The Slovak NGDO Pontis Foundation's Depoliticizing Development Discourse[1]

Abstract

The aim of this text is to find out whether the Pontis Foundation, a Slovak philanthrocapitalist NGO that also engages in development cooperation, depoliticizes unequal power relations in its discourse and if so, how. Using samples of promotional materials published by Pontis, I analyse Pontis' discursive constructions of legitimation and interviews with respondents from Pontis. My analysis shows that documents published by Pontis do indeed depoliticize unequal power relations, for example, by highlighting the importance of education. I also find that the Foundation's employees, with the exception of one who comments on the organization's apolitical stance, exclude politics from their personal perspectives. The article also discusses the question of intentionality in the depoliticizing discourse and the question of the way ideology works in relation to depoliticization.

Key words: depoliticization, development discourse, Pontis Foundation, Slovakia, new donors

Introduction

More than a century ago, the German sociologist Georg Simmel argued that directly helping the poor stabilized systems of inequality. According to him, although welfare does transfer resources from the rich to the poor, "it still in no way approaches an equalization of these individual positions and [the idea of welfare] will not at all overcome the *tendency* for the differentiation of society into rich and poor" (Simmel 2009: 413). Instead, its purpose is "to mitigate some of the extreme manifestations of social division" (ibid.).

It is not difficult to see the similarities between the welfare Simmel discussed and our own modern-day form of "development"[2] cooperation. Here too, aid flowing from North to South, and also from South to South, conceals the world's tendency to differentiate people into the rich and the poor. Development projects and programs (often) aim at improving the lives of the poor, but at the same time disregard how or why people become and remain poor.

The exclusion of political matters from the development apparatus is called depoliticization. The problem of removing conflicting issues from the political field has been dealt with by a number of scholars in general within political science (Bourdieu 2002; Crouch 2004; Flinders and Buller 2006; Foucault 2002a; Mouffe 2005; Pettit 2004; Rancière 1999; Rose 2004; Simmel 2009; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014a; Žižek 1999) as well as in the subfield of depoliticization within development studies (Brockington 2014; Dogra 2014;

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2   Due to the contested meaning of the term "development" I put it between quotation marks here; however, in order to avoid their extensive use, I do so only in this first case of its use.

Easterly 2013; Erkkilä and Piironen 2009, 2014; Feldman 2003; Ferguson 1994; Harris 2001; Hout 2010; Hout – Robinson 2009; Jaeger 2007; Kamat 2014; Kapoor 2012; Li 2007; Löwenheim 2008; Manji 1998; White 1996, 2006). Making technical issues the central concern of a project often leads to the exclusion of political issues. Depoliticization then denotes (political) attempts to suppress or disavow conflicting issues with clearly defined or potential enemies (see Author). The aim of this paper is to offer a small empirical contribution that focuses on one particular actor and its depoliticizing discourse and to engage with broader theoretical arguments. My research question is whether the Pontis Foundation depoliticizes unequal power relations through its discourse – and if so, how.

Apart from studies of depoliticization, this paper should also enrich two more academic subfields within development studies: the study of development discourse (see, e.g., Escobar 1995) and the study of NGOs (see, e.g., Lewis and Kanji 2009).

The paper focuses on the Pontis Foundation – one of the most important NGOs in Slovakia, even if most likely it is unknown to the international forum. Taking a leading role against the semi-authoritarian ruler Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s, the Foundation became one of the crucial representatives of cooperation between the Slovak private sphere and the civil society. This philanthrocapitalist NGO cooperates with companies such as Accenture or Lenovo on practices related to their corporate social responsibility - e.g. helping children, supporting volunteers or teaching business skills in Slovakia. Pontis also administers their funds and the Business Leaders Forum, an informal association of firms that commit themselves to enforcing the principles of corporate social responsibility. In general, Pontis helps companies with their CSR. Such a friendly relationship with the private sector suggests that Pontis is an apt candidate for an analysis of depoliticization. The contradictory results, however, show that Pontis' philanthrocapitalist nature need not have a determining impact on its employees.

Within the field of "development and democratization," the Pontis Foundation engages in the North African region, the Balkans and other countries and competes for government grants. There are 36 employees in the whole NGO, and around four of them deal with development cooperation and global development education. Pontis "contributes to the development of civil society in the non-democratic and transition countries of the world, such as Belarus, Cuba, Iraq, and Serbia" (Pontis n.d.-d), but also engages in Kenya with its computer project that I focus on in this text. As such Pontis is just yet another Slovak NGDO. Its main difference from other Slovak NGDOs, however, is its strong orientation toward the private sector. Within development cooperation most of its funds come from the state, though.

The main reason for choosing the selected project is its educational aim as education can have both politicizing and depoliticizing consequences. It

should be noted that the project was successful according to Pontis.[3] Just like Ferguson's (1994) analysis, the analysis here does not focus on the actual outcomes of the project, but on its discursive side-effects. The aim is not to analyze the specific elements of the projects, but to analyze its general discursive enactment that (re)produces the depoliticizing development discourse.

As of yet, there has been no research about the Pontis Foundation as a particular actor. While non-mainstream media have criticized the NGO for being part of the "infrastructure of the Slovak neoliberalism" (Chmelár 2005) there is little theoretically anchored research on Slovak NGOs in general (see Author) and none on Pontis in particular (see Author). Therefore, this study helps to fill an existing gap.

The Slovak development cooperation does not substantially differ from other development cooperations in the region. The Slovak government dedicates around 0,10% of the Slovak GNP to this cooperation. Most of the money goes to the EU budget, but around six mil. euro is spent mainly on a cooperation with the countries of the Easter Partnership and the Balkans, while some of it also flows to Kenya and South Sudan. Slovak NGDOs work with their "partners" in the global South to realize actual projects supported by the Slovak Agency for International Development and Cooperation, a body set up by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. The NGOs are grouped in a platform and have been criticized for their close relationship with the state (Author) just like the NGDOs in other countries (see, e.g., Banks – Hulme – Edwards 2015). Slovakia has a past of international aid from when it was part of Czechoslovakia during the period before 1989, but this experience is being disremembered (see Author). The present study focuses on one Slovak NGDO and its particular discourse.

The analytical part of this article reflects upon two arguments – that development projects depoliticize in general (Ferguson 1994) and that education as a focus of these projects depoliticizes in particular (Spitzl 2011). The research presented here thus confirms existing analyses of depoliticization. It also engages in a more theoretical argument with regard to the question of how the government is represented in the analyzed interviews, discussing Ferguson's (1994) argument and Li's (2007) follow-up on that argument. I will argue that good governance enables an ambivalent relation to the government. The government is, on the one hand, criticized by the respondents and, on the other, still considered as a neutral instrument of development. Furthermore, I will argue that there might be intentionality in the production of a depoliticized discourse and that ideology may work at the level of false consciousness, but also through so-called development cynicism.

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3   If one can believe that their data really measure the success of their project and not of other educational interventions: "Moi High School was in 2009 near the bottom of [both the] district and province school ranking in the leaving exams results (KSCEs). But after the project was over, in August 2011, it scored as the second best from 13 schools in the Voi district and as 10th from 46 schools in Taita – Taveta Province" (Pontis 2011c, see also Pontis 2011b).

First, I briefly present the post-structuralist theoretical framework and the critical discourse analysis method. Then I engage with the analysis of depoliticization in general, but particularly in relation to education. In the last section I will engage with the more theoretical arguments about intentionality in development related to depoliticization and about development cynicism.

Methodology

This article is based on a post-structuralist theoretical framework. The main assumption of this approach is that there is no such thing as neutral facts, but that reality is socially constructed. We perceive it through a discourse, which Foucault defines as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 2002b: 54). We do not come to these objects without any prior knowledge, but with a certain perspective that is based on our social surroundings.

It is crucial to be aware of the possibility of changing discourses. Foucault, especially in his later work (Foucault 1982), perceived in the possibility of exercising power the need for exercising freedom. Agency is an integral part of the post-structuralist perspective and I focus on how structure (discourse) is created by subjects' agency. On the one hand Pontis' employees write articles that are more likely to follow the development discourse, and on the other some of them act differently when they speak during interviews.

The empirical part includes an analysis based mainly on Theo van Leeuwen's method of critical discourse analysis (van Leeuwen 2008). Here I closely analyse the PR article 'Slovak Teachers Taught Their Colleagues from Kenya How to Use Information Technologies' (Pontis 2010c). This article was destined for potential supporters interested in Pontis' work. The rest of the corpus includes all the texts I could find on the topic of the article on the Pontis website (Pontis n.a.a, n.a.b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010d, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012). They are all related to the project 'Increasing the PC Literacy of Teachers and Students in Southeast Kenya'. The reason for choosing one particular article ('Slovak Teachers...') was the way it represents the project as a whole – Slovaks coming to Kenya, teaching the Kenyans, Kenyans learning and demonstrating their newly acquired knowledge – and not just its parts (e.g. the preparatory journey or the goals of the project) as in other articles. The other texts referred to the events and other elements of the project in a similar way, as they either represented it positively or offered descriptive information about Kenya. I will also include supporting evidence from these throughout the analysis.

While I will analyze the discursive constructions of legitimation (van Leeuwen 2008: 105-123), I will also use some of the categories from the analysis of discursive construction of social actions such as mythopoesis, moral evaluation, positive analogies, role models, distillations or omission of agents. I will explain the categories throughout the analytical part when necessary.

The study of the interviews does not follow a detailed method of discourse analysis, but merely focuses on the argumentation. It thus engages in a very general qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000) of mostly intentional and consciously controlled answers to my questions. The analysis focuses on the claims made by the respondents in connection with one main category – depoliticization. For a more detailed categorization of depoliticization see Author (under review). In the interviews I asked the respondents what they thought the reasons for poverty were, how they would solve the problems of poverty, how development can be reached and what the role of the market is in development.

In order to engage in more theoretical arguments and support them with more data, in this study I also include interview answers from respondents from CARE Austria and Austroprojekt (two non-state development organizations similar to Pontis) from my PhD thesis. For the thesis I analysed more than 150 texts of various formats altogether and conducted 26 interviews. Here I present a part of the research and some partial results.

In the next section I briefly present what depoliticization in development means and connect this perspective to my own research using the above mentioned methodological categories.

Depoliticization in development

Development as "the anti-politics machine" (Ferguson 1994) depoliticizes conflicting issues and unequal power relations. Within the development machine, structural problems of unequal power relations are excluded from the discourse of development organizations.

Ferguson shows in his research how the World Bank portrays Lesotho. This representation differs markedly from the country's portrayal in academia. Whereas in 1910 the *Encyclopedia Britannica* wrote about a thriving trade of agricultural products between South Africa and Lesotho, a functioning infrastructure in the country and work-related migration by the Basotho (the people of Lesotho), the World Bank creates an image of a country untouched by modernization with a traditional rural subsistence society which lacks infrastructure and a banking sector (ibid.: 26–27, 30–67).

The reason for the difference in the World Bank's representation, however, is not due to an inability of its analysts to perceive the situation in Lesotho "correctly". Rather, the discourse in this institution can only go in certain directions. The result of the discourse needs to be a development project that requires an intervention of a certain type, for which a country of a certain type – a "less developed country" – is the most promising candidate. The ideal country for this needs to be aboriginal, i.e. outside of the modern world, in order to be incorporated into this world by building infrastructure. It also needs to be agricultural in order to be "developed" by modernizing its farming and irrigation practices. It needs to have a national economy so that national economic plans for it can be supported. And, lastly, there needs to be an assumption of a neutral, effective government on its part (ibid.: 71-72).

"An analysis which suggests that the causes of poverty in Lesotho are political and structural (not technical and geographical), that the national government is part of the problem (not a neutral instrument for its solution), and that meaningful change can only come through revolutionary social transformation in South Africa has no place in development discourse simply because 'development' agencies are not in the business of promoting political realignments or supporting revolutionary struggles" (ibid.: 69).

Therefore, a development organization needs to depict its unit of intervention in such a manner that it will allow it to intervene. My aim will now be to analyse how Pontis depicts its field of intervention, but also to discuss Ferguson's conclusion under the light of more recent analyses of depoliticization and also under the light of the results of my own research.

Analysis of the texts
To be more precise, my aim is to show through a discourse analysis how the article by the Pontis Foundation makes Rukanga in Kenya an "enormously promising candidate" for an "apolitical technical 'development' intervention" (ibid.) and how it represents this intervention as successful, thereby legitimizing it.

First of all, the whole text is a mythopoesis: a legitimation conveyed through a narrative. It is a moral tale about the possibility of achieving progress without the need to mention a conflict or politics. The gist of the story is in the middle of the analyzed text: "Before the Slovaks came to Kenya, the teachers at Rukanga did not know how to work with [PowerPoint]; however, after only three days of the training, they were able to create their own presentation of a very good quality... On Wednesday they saw PowerPoint for the first time, and already on Saturday they had a presentation about the school ready for the parents, and it lasted almost six hours." (Pontis 2010c) The problem in Kenya that Pontis deals with is the lack of IT. Instead of the modernizing of farming practices that Ferguson writes about, there is a different kind of a lack of technology in Kenya. Yet, both approaches ignore political issues in the same way.

The narrative of development cooperation takes the usual path. The knowledgeable Self comes to help the Other, who lacks knowledge. After the training, the knowledge is transferred, and the teachers are now 'developed,' because they are capable of giving a presentation. It is not unequal power relations that need to be transformed. A transfer of technical knowledge should lead to development.

There are other forms of construction of legitimation which further support the main idea of the article. One moral legitimation is constructed

through an analogy.[4] The project designed for the African continent "is based on experiences of the Slovak educational project Innovative Teacher…" (ibid.). The normative assumption of development discourse that development can be achieved by imitating the path undertaken by the West (in this case Slovakia) is repeated here. This assumption downplays that following this (questionable) path can entail political conflicts.

Another form of legitimation is based on a role model and expert authority. The teachers from Bošany are represented as experienced, as they "drew their experiences in teaching with the help of modern technologies from the project A Notebook for Every Pupil" (ibid.). This legitimates their role as experienced teachers who can instruct and train the locals.

There is also a case of expert authority in the text, the expert being Roman Baranovič, the manager of educational projects for Microsoft Slovakia. He is the only person who is quoted twice in the text, and he is given the greatest amount of space out of all of the actors. The hierarchization is most visible here. Knowledge is connected to power, and the importance of experts in development is confirmed (see, e.g., Ziai 2006: 45). The development intervention is thus based on an expert knowledge. It is not politics that can change the situation, but non-political, technical expertise.

There are several examples of legitimation by evaluative adjectives, such as the mentions of "modern", "innovative", or "enthusiastic" teachers; Microsoft's "rich" experience or the "six-hour" presentation of the teachers from Rukanga being "of very good quality" (Pontis 2010c). The text implies that if we are innovative then modern development can ensue. There is again no mention of any conflict that made modernity what it is today.

There is one negative evaluation in the text: the "non-ideal accommodation" (ibid.) in Rukanga. This legitimizes the project in the sense that the teaching could help in development, which would then lead to a better accommodation. If there were ideal conditions in Rukanga, no project would be necessary.

The representation of the "non-ideal accommodation" also omits any agency behind the problematic living conditions. We do not know who is responsible for them. The processes that lead to the existing circumstances are thereby backgrounded. This social action (the non-ideal accommodation) is represented as something that simply exists (van Leeuwen 2008: 67). The reader does not get the information about how the "non-ideal" accommodation in Rukanga came about. We learn nothing about the (neo)colonial processes of exploitation and local corruption or other political processes, without which the current form of accommodation would probably look a lot different. Nor do we learn about a production of discourses that set the norm and define what kind of accommodation is ideal and what kind is non-ideal.

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4   A moral legitimation is a "legitimation by (often very oblique) reference to value systems" (van Leeuwen 2008: 106). Positive analogies legitimize social actions because these analogies claim that the actions are like other activities which are associated with positive values.

Politics is again not in the Pontis Foundation's discourse. The negative evaluation legitimizes the project, but it does not politicize relations of power in any way and thereby enables an apolitical project to be a legitimate response to the problem of non-ideal accommodation.

In sum, the PR articles from Pontis have the non-surprising aim to legitimize a development project. The way they engage in this legitimization leads to a depoliticization of poverty and unequal power relations at its basis. Next I focus on depoliticization, but also on politicization, in the interviews.

Analysis of the interviews

The respondents, in their answers to the questions mentioned above, to a great extent ignored the political problems of unequal trade relations and the colonial legacy behind the current state of affairs. The given reasons for poverty were located in the lack of good governance (Interview No. 5 2013), corruption, the lack of natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa, and a mentality of not being oriented towards the future (Interview No. 3 2013). Another respondent said that the reasons for poverty are primarily a lack of resources, the low level of wealth of individuals or their parents, insufficient or irregular incomes, low levels of savings, bad habits such as drug abuse, reasons related to culture, the fact that families have too many kids, low levels of education, and an insufficient social and health infrastructure (Interview No. 7 2013).

Dogra calls this confusion of causes with components or dimensions of poverty *disaggregation*. It "gives the impression that substantial information is being provided but obscures the fact that the 'information' is tautological and circulatory. The information at best, merely splits up the manifest symptoms of a complex issue to show them as various 'causes'" (Dogra 2014: 85). According to her, disaggregation of poverty contributes to its portrayal as a technical issue since the symptoms are represented as treatable.

The question regarding the way to reach development offered similar answers. One respondent considered as important effective state intervention in education, health, and political stability that can lead to foreign investment and subsequently to the creation of jobs, and then to higher consumption (Interview No. 7 2013).

These responses show a clear change from the 1980s, when Ferguson was doing his field research. The question is, how far does this change go? Nowadays the government is not considered to be a neutral instrument, but is, in the rhetoric, perceived as part of the problem. It seems that politics enters the development discourse through governance. This is partly confirmed by Tania Murray Li. Development agencies such as the Asian Development Bank, according to her, acknowledge the importance of power relations. The "detailed and site-specific project planning seems to bear little resemblance to the scenario in Lesotho described by Ferguson in the 1970s, in which ahistorical generic descriptions were used to characterize 'underdeveloped' countries…" (Li 2007: 125–126). But according to her, depoliticization still

takes place and Ferguson's analysis remains pertinent: "Yet despite the attention to detail, the programs… retained two fundamental features of the development problematic Ferguson identified. First, they reposed political-economic causes of poverty and injustice in terms amenable to technical solution. Second, they highlighted only those problems for which a technical solution could in fact be proposed – sidelining much of the data so painstakingly collected" (ibid.). Thus the design study of the Asian Development Bank recognized the history, economy and social structure of the area with problems such as landlessness, indebtedness or migration, but the project plan proposed income-generating projects and improved farming techniques as solutions to this situation.

The interviews show a similar phenomenon. The respondents speak of the government in terms of problems related to corruption and bad governance. Politics thus seem to enter the development discourse. However, at the same time the state is expected to engage in an effective intervention in education, health and political stability (Interview No. 7). It is expected of the state to "assist in that development" (Interview No. 5 2016). On the one hand, the government is corrupted and does not govern well; on the other there is still a need for an actor who will enact the development intervention. The role of the state is twofold – it is a problem that needs to be dealt with unlike in the discourse analyzed by Ferguson, yet, in accordance with Ferguson, the state is still expected to intervene effectively into the society.

Moreover, the criticism of bad governance and the call for good governance are never specified by the respondents (but it should be noted that I did not inquire any further about this point). Good governance is used as a buzzword. However, the good governance discourse represents governance as a nonpolitical tool, a technocratic affair whose aim is to secure efficiency in public administration. This is visible not only in the official good governance documents (Demmers, Jilberto and Hogenboom 2004, Hout 2009), but also in the way the good governance indicators are constructed (Erkkilä and Piironen 2009, 2014, Hout 2010). Thus, even the seemingly political criticism of governance can be depoliticizing.

The discourse analysis of the interviews reveals further depoliticizations. For one respondent, in order to reach development, "it is important to create possibilities and opportunities for the people" (Interview No. 3 2013). To support her argument, she offered the example of a community of basket weavers – old women – for whom students made a Facebook site so that they would be able to reach more customers. Here the respondent echoes Ferguson's argument that the location needs to be represented as lacking infrastructure. Whereas in Lesotho the problem was allegedly with the lack of a market for cattle, here the market for baskets is missing and the solution is again apolitical – the creation of a Facebook site that will bring the market to the producer in Rukanga.

These reasons for poverty and the proposed measures to reach development exclude international (and local) politics from the picture. The

three respondents who gave the statements mentioned above thus seem to confirm the depoliticization thesis, and their views are in accordance with the texts that their organization produces.

However, there is one respondent who considered the reason for poverty to be the following: "a combination of certain geopolitical and trade relations, in which the given country is situated in combination with some kind of historical evolution that might have been influenced by, e.g., some colonial past or some military conflicts" (Interview No. 4 2013). If he had the ability to change things, he would "adjust the political and economic relations at the global level" (ibid.). When I asked the respondent why Pontis was not doing anything about this, he said: "We are trying to be an apolitical organization on the outside. This is, I think, the most important reason. And also [...] because our people do not perceive this aspect of poverty [or it is not something that would be important for their decisions ... and] because Pontis' leadership has a strategy, and this is not included in that strategy" (ibid.). Here the political was at the centre of the analysis, and its omission in Pontis' practice was acknowledged.

A direct question related to the role of the market in development revealed an awareness among the respondents of the political problems connected to the free market. A general turn away from the worship of the market was reflected in their responses. However, their admitted lack of knowledge about this matter was striking. Two respondents said that they simply "do not know" (Interview No. 3 2013; Interview No. 5 2013). One said that she is "not an expert," and the other one "[did] not have a concrete opinion on the matter." The respondents understood the market in terms of "the comparative advantage" (ibid.) theory as basically a positive force that, however, could have negative consequences. Another respondent thought that state intervention is necessary, but that it should lead to greater openness (Interview No. 7 2013). Another saw the market as having a large role in development, but he also did not know whether more regulated trade or more free trade is the better option, only to highlight the problematic regulation of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (Interview No. 4 2013). It seems as if the discursive changes in favor of regulation since the financial crisis in 2008 enabled slightly politicized answers among the respondents. These, however, do not in any way translate into the practice of their development projects.

Thus, *in general*, Pontis does not see poverty as a political problem connected, for example, to the national power relations or to the way the world market is regulated (or a lack of such regulation). Yet, development projects, along with the whole development apparatus, perform power-laden operations. They (through their discourse) create a claim that poverty can be reduced through technical means, in this case computerized education. Here, power operates through discourse. People within development organizations seem to believe that they help to improve the lives of others through their work. However, their (possibly positive) actions add to this immense discourse of development and, as one of the myriad focal points, become entangled in

workings of power. This, then, is how power (as well as discourse) operates through subjects.

However, one should bear in mind a politicizing discourse that has been expressed by one Pontis respondent. This shows that counterdiscourses are there, ready to be used, but it is not only the way the projects are constructed as non-political interventions, but also the self-representation of NGOs as non-political institutions that prevents a more extensive spread of the discourse (see the last section for a discussion of this issue).

A more particular form of depoliticization has its basis in the discourse of education, to which the next section is dedicated. The research question here asks how Pontis depoliticizes within the sphere of education.

Depoliticization in education

In order to answer the research question in the field of education, one needs to specify the way depoliticization works in this field. Bowles and Gintis (1976, see also 2002) argued that the most important function of education in the US society is depoliticization. According to them "[e]ducation plays a major role in hiding or justifying the exploitative nature of the U.S. Economy" (ibid.: 13). Their argument is based on quantitative evidence that shows the persistent inequality in American society and the inability of education to alter this inequality. The problem with the education system, then, is that it "legitimates economic inequality by providing an open, objective, and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions. The educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills..." (ibid.: 103).

A similar pattern is decipherable in the education discourse within development. Spitzl shows that "education gains a quasi magic function in the global/ised discourse […], in which it is represented as the central instrument for changing the world and for the reduction of poverty" (Spitzl 2011: 66). Thus the leading metaphor in the education discourse is the "key" (ibid.). Education becomes "the key that gives access to the twenty-first century" (UNESCO 1996), "the key to bridging the widening gulf between rich and poor" (World Eduction Forum 2000) or "the key to unlocking the cage of human misery" (Annan 2003; these three quotes are from Spitzl 2011: 66).

There is a clear pattern of ascribing to education a great, if not the greatest, role in the process of development. This allows the dominant actors to turn attention away from unequal power relations in the global, as well as the local, setting and focus a population's attention on educational aspirations. The discourse is powerful because it makes people desire education as their "passport" to a better life, or to a better life for their children. By focusing on education or other "ways to development", structural problems remain hidden and are not problematized. As the next section shows, the Pontis Foundation's discourse follows the basic tenets of the educational discourse.

Analysis of the texts, the interviews and the rest of the corpus

Apart from the construction mentioned in the previous sections, the legitimation of the project is constructed in the text also through distillations attributed to the teachers from Rukanga and the local people. Distillation is a form of abstraction that abstracts (distils) particular qualities from social actions in order to legitimize them without actually referring to their substance (van Leeuwen 2008: 69). The teachers understand the importance of the ability "to master technologies... for their future", and the local people "view information technologies and the ability to work with them as a means of securing a better future for themselves" (Pontis 2010c). The only quality of information technologies that is mentioned in both cases is that of securing a better future. These distillations are thus in accordance with the main tenet of the education discourse: the importance of education as a key to a better future (Spitzl 2011).

Other texts about the project confirm these findings. For example, in one text we can read that "[e]ducation is the fastest way to escape from poverty" (Pontis 2010).

The respondents also ascribed great importance to education. The role of formal education in development was considered "huge" (Interview No. 7 2013), "one of the greatest" (Interview No. 5 2013) and "crucial" (Interview No. 3 2013). The three respondents who said these things thus did so in accordance with the discourse of education in development (Spitzl 2011). Overall both the texts and the interviews follow the main depoliticizing tenets of the education discourse in development. Education is supposed to bring development, and unequal relations are excluded from the discourse.

However, the respondent who criticized geopolitical and trade relations thought that education should "explain to [the students] why they are poor and how they can remove poverty from their lives" (Interview No. 4 2013) - for example, it should teach them "how they can improve their consuming practices, what they spend money on and how they can spend more effectively, and how to earn money", but also "why their society is poor", and "this question […] leads to wider relations, not only inside Egypt, but somewhere further" (ibid.). Here the content of education actually matters and more importantly, the depoliticizing discourse of one's own responsibility for one's poverty continues into the discourse that politicizes wider international relations.

As I already claimed, the education discourse in development legitimates economic inequality. "The existing hegemonic power relations are stabilized through the discursive construction […] of the access [to affluence and richness]" that can be achieved through education (Spitzl 2011: 71, my translation). "The asymmetry of the real world remains intact" as education is instrumentalized into the solution for world inequality (ibid.).

In another article by Pontis the importance of education and digital technologies is also related to the ability to find a job on the Internet (Pontis

n.a.a) as if all that was lacking was the infrastructure. Again, just like in Ferguson's (1994) analysis of Lesotho, people are lacking an access to the market. If this problem gets to be solved development will ensue thanks to the forces of the market. Here, the inaccessible market is the job market, which seems to only require the Internet to secure jobs for everyone (for a similar argument see also Hacker 2008).

In summary, the legitimations constructed in the text serve its main (and unsurprising) goal - to legitimize the project - and employ the usual forms to achieve it. Through the expert authority, an analogy with a successful example from the North and the Northern Self, and the evaluative adjectives such as 'modern' or 'innovative', the legitimation is achieved. These forms also repeat the hierarchic colonial patterns, as the Other is represented as lacking what the Self has (see also Author).

At the same time the legitimations have another important effect. As the project is legitimized through all sorts of discursive constructions, depoliticization takes place as well. The constructed legitimacy of the project adds to the discourse that highlights the importance of education. Different attempts to improve living conditions are out of the picture as the text creates the impression that it is through an education in IT that the children will achieve development. The particular legitimations in the text fit the general importance attributed to education, as they agree with the view that the project is important.

The prevention of other (more political) forms of improving the local people's situation is not happening somehow directly through this one particular text or project, but indirectly, as the text becomes part of a hegemonic knowledge. This knowledge puts education in the forefront as the means to overcome poverty. Other, more direct means are put in the background, and the myth of improving one's position with one's own (enhanced) capacities is preserved. The legitimations in the text thus preserve this discursive hegemony.

Theorizing depoliticization of development and the question of intentionality

Overall, the texts follow the depoliticizing discourses of development and education to the letter. However, the respondents offer more contradictory responses. One of them engages in an explicit politicization of unequal power relations. More importantly, this respondent claims that Pontis is actually trying to be a non-political organization. His insight goes against the usual post-structuralist type of analysis that excludes the analysis of intentions. Ferguson (1994: 255) speaks of "side-effects" and of mistakes and errors in the World Bank Report that are "always wrong in the same way" (ibid.: 55), but never mentions why this may be so. The same applies to Li. She does not explain why it is so that the Asian Development Bank suggests only non-political interventions despite also thoroughly analysing issues of power inequality.

Post-development has been criticized for its "conspiratorial, intentionalist reading of development" (McEwan 2009: 104). Indeed, Arturo Escobar (1995: 167) perceives the World Bank as an "agent of economic and cultural imperialism at the service of the global elite", even though such a reading of Escobar may be unfair (see Author 2015: 84). The insight brought about by the mentioned respondent from Pontis is clear – there may be an intention on the part of Pontis to be perceived as a non-political organization. One can hardly speak of a conspiracy in this case, but the intention to avoid relations of power can be traced not to the non-subjective actions of an omnipresent power whose strategy can only be read from its effects, but to an intentional decision of Pontis' leadership. The respondent includes also a non-subjective motivation in his answers as Pontis' employees do not perceive the political aspect of poverty, and the discourse simply goes through them into their actions, but next to this lack of intentionality on their side, there may be a conscious strategy to depoliticize. Future research could focus not only on the depoliticizing effects of development cooperation, but also on the motivations and intentionality behind depoliticization.

Furthermore, it is important from a theoretical perspective to note that the analysis of the Pontis Foundation points to the two ways ideology works. In the traditional understanding, ideology is understood as Marx's false consciousness ("They do not know it, but they are doing it", De Vries 2008: 168). In Sloterdijk and Žižek's understanding, ideology is not a false consciousness, but is reproduced by subjects aware of the contradictions in their actions. Such a position is close to the cynicism that Pieter de Vries, following Sloterdijk and Žižek, succinctly describes in relation to the field of development cooperation: "They know very well that the development apparatus does not deliver what it promises, but still they play the game" (ibid.).

Most of the responses from Pontis point to the first understanding of ideology. The respondents seem to be reproducing the problematic depoliticizing discourse without any questions. The fourth respondent, though, is aware of the discrepancy between the political issues and the non-political approach of his employer, yet he still plays the game, and thus he is an example of the second understanding.

This approach gains the greatest visibility in a response from the small Austrian company Austroprojekt, which used to function as an NGDO: "Such a programme – as the one analysed – is a small wheel in the midst of a big machine and it is virtually impossible to change [the course of that machine]. 'We', the relevant actors, know this and always knew it. [...] The need for eventual change lies much deeper – on a global level..." (Gütermann 2014). The lack of political action has also been criticized by respondents from CARE Austria, who argued for a change of the "superstructure of capitalism" (Interview No. 26 2013): "we are not so strong in negotiating with and in engaging in these trade treaties, how they are set up, how private investors do businesses..." (Interview No. 25 2013). In even stronger words: "CARE is quite

cowardish [sic]. It acts cowardly [as it does not campaign or advocate] hard and heavily by protest march[es]" (Interview No. 26 2013).

These responses from CARE Austria and Austroprojekt show that there are development workers just like that one Pontis respondent who are aware of the discrepancy between the need for political actions and the actual non-political conduct of the NGDOs. The analysis of Pontis, on the other hand, shows that there are respondents who follow the depoliticizing development discourse to a much greater extent. This research thereby points to the ambivalent workings of the discourse as there are actors aware of its problems, but also actors unaware of these problems. In the first case, one could speak of development or responsible cynicism (if the term cynicism should be used at all) as here there is no ironic distance from the practice of development, but only an awareness that there is a need to engage in a different way than just through development projects.

Finally, a whole field of research opens up with the question about the factors that contribute to the ideological orientation of the respondents. How can one explain the respondents' ideological repositioning away from the right-wing economic policies? In Slovakia one factor to explain the leaning to the right among the respondents could be the neoliberal turn after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. According to the more political respondent, whose formative years revolved around the fight against the semi-authoritarian ruler Valdimír Mečiar, after 1998 (the year when Mečiar lost) "the right wing [economic] policy was a symbol of social progress [...] the right-wing government symbolized also a definitive break away from the communist/Mečiar clientelism, corruption and orientation toward Russia" (Pontis respondent No. 4 2015). It is plausible to argue that his colleagues were also influenced by the overall neoliberal turn (I only asked the more political respondents from the Slovak development organizations mentioned in my PhD thesis to examine the ideological changes in their thinking). His change of perspective was caused by, among other things, his reading of critical authors such as Brubaker and Foucault at university and his experience of problems inside the development apparatus – the donors' corruption, a lack of interest on the side of the state institutions, a lack of experience among NGO workers, and a lack of actual "cooperation".

The Austrian experience is clearly different, with the country's different ideological constellation lacking such a strong anti-leftist sentiment after 1989. Depoliticization of the market was never as strong in Austria as it was in Slovakia. Another factor contributing to the more political approach to development cooperation among Austrians could be their longer experience with development work and awareness of its problems.

This is just a sketch of the potential factors that might have contributed to the differences in terms of depoliticization between Slovakia and Austria. Further research in this regard is clearly necessary.

Conclusion

To summarize, the congruence with the development discourse in terms of depoliticization was quite clear in the examined texts from the Pontis Foundation. There was no trace of focusing on political problems. The main analyzed article legitimized the project through an expert authority, an analogy with a project from the North and evaluative adjectives such as "modern" or "innovative". At the same time it made use of a negative evaluation of the local accommodation and omitted actors from social actions, thus depoliticizing the unequal power relations behind the "not ideal" conditions in Rukanga. Other texts from the corpus highlight the importance of education together with digital technologies as the way to escape from poverty following the main pattern of the discourse of education in development.

Three out of four respondents from Pontis did not politicize larger relations of power. A direct question about the market showed an admitted lack of knowledge about this issue on the part of the respondents that suggests a lack of interest in this issue. One respondent, however, substantially differed from his colleagues and politicized the geopolitical and trade relations and even admitted that Pontis tries to be perceived as apolitical, but he also replied in a partly depoliticizing manner to a question related to education. To answer the research question: the Pontis Foundation depoliticizes unequal relations of power, even if one of its employees engaged in politicization in an anonymized interview. The forms of depoliticization are various types of legitimization as well as a particular issue of development – education.

The analysis enables a discussion of three theoretical issues. First, the question of the neutrality of the state or of the government remains unanswered. Ferguson's finding that the state is a neutral instrument no longer holds as the good governance discourse problematizes the issue of governance, and recent findings show that political issues are analyzed by development agencies. However, the respondents still expect the state to intervene effectively and "good governance" may serve as a buzzword that in fact refers to a depoliticized administration.

Second, the depoliticization of unequal power relations need not be a side-effect of the non-subjective workings of the development discourse. It may very well be a conscious strategy of an NGDO that tries to remain non-political and I would argue that this may have to do with the relationship of this NGDO to private enterprises as well as to the government as a donor (see Author 2015).

Finally, not only can ideology work in the traditional way of creating a false consciousness in people's minds, but development workers may be well aware that development cooperation does not deliver results, and very different changes are necessary to improve the lives of the poor. Still these workers continue with their work, engaging in development cynicism.

All three of these theoretical discussions, however, require more empirical analysis to support or refute the findings from my research.

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