this hierarchising and sanctifying discourse (see, e.g., Ferguson 1994).

The theory thus generates the following research question: How does the Pontis Foundation's discourse differ from the development discourse?

Method

The empirical part of the article includes an analysis based on Theo Van Leeuwen's method of critical discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen 2008) and on other sources from this field (Wodak – Meyer 2009). In it, I analyse a website PR article titled 'Slovak teachers taught their colleagues from Kenya how to use information technologies' (Pontis 2010c).[2] The rest of the corpus includes all the similar texts that were on the Pontis website (Pontis n.a.a, n.a.b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010d, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012) and I use the results from their analysis to support my findings. I thus focus on the Pontis' discourse that was intended for the public as this disocurse shapes the public perception of the Other to a much greater extent than the discourse that is used in their project proposals or reports written for their donors. All the analysed texts have something to do with the project 'Increasing the PC Literacy of Teachers and Students in Southeast Kenya'. In the context of this project, Pontis brought computers and overhead projectors to Moi High School (and four other high schools) in Kasigau, Kenya, established IT clubs for students and organized trainings for teachers. My reason for choosing the particular article ('Slovak teachers...') was the way it represents the project as a whole – the Slovaks coming to Kenya, teaching the Kenyans and the Kenyans learning and demonstrating their newly acquired knowledge[3] – and not just its parts (e.g. the preparatory journey or the goals of the project, etc.), which were the focus of other articles.

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2   The name of the author of the text was not mentioned on the website. According to one of the respondents, however, it was written by Roman Baranovič from Microsoft Slovakia, who also took part in the project, and it was then edited by the respondent and the PR manager of the Pontis Foundation.

3   The gist of the story is in sentences 20-22 of the article: "Before the Slovaks came to Kenya, teachers at Rukanga did not know how to work with it [Power Point], however after only three days of the training, they were able to

The analyses I conducted include two studies of the representations of social actors and the representations of social actions, respectively. The former asks how the agents of the verbal processes are represented (Van Leeuwen 2008: 24) and the latter asks what are the ways in which social actions are represented (ibid.: 55). The studies especially show the extent of hierarchisation among the actors mentioned in the analysed text. Whereas Escobar, Ferguson and Ziai follow Foucault's approach in focusing on the structure of discourse (and also on its non-semantic elements), Van Leeuwen's method on the other hand focuses on agency and on a 'detailed linguistic operationalization' (Wodak – Meyer 2009: 22). Such an approach enables a good juxtaposition of structure and agency. It also enables me to look for the breaks and ruptures in what Escobar's critics call a monolithic discourse.

Van Leeuwen's approach is particularly apt for the analysis of hierarchy between actors. He himself studied a racist article on migrants in the conservative Australian newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald*, which creates a much sharper hierarchy between 'us' and 'them' than the articles from Pontis, but his approach to study could be utilised in this study of Pontis as well (Van Leeuwen 2008).

Both social actor and social action analyses apply a number of categories to the text:

- *Activation* 'occurs when social actors are represented as the active dynamic forces in an activity' (Van Leeuwen 2008: 33).

- *Passivation* occurs when actors 'are represented as "undergoing" the activity or as being "at the receiving end of it"' (Van Leeuwen 2008: 33).

- Being *nominated* means being represented in terms of one's unique identity (i.e. name) and not in terms of an identity shared with others (Van Leeuwen 2008: 40).

- *Objectivisation* is a subcategory of impersonalisation and 'occurs when social actors are represented by means of reference to a place or thing closely associated either with their person or with the action in which they are represented as being engaged' (Van Leeuwen 2008: 46).

- *Genericisation* is a general representation such as classes or ordinary people (Van Leeuwen 2008: 36).

- *Specification* means representing people as specific individuals or specific groups.

- The *objectivation* of social actions is realized by nominalisations or process nouns as in, e.g., 'their understanding' (Van Leuuwen 2008: 64).

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create their own presentation of a very good quality... On Wednesday they saw Power Point for the first time and already on Saturday they had a presentation about the school ready for the parents that lasted almost six hours."

- *Descriptivisation* is a form of objectivation which represents social actions or reactions as more or less permanent qualities (ibid.: 66).

Van Leeuwen's method includes a simple statistical operation that counts, for example, how many times the actors are activated (see the analytical section). This approach offers an insight into the importance of an actor, but it has to be complemented with an interpretation, as the activation can be related to various actions (e.g. negative/positive actions, cognitive/affective reactions, etc.) that may shed a different light on the hierarchy between actors.

I focus on sanctification especially in the interviews. The study of the interviews does not follow a detailed method of analysis, but merely focuses on the argumentation. It thus analyses what van Dijk (2009: 68) calls the 'semantic macrostructures,' and when focusing on the meaning of the term 'development' it includes an analysis of local meanings (e.g. the meanings of words, ibid.: 69). Both (semantic macrostructures and local meanings) are mostly intentional and consciously controlled by the speaker. The analysis refers to interviews with all four of the Pontis employees[4] who agreed to be interviewed, and these employees work in the sections focused on 'development' cooperation, 'development' education and democratisation. They mostly work in the head office in Bratislava, but have been to the field as well. Such trips, however, are usually one to three week stays in the country receiving assistance and they are usually taken once or twice a year. The interview questions were directed at the two already mentioned effects of the development discourse. In general I employed more open questions (such as 'How would you characterise Kenya?') but occasionally I also asked more direct (and suggestive) questions (such as 'Is Kenya a developing country?').[5] .

After having written down the results of the research, I sent the text to the respondents (who 'went through it') and discussed it with three of them. I then made some minor changes and added their comments in the appropriate sections.

Analysis

Hierarchisation

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4 There are only four employees at Pontis who actually deal with 'development' cooperation in a substantial way.
5 This is significant as it may weaken the resulting claim. There is a difference in answering the first question by saying 'Kenya is a developing country' and responding with'Yes, I agree that it is a developing country to the second one'. On the other hand, the respondents often work and talk in the context of 'development' cooperation, which an open question does not create. Thus, posing a very open question prevents the usual context of 'development' cooperation from influencing the answer, and this is problematic as well

Analysis of the text: representation of social actors and social actions

There are two groups that stand out from the text – 'us' and 'them'[6], which both include several actors. In the first group, there are actors such as 'Slovak teachers'[7], 'the Pontis Foundation', or 'Jana Kontúrová, the director of an elementary school in Bošany', and in the second group, there are actors such as 'local teachers', 'students' or 'Christopher Musyoka, an IT teacher at the Moi High School Kasigau in Rukanga'. Due to the way the article is written, it seems reasonable to me to create these two groups, which I further differentiate in the analysis as more power relations come into question.

The results of the analysis 'at first sight' are the following: First, one may decipher a hierarchical pattern of activation and passivation. We are mostly activated (83%), whereas they are both activated (52%) and passivated (48%). Further, we are nominated eight times (e.g. Jana Kontúrová) and they are nominated only once (Christopher Musyoka) in the analysed text. More important social actors are more often nominated (Van Leeuwen 2008: 40). 64% of social actions are attributed to us, and 36% to them. Our social actions are also more often activated (represented dynamically) (60%) than theirs (45%). Plus, we are quoted directly three times, and they only once. Even though these numbers need to be interpreted, they seem to reveal a hierarchy between the actors. The text is about us, we are the active actor and we are those who speak more often. I will now proceed to further interpretation of the findings.

The social actor and social action analyses also reveal other instances of the hierarchical pattern. As social actors, they are objectivated as the 'African continent' with homogenising consequences, while we are objectivated as the 'Pontis Foundation,' and this puts the Pontis employees in the background, but puts the organization in the foreground. Also, there is one instance where they are referred to generically as 'local people'. Genericised social actors are 'symbolically removed from the readers' world of immediate experience, [and] treated as distant "others" rather than as people with whom "we" have to deal in our everyday lives' (Van Leeuwen 2008: 36).

On the other hand, there are also instances of equality between the actors in the text. Both us and them are functionalised, i.e. distinguished on the basis of our roles or occupations, which in this case are mostly roles related to teaching. Functionalisation is usually reserved for high-status social actors (e.g. teachers). Identification on the basis of origin is characteristic for both groups of social

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6 To avoid extensive use of inverted commas, the terms 'we', 'us', 'they', 'them', 'our' and 'their' are used here without the commas and refer to the two groups in the text.
7 When no source is given for a quote in the text, it means that the quote is from the analysed article (Pontis 2010c).

actors and helps to tell them apart. Also, except for the one case of genericisation ('local people'), there are only specifications of individuals and groups of people in the text.

The analysis of social actions brings further results. Whereas the representative of Microsoft is quoted as he speaks about a similar project in Slovakia and about the unexpected understanding of the importance of technologies on the side of the Kenyan teachers, the Slovak teacher is quoted as saying that she is happy that she had the chance to be a part of the team in Kenya. The Kenyan IT teacher, on the other hand, expresses his gratitude and considers his school lucky to have been chosen for the project. The text here thus distinguishes between three levels of hierarchy – those of the expert, the Slovak teacher and the Kenyan teacher.

When one looks closer at the cognitive reactions attributed to them, one can see that they are represented as either 'not knowing', 'knowing the basics', 'learning' or 'understanding... the fact that being able to master technologies is important for their future...' On the other hand the cognitive reactions attributed to the Slovaks are mostly related to their 'experiences,' to the Microsoft representative talking about the Slovak teachers learning or to his findings about Kenya and its teachers. The representation here thus reflects the hierarchical division of the development discourse. The Self is represented as knowledgeable, and the Other as not knowledgeable.

The hierarchical difference is visible in the interactive transactions (i.e. actions with people). We mostly 'teach [our] colleagues from Kenya', 'instruct' them, 'train' them, or even 'infect' them. On the other hand local teachers are represented in interactive social actions only in relation to their colleagues, to whom they are able to transmit knowledge, or when they have a 'presentation ready for parents'. Whereas we interact with them, they 'interact' almost only with things – namely computers (i.e. they engage in instrumental transactions) – or their actions are non-transactive and do not have an effect on the world. When they interact with people, they interact only with each other and not with us. We interact with them as we teach them, but as they are taught, they cannot really interact back. There is no place for such an interaction in the text.

Our actions are objectivated (26%) roughly as much as 'theirs' (32%). The objectivation of social actions or reactions downgrades the representation in order to give priority to something else (Van Leuuwen 2008: 64). Descriptivisation is related to the actors in different ways, though. Our descriptivisations include modern, innovative or enthusiastic teachers, striking results and innovative practices and, less often, being glad, happy or surprised. Their descriptivisations, on the other hand, are related to their capabilities of transmitting knowledge and being able to work with technologies as either PC beginners or advanced PC users. They are also portrayed as being lucky and thankful. Their positive descriptivisation is thus more often connected to the skills important for the project than to more general qualities such as being modern or innovative, which are not related

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to the project in a particular way. Whereas we are glad and happy, they are lucky and thankful. The only negative descriptivisation is connected to the conditions of accommodation in Rukanga, which are 'not ideal'. On both sides the 'teaching', the 'training', and the 'educational process' have been objectivised as if these were processes on their own and did not include hierarchical interaction.

In sum, the analysis of the representations of social actors and social actions makes clear the hierarchisations between the actors. Their cognitive reactions are related to their lack of knowledge, their affective reactions express gratitude towards us and whereas we are described as modern in general, they are not. Also, where we interact with them to teach them, they cannot interact back. However, the hierarchy could be a lot sharper. The reason for the mildness of the analysed article might be that teachers are a special sub-group of the category Other. This is supported by the distinction between functional categorisation in the case of the teachers and categorisation only on the basis of origin in the case of the 'local people'. In any case, the aim of the partnership called for by the Pontis Foundation is not reflected in the text, as the partners are not represented as equals, but as unequal actors with us above them.

The rest of the corpus showed a similar pattern of hierarchisation. For example in the article '335 students attend information technologies lessons at Moi High School - Kasigau in Kenya' (Pontis 2011a) there are six nominations of 'us' and three of 'them'. Whereas 'we' (Ivana Raslavská) are quoted directly four times, 'they' (Chrispin Mwawana) are represented through rendition (i.e. reported speech) twice. There were similar instances of us being activated in interactive transactions with them and of them interacting with ICT and among themselves.[8] In general I found many other similarities with the main analysed text, but this does not mean that there were not instances of them being represented as knowledgeable, e.g. in David Ogigu being invited to Poland 'to talk about protection of wild animals' (Pontis 2010d). Two articles in the corpus even claimed that the goal of the project was to change stereotypes and prejudices related to Africa (Pontis n.a.b, Šimek 2010). However, it is doubtful how successful these attempts were as Pontis, on the one hand, presented Kenya as being good in terms of technologies (mobile banking), but on the other hand argued that Kenya needs more technologies, and is 'lagging behind in the construction of roads, distribution networks and the accessibility of drinking water', while Africa was represented as risky and unstable (Šimek 2010).

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8 For example: 'Ms. Kontúrová and two other teachers will in few months go to Kenya to train their Kenyan colleagues about how to use information and communication technologies when teaching their students.' (Pontis 2010b)

In the discussion after the respondents saw the results of the research, part of the 'blame' for the hierarchical character of the analysed texts was put on Pontis's PR manager, upon whom the respondents had only limited influence.

Analysis of the interviews

In this part I will analyse the interviews in relation to the question of hierarchisation. I will first focus on the representations outside of the development discourse, then I will deal with the negative (and hierarchising) representations and after that I will discuss the positive representations in the interviews. Afterwards I will point to the aim to achieve an equal relationship with the partners expressed by the respondents. The final paragraph briefly reproduces the respondents' reaction to the first draft of this analysis.

The questions that were directed at the problem of hierarchisation were concerned with the characterisation of a country in the global South (Kenya, Egypt or Tunisia) depending on the respondents' experience, their relation to the local people, and the cultural differences between the people in the particular country and those in Slovakia. However, various forms of hierarchisation appeared in the responses to other questions as well.

The countries from the global South were to a certain extent characterised outside of the development discourse. For example, one respondent said, 'Kenya is a large country, an important country in East Africa' (Interview No. 2 2013). Also, Egypt is seen as a highly specific case due to 'the revolutionary changes' there (Interview No. 4 2013). These respondents did not begin their answers by talking about e.g. the Kenyan or Egyptian 'level of development', the given country's rate of economic growth or any other typical element of the development discourse. Later in the interviews, however, they followed this discourse to a much greater extent.

Also the representations of the people in these countries remained to some extent outside of the development discourse. Those in Kenya were referred to in relation to the ethnic diversity there (and not e.g. in relation to their natality or educational level, etc.). Thus Kenya is seen as 'strongly multicultural' (Interview No. 3 2013).

However, other representations were in accordance with the development discourse. Despite some reservations, when directly asked, the respondents accepted the classification of Kenya as a 'developing' country (Interview No. 3 2013). One respondent had 'a problem […] with dividing countries into developing and developed [countries]' and '[did] not feel that Tunisia would be a developing country' (Interview No. 1 2013). Yet, a similar refusal was less strong in the case of Kenya, which was, 'according to objective indicators,' considered to be a developing country (ibid.)

even though the 'statistics did not reflect the experience' (ibid.) of the respondent who said this.[9] The power of the development discourse is clearly present. The respondent questions it, but then accepts it as it is supposedly objective or because someone called a country a 'developing' country.

The usual stereotypes of the development discourse were also present in the interviews. For example, Kenyans were contrasted to Slovaks in terms of their relationship to nature. Kenyans consider nature to be 'a source of income' (Interview No. 3 2013), whereas 'we Slovaks maybe think about nature in the direction that nature is something that one should protect [sic]' (ibid.). This stereotype not only places us above them, but also repeats one of the main traits of the sustainable development discourse shifting 'the blame away from the large industrial polluters in [the] North and [the] South and the predatory way of life fostered by capitalism and development to poor peasants and "backward" practices such as slash-and-burn agriculture' (Escobar 1996: 330).

Another often invoked hierarchising stereotype is that developing countries are full of corruption. The respondents said that Kenya is a country with 'a lot of corruption' (Interview No. 2 2013). Although the corruption there might be 'comparable to what is happening elsewhere in the world' (Interview No. 3 2013), 'it is extremely conspicuous over there' (ibid). As, among others, Abrahamsen (2000: 44) and Wilson (2012: 137) claim, in the good governance discourse, the rich industrialised countries retain the high moral ground and are shielded from scrutiny. There is an interesting turn in the good governance discourse here. This respondent keeps the hierarchy, but admits that there is corruption in the rich countries as well.

One respondent mentioned that the mentality in Kenya is such 'as if they did not think into the future, but they [rather] think about what comes in the immediate moment. Thus the poverty might be also the result of the lack of certain planning, [or] maybe the [lack of] creation of savings' (ibid.).[10] Also according to this respondent, Slovaks keep their discussions more at the level of opinions than at the level of ethnic cleavages (ibid.). The hierarchising stereotype of the rational self and the irrational other was thus reproduced in this respondent's answers. Other negative representations of the Other in the interviews involved poverty, unemployment, inequality, crime and an authoritarian government (Interview No. 3 2013; Interview No. 51 2013; Interview No. 2 2013).

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9   Another respondent said that Kenya is a developing country 'because someone called it that […] if there is a GDP per capita definition and they belong on the [low income country] level, then according to this definition, it is a developing country' (Interview No. 2 2013). However, this respondent was not content with the fact that countries get written off just because they are called developing countries.

10 There are two points to be mentioned here. First, circumstances can make this a rational strategy. Second, there indeed might be a different time concept that lacks a future in Africa, as John S. Mbiti claims, and thus a critique of it may contradict the partnership discourse. However, time conceptions of the future have been found in several African languages (Eriksson Baaz 2005: 98).

Finally, the stereotype of the Self that activates the agency of the Other was repeated in relation to the partnership. The Other is represented as 'wanting to work' (Interview No. 3 2013), and the Self as the enabler: 'That means that only by creating an opportunity for them, by showing them a way, it is their choice whether they take it [sic]... it is not about us dictating what they are supposed to do, but it is about us showing them that there is another way' (ibid.).

This is related to the stereotype of the knowledgeable Self and the Other, who needs this knowledge. One respondent, when defining 'development,' claimed that it means 'qualitatively moving forward the capacities of the people... to support the NGOs in Tunisia, to know how to write a grant proposal, how to lobby against institutions, how to fundraise, how to support one's sustainability...' (Interview No. 1 2013). In both these instances, the Self remains hierarchically above the Other.

On the other hand, the positive accounts of the Other in the interviews were also concrete. The partners were characterised as, e.g., 'nice' (Interview No. 4 2013), and the experience from the cooperation with them as 'excellent' (Interview No. 1 2013). One respondent said that the people in the Kenyan countryside were 'open and friendly, and so are the people in smaller Slovak towns' (Interview No. 2 2013). Another said that the civil society in Tunisia is 'very enthusiastic, and the people are very active' (Interview No. 1 2013). One respondent praised 'the business thinking' of the young men and their 'willingness to work' (Interview No. 3 2013) The stereotype of the passive aid recipient (see, e.g., Eriksson Baaz 2005: 121) was thus countered. The business thinking characteristic went against the stereotype of the Other being incapable of doing business and therefore being in need of the knowledgeable Self that one encounters in, e.g., the microfinance discourse. Such representations thus do not hierarchise cultures, but enable a more equal perspective on the partners.

On several occasions the respondents explicitly stressed the effort to achieve equal relations with their partners. One of them would like to 'perceive the relation more as a cooperation than classify it as development cooperation' (Interview No. 2 2013), and in his or her view, it is an overly shallow perception to say that 'we are those who go there to develop them and they are those who will be developed' (ibid.). Another respondent even claimed that it is not Pontis's goal 'to reach development in that community, but rather to help in particular activities or areas that those people themselves define' (Interview No. 3 2013). Yet another respondent thought that 'development' could go the other way around and that it could be cyclical, which would be an ideal project... the fact that we are qualitatively higher in some segments of the relationship does not mean that in others we cannot be qualitatively lower. Simply put, we can also learn something'

(Interview No. 4 2013). He also admitted that this cyclical exchange is not stressed in Pontis's projects: 'the projects that we do are simply set in this way from the donor's side' (ibid.).

Apparently the hierarchisation is weaker in the interviews than in the analysed texts. Whereas the texts reproduce the unequal paternalist discourse, the interviews avoid the discourse, break it and confirm it. It is significant that the confirmations follow after direct questions related to the discourse have been posed and, more importantly, after an explicit subordination to the official discourse occurs. There is also an explicit attempt to achieve equal relations with the partners. Despite the breaks in the discourse, the hierarchisation that is typical for the development discourse has been reproduced in some of the stereotypes. The Other's lack of knowledge appears again as the most important stereotype confirming the scheme followed in the analysed texts. Thus, the hierarchic discourse has been partially disrupted, but also confirmed, the attempts to follow the partnership rhetoric notwithstanding. The disruption of the hierarchisation can be ascribed to the critique of Eurocentrism and to one of its outcomes – the partnership discourse (both of which are explicitly endorsed by the respondents), but also to a simple avoidance of the development discourse when the questions were most open.

The respondents, after they saw the results of the research, confirmed that they had problems with the 'developed/developing' distinction, and one respondent added that the problem is that when one begins to talk about 'developing' countries, people think in a kind of pre-defined reductionist way about something negative connected to a particular country. She also understood the need for classification as stemming from 'the need to legitimise what is happening in the world.' However, the term 'development' was not considered problematic by them.

Sanctification and the definition of 'development'

Analysis of the texts

In this part I will focus especially on an analysis of the interviews in terms of how they use the term 'development.' In the corpus (see the section on methodology) it is used mostly as part of the terms 'official development aid' and 'the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation'. Other uses of the term include its uses in the phrases 'development of local tourism', 'development of other activities', 'development of the Kasigau region' and, when quoting Jakub Šimek, a Pontis employee, 'economic development' (of the same region). There is no disruption of the development discourse in these texts.

Analysis of the interviews with the respondents from the Pontis Foundation

This section will first focus on the doubts expressed regarding the term 'development' and after that will focus on its acceptance.

In general the respondents disrupted the discourse of development in their initial answers to the direct questions about how they use the term and what it means to them. According to one of them it is 'a buzzword' (Interview No. 4 2013), i.e. a word that one uses 'without thinking about what it actually means […] because [we] are applying for the projects of development education connected to some calls for development education bound up with the global education strategy, the national strategy' (ibid.). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs demands that particular 'development' projects are to be carried out, and the NGDO follows the direction of the project as it is set by the Ministry or by another donor. One is not 'concerned with whether development means this or that [for him or her] […] but [one is] interested in whether [he or she] bought the plane tickets [etc.]' (ibid.). The term thus comes especially from external actors, and '[i]t is part of the usual terminology that one uses here without attaching to it a distinctive connotation... it is rather a technical and partly a banal term' (ibid.). The respondent here represents Pontis not as a producer, but as a receiver of the discourse who carries it further because of institutional demands coming from the donor (the Ministry).

Another respondent also disrupted the discourse by trying not to use the term 'development', 'because for our partners it is a very sensitive issue, since Tunisia is going through changes that the Tunisians themselves do not want to perceive as something that is concerned with the term development in its true sense,[11] as [a process that would be connected with] some Third World country' (Interview No. 1 2013). Another respondent similarly stated that he would prefer to replace the term 'development cooperation' with just 'cooperation' (Interview No. 2 2013), as the Kenyan students are capable of reaching the level of the Slovaks in, e.g., creating a presentation video for a company or business cards in a year or so. After that, a cooperation on an equal footing could follow, and it 'could develop both the Slovak and the Kenyan schools' (ibid.).

Though these answers disrupted the image of a monolithic development discourse, there were very often returns to the 'usual understanding' (Interview No. 3 2013) of the term. In this particular case it followed a circular argument that defined it as 'a socioeconomic development', thus proving the insight that 'development' is especially understood as a self-evident term. Other, more comprehensible replies confirmed the sanctifying hypothesis: development is 'a movement to

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11 In the discussion after the respondents went through the text, the respondent who said this specified that by the 'true sense', she meant the sense in which the term would be understood by the Tunisians - the usual hierarchical sense - and claimed that she would never use it in this way.

[…] a qualitatively better state' (Interview No. 4 2013); or it is 'an advancement forward, or progress in something, e.g. […] some socio-economic matters' (Interview No. 1 2013).

These accounts were further confirmed in instances, where other topics were discussed. Especially in relation to the economic question, 'development' turned into 'growth' (Interview No. 3 2013). Or, quite explicitly, it was stated that what China and Korea achieved during the last fifty years 'certainly is [development]' (Interview No. 2 2013). Regarding the question of education, one respondent replied that with more investments going into formal education, 'the [aided] country would be more developed in terms of those socio-economic indicators that we here accept as ours (laughing)' (Interview No. 1 2013). The respondents thus not only attributed a positive value to the term 'development,' but also followed the classical (linear) development perspective of improvement along the industrializing path.

To sum up, apparently, the respondents use the term since they are required to use it in the context of their everyday jobs in accordance with the institutional demands coming from the Ministry. Two of them even prefer to avoid it, but this is due to reasons related to the critique of paternalism and hierarchisation and not to its sanctifying effect. They thus offer a contradictory perspective. On the one hand, 'development' is a technical, banal buzzword with no particular meaning, and on the other, it is a term with clearly positive connotations. Furthermore, they explicitly accept the common usage of it with its socio-economic indicators and even equate it with the South Korean experience. Despite the explicit rejection of the term (which was actually refuted in the discussion afterwards) and the questioning of its meaning, the discourse still penetrates into the thinking of the respondents, who give the term a positive connotation and connect it to the linear evolutionary thinking that is typical for the modernisation theories. This is then also relevant for the hierarchising effect of the discourse, as the evolutionary thinking hierarchises cultures. Such a contradictory approach may reflect the influence of the equalizing partnership discourse that makes the respondents not want to use the term in relation to their partners or prefer the term 'cooperation' over 'development cooperation'. However, their dependency on the government funding could be understood as a factor that keeps them tied to the discourse so that they reproduce its hierarchising and sanctifying core without always intending to do so. More importantly, both hierarchisation and sanctification were also intentionally accepted by the respondents when they replied to the direct question about the meaning of the term and when they talked about China and Korea in a way that was very much in accordance with the classical development paradigm.

Conclusion

The research question posed at the beginning of this article asked how the Pontis Foundation's discourse differs from the development discourse. Within this article, I focused on two effects of the discourse – hierarchisation and sanctification – and, in connection with this, analysed a set of texts from Pontis and also a set of interviews with four of its employees.

A discursive analysis of social actors and actions in the texts revealed a hierarchical pattern between us and them, thus contradicting Pontis's rhetoric of equal partners. The interviews, on the other hand, offered a much more varied approach to the Other. Negative stereotypes were both countered and reproduced in them. Also, in the responses to a general question, the whole discourse of comparison was avoided. After some direct questions were answered, the hierarchisation was problematised, but then it was accepted as somehow being the objective perspective on reality. The discourse was thus partially disrupted and there was a clear difference between the texts and the interviews.

The sanctification of 'development' has been confirmed in the texts, which used the term in an unquestioning manner, but most often it was used as part of other terms such as 'official development aid'. The lower level of the use of the term could be ascribed to the fact that it was education rather than 'development' that was the dominant topic. The term 'development' was also positively connoted by the respondents having the sanctifying effect. However, the respondents sometimes explicitly rejected the term, but this was due to its hierarchising connotation. On the other hand, when they responded to the questions related to other topics, they confirmed the linear evolutionary thinking associated with the term. Thus, again, the discourse was partially disrupted.

This result confirms the critique of the monolithic nature of discourse and validates the need to study both agency and structure. More importantly, it shows that there is a tension between the classical development paradigm and the partnership approach, however the rules of the formation of the development discourse seem to prevail, the attempts to change them notwithstanding.

Both the disruption of hierarchisation and the lukewarm acceptance (and sometimes explicit rejection) of the term 'development' could be ascribed to the influence of the widely promoted discourse of partnership, as the respondents explicitly claimed. They want to consider the recipients as partners, and some of them prefer not to use the term 'development' for precisely this reason.

Apart from the acknowledged influence of the partnership discourse, the search for an understanding of the results could start with the donor. The donor partly imposes the development discourse on Pontis, as its employees made clear during the interviews. Another factor might be the PR imperatives. They were most visible in the texts that do not disrupt the discourse at all and the

respondents claimed that the PR was crucial after they read the draft of this analysis. Finally, the discourse itself is powerful enough to make the respondents accept it as official and therefore somehow true, even after they explicitly questioned it. However, the discourse is the most insidious when the respondents succumb to it in their responses related to other topics and take for granted that there is such a thing as 'development' and states follow the path associated with the discourse more or less successfully as they become more or less 'developed'.

The research thus contributes to the understanding of the development discourse, and even though it supports the rejection of the view of discourse as monolithic or singular, at the same time it shows the usefulness of putting together its core elements to enable a more focused analysis. In relation to the study of NGOs, it shows that Pontis is to a great extent a receiver of the development discourse rather than its producer, and its employees reproduce it due to material reasons. And regarding the research on the 'new' donors, this particular case study points to an acceptance of the world trends in both maintaining the development discourse and disrupting it through partnership in one NGDO from Slovakia. More research is necessary in order to make a more general claim about the Slovak development apparatus.

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