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Boštjan Kravanja: On Social Inequality in Tourism Development and Tourist Marketing...

ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND TOURIST MARKETING OF POSTCOLONIAL SRI LANKA

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The article initially deals with the question of how the historical relations between Sri Lanka and the West are perpetuated through present-day tourism development and tourist marketing. The main question of the text is, how the orientalist and colonial forms of discourse, which have shifted to contemporary meanings of development and value regimes of tourist marketing, are generating and perpetuating social inequality not only between Sri Lanka and “the West”, but also between the Sri Lankan state and its citizens. The article discusses the power of such discursive relics of Western colonialism, which are embedded in large-scale tourism development conceptions and tourist marketing, and presents certain ways of their surpassing.

Key words: Sri Lanka, development, tourist marketing, colonial discourse, social inequality

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to show how social inequality is embedded in relations between Western colonial and global capitalist forces and the small-island nation state of Sri Lanka. It seeks to identify social inequality in paradigms, discourses and practices of tourism development and in contemporary tourist mythmaking. Sri Lankan development plans throughout its post-independence era (after 1948) perpetuate the old colonial division between “the West and the Rest”. This division is generated and consolidated also in present-day tourist media such as tourist guides and promotion clips of Sri Lanka. As the social inequality is intrinsically connected with processes of exclusion, the author explores how this continuation of colonial myths functions in contemporary contexts of “disorganized capitalism” (cited in Appadurai 2005:32–33).

As John Urry (2003) convincingly showed in his book on global complex systems, the world is nowadays fragmenting, reorganizing, flowing, networking and emerging in strange movements and structures. This article is contributing only a tiny fragment to these flows, uncertainties, and differences, and focuses more on the question of persistence of historical power relations in today's social, economic and political landscapes of Sri Lanka. Although the two-blocks' paradigm of the West and the Rest does not seem to be in accordance with today's moving, flowing and shifting worlds, the article deals with relics of colonialism, which are traced in present-day business imperialism of international and corporate development projects, and with colonial discourse, which is discussed through examples of present-day tourism marketing of Sri Lanka. The two blocs are therefore not simply "there" as an overwhelming and obvious myth, but encoded in the way Sri Lanka have been embracing the idea of tourism development.

The beginnings of tourism in Sri Lanka date back to 1960s and 1970s, but the civil war in subsequent decades prevented its full development, especially because the northern and eastern parts of the island could not be incorporated in the homogenous tourist destination of Sri Lanka. Soon after the war ended (in 2009), the old idea of Sri Lanka as a tourist paradise for high-spending guests was revived, substantially supported by the state and global conglomerates, and carefully packed in marketing strategies, which followed the canons of modern international tourist promotion campaigns. These campaigns, as well as their implementation through media advertized development programs, discursively generated and juxtaposed the two homogeneous blocks of the West and the Rest. Although the paradigm was not expressed in these words exactly, but clothed in celebrating luxury and growth in "true Asia", the author argues that the implicit frame of social exclusions in these large-scale economic activities stems from old the colonial way of comprehending local population. Inequalities and social exclusions based on ethnicity, race, class, gender, age and occupation are therefore disguised in such a way that "the Rest" *is* included in shaping of tourism development and marketing, but always and consistently as its unequal and subordinate part, bearing the specific role of adding an oriental flavor to otherwise Western-like representations.

Similarly to Orientalism and Occidentalism, these blocks are not geographical entities. They are obvious and persisting styles of thought,

which are used to maintain a postcolonial *status quo* in the so-called developing countries of the Third World. As long as the colonial discourse is seen as a static picture, these countries are determined by different tourist myths, such as the myth of the “unchanged”, “unrestrained”, and “uncivilized” (Echtner and Prasad 2003). But if we try to see how the colonial discourse has been adapting to different economic agendas, we find it also in the very concept of development. This article therefore seeks to also explore colonial discourse’s flexibility and relates it to major development paradigms after the 2nd World War.

Finally, the author discusses why such discursive relics are still a part of tourism development and tourist marketing of ex-colonial countries and what is their role there. For if they represent a powerful all-encompassing force that has to be seriously considered in future tourism research, then they might not only be a part of the development and marketing, but they generate their conceptualizations and practices. In this case, the concepts of tourism development and tourist marketing, especially in ex-colonies, must be questioned in equal terms as colonial discourse, i.e. as myths and discursive relics themselves.

The article first introduces the history of Sri Lankan development, focusing especially on events that crucially marked Sri Lanka’s social, political and economic situation. First, it presents initial appreciation of Sri Lanka as an island of beauty and wealth and its high reputation of being a worth-visiting place for centuries. Secondly, it outlines the European colonization of Sri Lanka, which fundamentally and irreversibly changed the island’s infrastructure, its position in the world, its residents’ identities, and more. Thirdly, it presents Sri Lanka’s post-independence civil war and intergenerational violence, which had crippled the country’s economy, caused overall instability, and slowed down tourism development. And finally, it presents Sri Lanka’s new large-scale undertakings in tourism development after the tsunami disaster in December 2004 and the official end of the war in May 2009.

All of these markers of Sri Lankan development history are in one way or another connected with tourism. Moreover, the issue of tourism is omnipresent in present-day Sri Lanka and only now that 26 years of ethnic war is over, had it started to substantially change general conditions of Sri

Lanka's residents, for it is now that mass tourism is becoming reality, which in fact is not surprising. As Hollinshead (2004) stated in his article on new sense of tourism:

“[...] tourism no longer ought to be seen as some singular or unconnected isolated-realm of the mere ‘vacational’ or of inconsequential ‘leisure travel’. Tourism is a vital medium of being and becoming which not only talks about worlds, but decidedly makes (or, at least, helps make) worlds.”

In accordance with this, the article is analyzing contemporary tourist marketing of Sri Lanka and is attentive to the above introduced colonial discourse. As already mentioned, the author does this by comparing tourist promotion of Sri Lanka to major development paradigms and discusses the possibilities of escaping colonial discourse and social exclusions in present-day tourism practices and representations.

The author has completed altogether nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2003, 2004 and 2006, which inspired him to write this article. However, the article is not drawing on ethnographic materials from that period but is rather based on recent literature on tourism development and Sri Lanka, as well as on materials the author has collected from recent internet sources.

SRI LANKA'S PREDICAMENTS WITH THE WEST AND ITS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The old Lanka¹, which has been commonly referred to as *The Pearl of the Orient*, had already been noticed by the ancient Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Chinese (Crick 1994:21). On the maps made by Claudius Ptolemy in approximately 200 A. D., which were later adopted in European medieval cartography, the island's size appeared much bigger than it actually was.² This disproportion demonstrates Sri Lanka's importance for Europeans

¹ Lanka (island) is one of the pre-colonial names of the island, which had been added “Sri” (meaning resplendent) in 1972.

² See e. g. <http://www.raremaps.com> (accessed 21. 12. 2011).

already in the era of their early voyages overseas. Marco Polo, for example, who visited the island as an official representative of Kublai Khan in 1284 and 1293, proclaimed *Seilan*³ to be “for its size one of the finest islands in the world” (Crick 1994:21). Conversely, five centuries later, in the era of early British missionary zeal, Bishop Herber in one of his hymns stated that in Ceylon’s isle “every prospect pleases, And only man is vile” and that “The Heathen in their blindness” should “Bow down to wood and stone” (Whitegate 1828:6). In his view, the island itself was therefore as pleasant as always, but its residents were problematic.

The first “real” colonialists of Sri Lanka’s coasts were the Portuguese (1505–1658), who were mainly interested in the dissemination of Christianity, but also in trading spices like cinnamon, cloves and pepper. The second colonial impact, enhanced by a protestant commercial and engineering zeal, was undertaken by the Dutch (1658–1796), but the final touch, taking over the island and its complete reconstruction, was added by the British (1796–1948) (see Gunasekera 2003). The colonial plantation system has brought first integration of the island into the international colonial economic space and unification of the island as a whole, especially in terms of the first modern transport infrastructure that was built at the time.

After gaining independence in 1948, the first governments of Ceylon undertook the identity policy that gradually put Sinhala-Buddhist ethnical complex to the fore (see Obeyesekere 1997). The equivalence of the terms “Sinhalese” with “Buddhism” was legitimised by reinforcing several myths of Sinhalese heroes and kings, such as *Vijaya*, *Dutugāmunu* and *Asoka*, who were protecting Buddhism and the island from the Tamil invasions from South India (Obeyesekere 1997:356–362). The second historical reference that was used for building Sinhala nationalism was the reformist movement of Angārīka Dharmapāla in the late 19th and early 20th century. He, albeit

³ Otherwise, the island had many names, as each of the peoples described it or transliterated its Sanskrit and Pali base *Sinha* (lit. a lion) in their own way. Some examples: the European colonizers (Portuguese, Dutch, British) first named it *Ceilão*, *Zeilan* and *Ceylon*, Tamils *Ilankai*, Arabians *Tenerism* (Island of Delight) or *Serendib* (i.e. Persian *Serendip*: happy place discovery), Chinese *Pa-ou-tchow* (Isle of Gems), old Sinhalese *Sinhala dvīpa* (Island of the People of the Lion), and finally the modern *India’s teardrop* or *Pearl of the Indian Ocean*.

under strong influence of American theosophists Henry Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, succeeded in instilling Sinhala Buddhist identity consciousness in opposition to Western colonialists and missionaries (368–381). In this vein, already the after-independence Sri Lankan elites excluded the Tamil population and other non-Buddhist minorities from taking part in building the new national state, and especially the Tamils as the second largest community in the country⁴ normally started to see themselves as a threatened minority (cf. Bastin 1997).

The Sri Lankan national state had due to these decolonization processes got involved in a civil war in 1983. It – with occasional ceasefire agreements, negotiations, and new beginnings of fights – lasted 26 years and officially ended in May 2009. It was triggered by the notorious emancipation of Northern and Eastern parts of the island in the aftermath of nationalist measures by the Sinhalese nationalist government of Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), such as introducing the law on Sinhalese as official language of Sri Lanka in 1956. This move and general Sinhala nationalistic climate that SLFP exposed by ignoring Sri Lankan ethnic and religious minority rights escalated in the establishment of different Tamil terrorist organizations. The most propulsive group of rebels were the so-called Tamil Tigers (LTTE),⁵ which started to seriously threaten the unity of the *Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*, which is Sri Lanka's official name ever since the times it was under the influence of an active membership in the non-alignment movement during 1970s.

Notwithstanding this civil war, there emerged also a separate wave of violence from the side of the Sinhalese youths in 1987–88. These rebels were under the leadership of Marxist-Leninist oriented political party called JVP.⁶ The class-aware, highly educated and competent youths felt that they could not access any political positions even on the level of villages due to the rigid upper-caste layer of the old Sri Lankan elite. They started to

⁴ According to estimates by the *Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics*, in 2001 there were 11.9% of Sri Lankan Tamils and 4.6% of Indian Tamils.

See <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/PDF/p7%20population%20and%20Housing%20Text-11-12-06.pdf> (accessed 7. 9. 2012).

⁵ The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

⁶ Janatha Vimukti Peramuna; People's Liberation Front.

violently terrorize mainly the southern and central parts of the island, and the government forces responded with arms and terror of death squads, which were massively killing JVP leaders and suspects. While the Tamil Tigers invented the technology of the bomb-belt and attacked crowded public places with “suicide attackers”, JVP and government forces imitated the apartheid methods of the South African Republic, like e.g. the spectacles of burning tires on the body of a victim (on violence of JVP as well as on counter-insurgency of the Sri Lankan government see Argenti-Pillen 2003; Attanayake 2001; Daniel 1996; Silva 2005).

After over 450 years of Western colonialism, Sinhalese nationalism has, subsequent to the independence in 1948, the introduction of the open-market economy in 1977, as well as violent ethnic and class conflicts in 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of 21st century, significantly marked the history of Sri Lanka. These are only the “official” milestones. Sri Lanka comprises 65,525km² of surface and is, with its huge and expanding population (about twenty million), relatively solid traffic infrastructure, limited natural resources and plantation economy structure of British colonialism, relatively vulnerable in its economic and political relations with the outside world (Phandis and Ganguly 2001:102–106). Moreover, there exist a number of social and economic changes, which are not part of the state’s “official history”, but rather of the history of so-called undeveloped countries of the Third World and global processes that reveal fragmentation of old economic organizational principles of the world, such as centre/periphery, push/pull, surplus/deficit, and users/manufacturers (Geertz 2000:218–263). In contemporary Sri Lanka, this historic process is characterized by rapid population growth, general access to education and technology, the abandoning of farming in favor of employment in the industry and service sectors, urbanization, overseas work, establishment of duty free zones and last but not least, creation of tourist infrastructure (Morrison 2004).

Nevertheless, the second “unification” of Sri Lanka was – at least due to a *laissez faire* economy after the 1977 and the integration of the state into the global market economy – accomplished by incorporating it on international tourist maps and in the tourist industry. This was a period of generous tax incentives for foreign capital, which was increasingly financing hotel construction. Foreign tourist arrivals “virtually quadrupled” between 1975 and 1982 (Crick 1994:37). The new national airline Air

Lanka, which was heavily subsidised by the government, was founded in 1979, and the Ceylon Tourist Board (founded in 1966), in 1982 launched educational programmes for guides/lecturers who would appropriately present the country to foreign tourists (Crick 1994:34–41).

Sri Lanka's international tourism, which the state of Sri Lanka initiated already in 1966, has been established under the influence of United States through The Agency of International Development (USAID), which utilized Harris, Kerr, Foster & Co., a company of tourism consultants based in Hawaii, which assisted in drawing up the so-called *Ceylon Tourism Plan* in 1967. These foreign "experts" visited the island for only three months and created a plan that guided tourism development well into the 1980s. The plan mainly spoke of the foreign exchange, the need to attract foreign capital, and the unproblematic and fast flow of income from tourists. However, it completely ignored the socio-cultural consequences of tourism development, the weak links between the tourist sector and the rest of the economy, the uneven social distribution of benefits that tourism might bring, and the heavy involvement of governmental investments in necessary infrastructure like accommodation and transport facilities (Crick 1994:27–29). The state supported the process, stimulating foreign investment by low taxation, using loans and foreign aid to build tourist infrastructure and keeping particularly vulnerable groups of people, like fishing communities, plantation workers, coast villagers, etc., within their boundaries.

However, on the scale of global markets, the people living in investment-interesting areas are rather seen as an obstacle. One of the first opportunities for pressure on their land in the name of tourism development was the cease-fire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers, which was signed in February 2002. USAID, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank were soon enthusiastic about Sri Lanka's potential, as it represented "one of the last places uncolonized by go-go globalization, a by-product of its long war" (Klein 2007:391). Similarly to the above mentioned Ceylon Tourism Plan, the country therefore launched a new tourism development program in 2002, which was approved by the World Bank, and presented under the title *Regaining Sri Lanka*. It demanded clear land plots for development, empty beaches for tourists, resorts, highways, golf courses and the like. Also because of this plan, Sri Lankans

voted at the elections in April 2004 against the then leading UNP⁷ and their foreign “experts”, and gave opportunity to People’s Alliance,⁸ which vowed to discard the Regaining Sri Lanka plan (Klein 2007:392–394).

Yet, when in December 2004 the tsunami stroke throughout the Indian Ocean and in Sri Lanka’s eastern and southern coast, the newly elected government was soon under pressure of international developers again. Soon after the tsunami catastrophe a competition between the states of the “developed world” aroused through donations, where the “price” of humanitarian help for Sri Lanka was negotiated to gain more international prestige (Stirrat 2006). Various national and international non-governmental organizations and their activists precipitated to protect victims of tsunami from ousting them from beaches and villages at Sri Lanka’s foreshores. But the government in subsequent *days* started to privatize water and electricity, raised the price of gasoline and created a new body called the Task Force to Rebuild the Nation, which was made up of the country’s leading bankers, and predominantly beach tourism sector executives. With this, the elected government was replaced with unelected technical group of business leaders, which was backed up by World Bank and USAID (Klein 2007:394–397).⁹

As the purpose of the country and global development institutions has long been to develop high-end luxury tourism in combination with untouched wilderness for adventure ecotourism, Ayurvedic medical clinics and the like, the tsunamis were a perfect opportunity to gain the empty and open land (Klein 2007:402–403). In 2006, the war between government forces and Tamil Tigers gradually started again. Perhaps the trigger for it was political change, as the UPFA¹⁰ candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa, who called for a tougher line against the LTTE, achieved a narrow win at the elections in November 2005. And it was bad again. According to Human

⁷ United National Party.

⁸ This was a coalition of already mentioned Marxist JVP and center-leftist Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP).

⁹ On introducing instrumental aims and purely “development’ planners” conceptions in politics see Ferguson (2006: 283–284).

¹⁰ United People’s Freedom Alliance, formed by SLFP, JVP and other smaller parties.

Rights Watch from February 2009 (Human 2009), both sides, the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE caused increased civilian casualties and abuses against civilians, including children, who remained within a shrunk and narrowed territory of battlefields in the northeast coast of the island. After several offensives and new fronts being opened after attacks in the East and North of the island, the government declared victory on May 19th 2009.

Soon after these events, Sri Lankan authorities had pinned high hopes on tourism again. The idea of “essentially a new destination” of Sri Lanka with availability of north and east of the island appeared only a month after the end of war.¹¹ There is some irony in comparison to this claim that a kind of grassroots movement started on former battlefields a year after the war was over. Namely, the former war zone was being visited by excursionists mainly from south parts of the island and has immediately grown into tourist trail, where sights such as a giant water tower blown up in fights in Kilinochchi, bomb-blasted trees, burnt bulldozer and rebel vehicles, a wreckage of a shot down aircraft, and war cemeteries are admired, mainly by groups of Sinhalese tourists. Armed government soldiers act as tour guides, retelling stories from battlefields to visitors to these sites. War items are displayed also in museums, like the Trincomalee Naval Museum, and the Sri Lanka Airforce Museum near Colombo. A few mainly Tamil entrepreneurs have set up makeshift stalls around these sites selling soft drinks, sunglasses, vegetables, fish, even palmyrah-based¹² sweets, and more.¹³

At the beginning of 2011, the country’s official tourism body The Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau has released a campaign *Refreshingly Sri Lanka – Visit 2011 – Wonder of Asia*, which promoted twelve different theme events,¹⁴ but also eight products tourists can experience in eight

¹¹ See <http://www.eturbonews.com/9884/post-war-sri-lanka-tourism-looks-boom> (accessed 25. 6. 2012)

¹² Palmyrah is a tall palm tree different from southern coconut palms in that it looks more stark.

¹³ See <http://www.eturbonews.com/16253/tamil-tiger-tourist-trail-becomes-sri-lankan-new-tourist-attract> (accessed 25. 6. 2012).

¹⁴ The promotion clip is available on <http://younghoteliers.blogspot.com/2011/02/refreshingly-sri-lanka.html> (accessed 6. 9. 2012). The twelve events that spread across the year symbolize also 12 alphabets of the tagline “Wonder of Asia”.

days,¹⁵ and *The Star of Sri Lankan Tourism* with five various experiences.¹⁶ Last year's tourist statistics show all sorts of increases, from arrivals, investments in transport, direct and indirect employments, total income, number of new travel agents, to hotels and registered rooms.

However, 20% of Sri Lankan guests are visiting friends and relations and stay in private residences. Some hotels and rooms, as well as entrance fees for temples, wildlife, and archaeological sites are already overpriced. The governmental tourism development bodies are concerned about "acceptable standards" of five stars hotels and supplementary services in comparison to Thailand, Malaysia and India.¹⁷ Aggressive marketing strategy is planned to attract also tourists from the Middle-East, Russia, India and China. Development of village tours, bullock cart rides and elephant safaris to promote authenticity and biodiversity is planned, although the main problem still lies in the low numbers of hotel facilities and especially in the poor tourist infrastructure on the east coast.¹⁸ A five-year strategic development plan for tourism sector has been therefore launched by Ministry of Economic Development to gradually solve this problem, mainly by attracting foreign investments.¹⁹ Last but not least, in the above mentioned promotion spot (see note 14) the investors are openly invited:

"There are many who make this emerald island their home away from home. Investing in some of the hottest properties and projects

¹⁵ Number eight in this case symbolizes 8 letters of the country's name. These experiences are: the beaches, heritage, scenic beauty, festivals, body and mind wellness, wild life, sports and adventure and essence of life (i.e. the Buddhist wisdom). See <http://younghoteliers.blogspot.com/2010/12/visit-sri-lanka-2011.html> (accessed 6. 9. 2012).

¹⁶ This brand was conceptualized for targeting high-spending tourists. Its five categories are: heritage, beach, wild life, culture, eco/greenery and cuisine. See <http://younghoteliers.blogspot.com/2011/02/experiencing-sri-lankan-tourism.html> (accessed 6. 9. 2012).

¹⁷ See <http://www.ft.lk/2012/02/15/is-sri-lanka-really-experiencing-a-tourism-boom/> (accessed 6. 9. 2012)

¹⁸ East coast is especially important because of the good weather during 'off-season' in the south and west (south monsoon from May till November).

¹⁹ See <http://www.eturbonews.com/27090/sri-lanka-welcomes-record-number-tourists-2011> (accessed 6. 9. 2012).

in one of the fastest growing regions in the world, one can embrace the magic that is distinctively Asia.”

The new tourism development plans in Sri Lanka are therefore ambitious and substantial. It is expected that the country will be able to host 2.5 million tourists by 2016.²⁰ New on-line visa scheme, which cancelled on-arrival visas facility was introduced in January 2011.²¹ In January 2012, Department of Emigration and Immigration has set up a special unit to monitor tourists and prevent undesired activities.²² One can get an impression that the country is preparing for war. But also for the former war zones of Sri Lanka that, as mentioned above, are today visited mainly by domestic excursionists, there are plans for step-by-step implementation of tourism projects; first by encouraging soft tourism (day-trips, participation of locals, information centres), then by building some hotels and resorts, and finally by attracting more domestic and foreign investments into tourist facilities and infrastructures.²³

In such circumstances of fast and unrestrained tourism development programs, projects, plans and promotions, the first problem that appears sooner or later is scarcity of land and other resources, as well as the question of participation and ownership of local population in tourism business. The plans to get more precious pieces of valuable land are usually impacted by politics on the state-level, and by developers on the case-to-case level. The latter is what Naomi Klein (2007) in her acknowledging of “disaster capitalism” failed to explore theoretically. Although her case of Arugam Bay was very “local” in terms of exposing the difficult situation of villagers, it was not grounded in terms of actual power relations that are not necessarily

²⁰ For comparison, the numbers of arrivals in recent years are moving towards 800 thousand. http://www.sltda.lk/statistics_at_a_glance (accessed 25. 6. 2012).

²¹ See <http://www.eturbonews.com/20325/new-visa-rules-irk-sri-lanka-tourism> (accessed 25. 6. 2012).

²² Special attention is given to Muslim visitors, who are presumed to engage in “social and religious activities”, rather than genuine tourism <http://www.eturbonews.com/27539/sri-lanka-set-special-unit-monitor-tourists> (accessed 25. 6. 2012).

²³ See <http://younghoteliers.blogspot.com/2012/01/tourism-progress-and-peace-in-former.html> (accessed 6. 9. 2012).

as visible as “instrumental aims embodied in plans” (Ferguson 2006: 284). In Klein’s oscillation between the governmental and corporate developers on the one hand, and the affected people on the other, is therefore missing a part of “development” which operates in-between the development projects and people’s lives. This particular topic will be further reflected in the next section of this article, where different concepts of development will be examined and paralleled with colonial discourse in tourism marketing.

COLONIAL MYTHS IN SRI LANKA’S TRAVEL DISCOURSE IN RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

Oriental and colonial forms of discourse that are replicated in tourist marketing of many developing countries in the Third World are persisting also in representations of Sri Lanka. On the one hand this small island-state was the land East of Suez that was colonized by Europeans for the longest time (cited in Crick 1994:56), and on the other, the tourist marketing is controlled by Western tourism interests that perpetuate colonial discourses:

“[...]colonial discourse is all-pervading in contemporary travel discourse [...] A good example is the way in which ‘paradise’ is often used in the promotion of postcolonial island states in a manner that reinforces Western colonial ideal of a Romantic ‘tropical’ Other. Almost all ‘tropical paradise’ destinations, such as the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and South Pacific islands, are former colonies [...] As such, promotional images are clearly embedded in, and perpetuating of, colonial discourse. They define and fix both the tourist and the toured ‘other’ in a relationship with each other which stems from colonialism and is always inherently colonial in nature.” (Tucker and Akama 2009:510)

In the medieval Christian perception, small islands were especially associated also with the biblical happy island and with other mythical and religious concepts of paradise (Šmitek 2004:44). However, the construction of European knowledge, institutions and scholarship in subsequent colonial centuries have caused the “Orient” to become static and inferior to the West. Edward Said (1978) recognized orientalism as a discourse of feminine,

sensual, and intuitive, but also cruel and despotic nature of the Orient. This style of thought that was essential for the invention of the West's other, represented the starting point of accounts concerning the East. Moreover, orientalism has been a persisting from the mid-nineteenth century on, with its foundations being European explorations of foreign lands, especially Asia (see Breckenridge and Veer 1993).

When the colonies in South Asia were well established, the early colonial concept of "India" was, in the name of science and development, substituted by geographic or climatic categories, such as the "tropics" (Perera 1999:73). "Tropicality" contained on the one hand "island Edens" and on the other "the spectrum of the jungle", where "fertile yet primitive estates await the civilizing and modernizing intervention of the West" (Clayton and Bowd 2006:210). This "environmental Eurocentrism" (ibid. 211) had become central by the late eighteenth century, when imperial expansion of Britain, France and other European powers focused on the cultivation and improvement of the colonies (ibid. 215).

The three colonial concepts, paradise on earth, orientalism, and tropicality relate to different areas of evolution of Western discourses about the East. While the paradise myths can be seen as originating from ancient and medieval fantasies of the explorations of new worlds overseas, the orientalism and tropicality are effects of more or less developed colonial accounts and exploitation. Yet, as we will see, the elements of all three are intertwined in contemporary travel discourse and tourism marketing of the so-called developing countries in the Third World.

A comprehensive research of Third World tourism marketing was conducted by Echtner and Prasad (2003). They identified three "Un" myths that replicate colonial discourse: the myths of the unchanged (ibid. 669–672), the unrestrained (ibid. 672–675), and the uncivilized (ibid. 675–678). The first represent destinations as timeless places that are fixed in the past and are available for discovery and exploration. This myth relates to Said's Orientalism (1978) in that, it reinforces binaries such as changed/unchanged, modern/ancient and advancing/decaying (Echtner and Prasad 2003:671). The myth of the unrestrained represents present-day paradise "as seen through Western eyes" (ibid. 675). These are images of the sea/sand destinations with resorts and serving hosts, where inequality between

hosts and guests is stressed.²⁴ Finally, the myth of the uncivilized represents the untouched wilderness, a primordial landscape with natives, ready for expeditions and discovery. The people within this myth are portrayed as primitive, but also noble savages.

The three “un-myths” represent “a set of three archetypical Third World tourism experiences” (Echtner and Prasad 2003:678). In this vein, “the myth of the destination” and not the “totality of the place” is what the tourist expects (ibid. 679). The authors stated also that the sights with surrounding places and people have to be “carefully chosen to mold into the overreaching myth” (ibid. 679). In case of Sri Lankan tourism marketing it seems that the three un-myths are applied and molded in a kaleidoscopic mixture of destination’s potentials and facilities. For example, the promotion spot titled Small Island - Big Trip²⁵ was initiated by Sri Lankan Tourism Cluster and created by US corporation James Walter Thompson with the help of USAID, and was made for the purpose of targeting Indian market. It was released as a post-tsunami campaign for stimulation and recovery of tourism and was awarded third prize on *Asian Tourism and Travel Award* in Singapore (Wijewardene 2006). In this clip one can see elements that are related to the myth of the unchanged (old names of the island like Serendib and Taprobane, historical sites, ruins, temples), the myth of the unrestrained (“paradise island”, golf course, “golden beach belt”), and the myth of uncivilized (mountain springs, “endless waterfalls”, “virgin rainforest”, wild elephants, jaguars).²⁶

A similar comprehending of Sri Lankan potentials for tourism development was expressed by the former president of the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO) Nilmin Nanayakkara:²⁷

²⁴ For evolution of this sort of places globally, cf. the chapter on the “global beach” in Löfgren 1999: 213–239.

²⁵ Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oqcXFJVgu0 (accessed 1. 7. 2012)

²⁶ However, the Veddas, the indigenous hunter-gatherers of Sri Lanka are not included.

²⁷ See <http://www.ft.lk/2012/02/15/is-sri-lanka-really-experiencing-a-tourism-boom> (accessed 25. 6. 2012).

Accelerating the Kalipitiya region [North Western coast] development with foreign investors is an excellent move because Kalipitiya could be the most diversified beach resort in Asia due to the fact that Kalipitiya is surrounded by a variety of attractions, i. e. marine (the best coral reef, whale and dolphin watching, kite surfing and other water sports), wildlife (with elephants, bear and leopard at Walpattu [national park, “Land of Lakes”] and bird watching) and culture (one hour drive to Anuradhapura, Thanthirimale [ancient Buddhist cities], etc.).

It would be possible to hypothesize that this plurality of ideas may indeed have been constituted through colonial discourse first, and was only then recognized as material potential. But the choice of the overreaching myth can be related also to dynamics of global tourist markets. In the circumstances of “unpredictable ‘global hybrids’ always on ‘the edge of chaos’” (Urry 2003:14), the markets are moving simultaneously in different directions, and are prone to unpredictable and irreversible changes that depend on their particular topology (ibid. 54). According to this line of thought, the overreaching myths seem to lose their power. At least in case of Sri Lanka, all of the three un-myths are jointly imposed on promotion and development, although not in equal quantities. The “positioning of the destination into one (or slightly overlapping two) of the myths” (Echtner and Prasad 2003:679) is here not really the case. The overreaching myth is here rather oscillating between the three un-myths, and never really turns out to be finally chosen. The choice is rather hybrid and rests on potentials and facilities of the destinations’ places. Furthermore, if we compare the three “un-myths” in tourist marketing and development plans of Sri Lanka to MacCannell’s (1976:43–45) creation of tourist attraction,²⁸ it seems that elevation of one myth over the other has been changing primarily according to changes of development paradigms.

²⁸ According to MacCannell tourist attractions are created through process of “sight sacralisation” (1976:43). In this theory, an object first has to be named and marked from other objects, it is then officially framed and elevated above other potential sights, then enshrined so that it becomes subject to mechanical reproduction (prints, photographs and other displays), and finally it is subjected also to social reproduction (naming of groups, cities and regions after the attraction) (ibid. 43–45).

In his overview Telfer (2009) identified five such paradigms: modernization, dependency, economic neoliberalism, alternative development, and development “impasse”. In the 1950s and 1960s, modernization and dependency paradigms of development were juxtaposing one another. While the modernization paradigm has been used tourism to promote Western way of life, the dependency paradigm criticized tourism’s exploitative character (Telfer 2009:153–155). According to these two paradigms, the myth of the unrestrained was prevailing, as tourism was promoted in form of conventional leisure tourism of sea, sand, and sun (Crick 1998). As such, it was also criticized for its negative social impacts (De Kadt 1979; Turner and Ash 1975; Britton 1982) and labeled as “a form of imperialism” (Nash 1978).

In 1970s and 1980s, economic neoliberalism and alternative development were introduced. While the first gave rise to international organizations and transnational corporations, which fund developing countries under the condition of offering investment incentives to tourism developers, the second paradigm supports in contrast approaches of “sustainable tourism” and small-scale, community-driven, environmentally friendly, and ethically appropriate projects (Telfer 2009:155–157). According to the neoliberal paradigm, the myth of the unrestrained certainly persists, as it champions the expanding of the existing branches. However, within the alternative paradigm, the images of leisurely holiday in a “tropical paradise” are no longer the only option. The myths of the uncivilized and the unchanged seem more suitable to sustainability.

In the last two decades, the development studies underwent an “impasse” (Telfer 2009:157). The gap between the rich and the poor nations is continuing to widen, developing countries implement only short-term policies, economic growth is having, in spite of numerous implementations of “sustainable tourism”, major impacts on the environment, etc. However, tourism as a development strategy is continuing to take place worldwide, whether as large-scale country development or small-scale local developments. In search of a new approach to development three main competing paradigms are present: “the first focuses on state intervention, the second on the role of the free market and the third relates to the power of political community.” (Telfer 2009:161). Especially under the influence of the latter, the colonial discourse and corresponding myths should weaken

also within mass-mediated promotion as well as in ways of doing tourism. Moreover, tourist marketing is passing through irreversible changes under conditions of interdependent, self-organizing and unpredictably emergent global systems such as e.g. information systems, global media, and the Internet (Urry 2003:14). Through this view of “global emergence” (ibid. 93–101), where “effects are often produced by ‘small causes’” (ibid. 94), the overreaching myths should dissolve. But will they?

CONCLUSION

The colonial discourse and its myths are still persistently shaping the core of contemporary “vacationscapes” (Löfgren 1999:2). Regardless of the fact that this can still be true in many respects and cases, there also exist alternatives which have been recognized on small-scale levels, where local communities build grass-roots tourism strategies and keep tourism impacts under control (Stronza 2001:275). It is felt that in such endeavors the concept of development and the colonial myths are not useful to describe what is going on.

Development, as one of the key signifiers after the 2nd world war, is a contested concept also from a point of view of small community movements that sometimes invent a tradition or even import a completely new element (like e.g. a festival of heavy-metal music; see Kozorog 2012), which primarily fulfill *their* need for being recognized in the outside world. These kinds of community-organized events, where tourists start to arrive and bring additional benefits, can tremendously change living conditions for a community in positive sense. But it is not adequate to see this process as “development” for there is no “development project” behind it. For example Di Giovine suggested the “revitalization model” as an alternative for conceptualizing such events. He believes this concept to be more suitable than development, because it “brings local ‘hosts’ into a direct and more equal relationship with tourist ‘guests’”. Moreover, it is “especially significant for post-colonial states who struggle to define and represent themselves on a newly enlarged, global stage” (2010:221).

The article gave an overview of the history of Sri Lankan “development” that was for centuries created on the basis of the “West

and the Rest” paradigm and was changing the island’s image and life of its residents. This history has shown that despite of Sri Lanka’s decolonization, Sinhala and Tamil nationalism and *because* of war and tsunami, the “development machine” did not stop. However, although the critique of “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007) that exposes top-down organized “development” can give valuable insight into what is going on in present-day globalization, it is not necessarily exhaustive. As Ferguson (2003) demonstrated, failures of development projects can be seen as an inherent part of development itself. A failed project can be a sign of success for the state, because by “developing” a place, the state and its bureaucratic structures expand in the name of the project. If the state introduced new bureaucratic structures directly, the people would protest and want to know why. But if this is presented as a “side effect” of development, the state will always have an answer for this. Ferguson (2003) conceptualized this instrumentalization of “development” as an “anti-politics machine”, which contests the concept of development from its very roots. What does “development” have to do with bettering the infrastructure, if it is an inherent part of the anti-politics machine, which only generates conditions for exercising power on its citizens?

Finally, the article explored forms of colonial discourse in Sri Lankan marketing. The three un-myths, the myth of the “unchanged”, “unrestrained”, and “uncivilized” (Echtner and Prasad 2003) appeared to take place in Sri Lankan marketing simultaneously. Contrary to processes of establishing an attraction (MacCannell 1976:43–45), it seems that finding an overreaching myth that would present Sri Lanka as a whole is neither desired nor necessary. However, the combination of the three myths can allow to tourism marketing to play around with their relations depending on contexts of their use. These contexts are not necessarily only segments of tourists that are targeted with promotion campaigns, but can be also different means of tourism development.

It is clear that the contemporary colonial myths and tourist marketing are determining tourism development in Sri Lanka. But if colonial discourse actually generates ideas that feed tourism marketing and if the development projects just follow the latter’s agendas, as their actual goals are anyway elsewhere (i.e. in generating new power relations), then we can talk about one and the same thing, which according to context shifts from one shape

to the other. In very general terms, this same thing is social inequality. As different social exclusions need different conceptual vehicles according to their base of exclusion (e.g. race, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, age), they – similarly as the state in relation to “development” (Ferguson 2003) – choose the one which momentarily fits best to their goals. In this sense, the colonial myths, tourism development and tourist marketing serve as a cover for changing power relations.

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Boštjan Kravanja

O SOCIJALNOJ NEJEDNAKOSTI U RAZVOJU TURIZMA I TURISTIČKOM MARKETINGU U POSTKOLONIJALNOJ ŠRI LANKI

Članak se prvenstveno bavi pitanjem kako povijesni odnosi između Šri Lanke i Zapada utječu na suvremeni razvoj turizma i turistički marketing u toj zemlji. Glavna rasprava u članku se odnosi na pitanje kako orijentalni i kolonijalni oblici diskursa, koji su se proširili i na ulogu sadašnjega razvoja turizma i na vrijednosna polazišta turističkog marketinga, stvaraju i produbljuju socijalnu nejednakost i to ne samo između Šri Lanke i “Zapada”, nego i između države Šri Lanke i njenih građana. Članak analizira moć takvih diskurzivnih relikvija zapadnog kolonijalizma, a koji su ukorijenjeni u predodžbe o razvoju i marketingu u turizmu u masovnom obliku, te nudi neke načine njihova nadilaženja.

Ključne riječi: Šri Lanka, razvoj, turistički marketing, kolonijalni diskurs, socijalna nejednakost