

## HOLLOW WORDS OR ACTUAL PRACTICE? A postcolonial perspective on a project within the German ASA-Programme

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### Abstract

Postcolonial scholars attempt to add discourses to the debate surrounding development paradigms. An awareness of these voices seems to be existent in the German ASA-Programme, which prepares its participants to become multipliers for global education. The self-description of the programme appears as being in line with postcolonial thoughts. This article questions this perception and uncovers gaps between the well-sounding statements and the actual practice. Based on writings by Said and Foucault the underlying mindsets are scrutinised. An example of one of the projects within the programme scheme is used to demonstrate how a postcolonial inquiry can unmask hidden assumptions, showing gaps as well as leading to a more appropriate assessment of projects and the sending of volunteers.

**Key words:** postcolonial theory, development discourse, ASA-Programme, volunteer services, North-South relations, Orientalism Said, Foucault.

### Lippenbekenntnisse oder wirkliche Praxis? Eine postkoloniale Perspektive auf ein Projekt im Rahmen des deutschen ASA-Programms

*Postkoloniale Theoretiker\*innen versuchen, Diskurse der Diskussion um Entwicklungsparadigmen hinzuzufügen. Ein Bewusstsein für diese Stimmen scheint im deutschen ASA-Programm, welches seine Teilnehmenden zu Multiplikator\*innen des Globalen Lernens ausbildet, zu existieren. Die Selbstbeschreibung des Programms erscheint weitgehend im Einklang mit postkolonialer Kritik zu sein. Der Artikel hinterfragt diese (Selbst-)Wahrnehmung und versucht, Lücken zwischen den wohlklingenden Statements und der tatsächlichen Praxis aufzudecken. Basierend auf Schriften von Said und Foucault werden die tieferliegenden Denkweisen analysiert. Ein Beispiel aus einem Projekt im Rahmen des ASA-Programms wird genutzt um zu demonstrieren, wie eine postkoloniale Untersuchung kaum sichtbare Annahmen aufdecken, Lücken aufzeigen sowie zu einer angemessenen Beurteilung von Projekten und dem Entsenden von Freiwilligen führen kann.*

**Schlagworte:** Postkoloniale Theorie, Entwicklungsdiskurse, ASA-Programm, Freiwilligendienste, Nord-Süd-Beziehungen, Orientalismus

## 1. Introduction

Initiatives in the broad framework of development cooperation and volunteer work generally claim to work with good and often altruistic intentions. While their goals are often ambitious, the results and outcomes of their work are questioned by

scholars from different schools of thought. Especially from the postcolonial perspective those initiatives are facing increasing scrutiny.

One initiative which appears to be, at least to a certain extent, rather self-critical about its own role and tries to include postcolonial thoughts in its work is the German ASA-Programme. It is an initiative in the field of development cooperation which uses the metaphor of a workshop of learning about development policies to describe itself. Every year approximately 250 students and young professionals, primarily Germans, take part in a training which the programme calls a learning cycle. Through the year participants from all four sub-programmes attend seminars, work in a practical phase and engage themselves with creative activities which raise awareness for issues of global concern. The official aim of the programme is to enable the participants to become multipliers for global education, which means that they develop the necessary skills to transfer their knowledge and understanding of the globalised world into their own broader society. This self-description can be seen as a step to distinguish the programme from other initiatives in the field. Through emphasising so-called global learning activities which are mostly carried out locally in Germany by the participants as part of their personal development process, the sending of volunteers to the Global South<sup>1</sup> does not appear as the main feature of the programme.

Hence, this general approach of *learning* does not directly imply that the ASA-Programme can be seen in the context of *voluntary* work. In fact, the organisation emphasises its distance from *classical* volunteer services, especially with the described focus on *global education*. It can be assumed that the high level of engagement with postcolonial critiques within the programme is one reason why it characterises itself in this particular way. Nevertheless, informal interviews and conversations as well as personal experiences of the article's author suggest that a number of participants start their journey in the programme with the intention of going abroad to engage themselves in voluntary work. Therefore, even if the programme's central feature is not officially a practical phase in the Global South which is largely about taking part in some kind of voluntary work or unpaid internships, the participants mostly appear as highly focused on this part of their learning experience. This can also be seen in the context of the application process in which people who show interest in the ASA-Programme are especially confronted with descriptions of the projects which are offered and will be carried out by future participants within the practical phase. Furthermore, during the process they are particularly asked to apply for one or two of these projects. Hence, the overall aim

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1 "Global South" is used here in order to avoid the term "developing countries". Most scholars in the postcolonial school of thought oppose the terminological divide in a so-called developed and developing world. As an alternative, "Global South" is used as an umbrella term for all countries which have been colonized.

of the programme, to become multipliers for global education, seems to step back behind the participant's wish to spend some time abroad, gain experiences in the Global South and to impact their environment positively through their engagement in these projects.

These arguments underline that although the ASA-Programme does not perceive itself primarily as being associated with voluntary work it indeed shows certain closeness. Thus it can be argued that even if the programme is trying to shift its focus away from volunteer services it can be seen as part of the diverse group of initiatives which are engaged in the sector of development cooperation and volunteer work. Above all, the programme expects a commitment to social engagement by its participants during their association with the programme and also afterwards. One requirement for the successful completion of the learning cycle is the carrying out of a so-called *global learning activity* which is seen by the programme as a starting point for further involvement in movements, projects and initiatives. These engagements can be seen as voluntary work as well which again brings the ASA-Programme closer to the field as it might appear on first sight.

After casting light on the programme's general features, its framework has to be discussed briefly in order to understand how it operates. Initially it has to be noted that the programme is divided into four sub-programmes which have a slightly varying approach while all are embedded in the described learning cycle with its seminars, practical phases and activities. To only name a few distinctions: the *basic programme*, in which most of the participants take part, consists of a three month practical phase in a project in the Global South. In this sub-programme mainly two German participants form a team which spends the practical phase abroad. As opposed to this, the *Global Education Network of Young Europeans programme* mostly features international teams of two. Beyond that, the *ASApreneurs programme* offers internships in the field of sustainable development in cooperation with different actors within the economy for practical experiences. Another strand is the *South-North programme* which primarily creates teams of four with equal representation of participants from the Global South and Global North who work together in a six months practical phase in the Global North and the Global South. The analysed project in this paper forms part of this particular sub-programme.

While seminars, workshops and a lot of activities within the learning cycle are run independently by the ASA-Programme, the practical phase primarily lies in the hands of partner organisations which supervise this part of the learning process. Those partners propose projects in which the participants of the ASA-Programme can gain practical experience and get the opportunity to learn "on the ground". In general, the ASA-Programme and its partners set itself high and ambitious objectives which often correspond with the demands and claims of postcolonial scholars. The participants are trained and supported to take part in projects

settled within the field of development cooperation. According to the programme, their activities are supposed to be based on equal learning from each other, working together at eye level and thus raising awareness for privileges and power structures. The programme commits itself to a non-racist and non-discriminative approach in order to prepare the participants for a future role as “multipliers for Global Education” (ASA-Programm 2012d).

„ASA wants more students and young professionals [...] committing to sustainable and socially fair development [and is] looking for partnerships and constructive conflict management between different cultures as well as between poor and rich countries.” (ASA-Programm 2012a)

This quote hints to the fact that the ASA-Programme engages itself with ongoing debates in the context of North-South-relations and development cooperation, especially those about decent strategies for development policies. Some of the programme’s general standpoints seem to be derived from thoughts which are originated from postcolonial theory. The critiques raised by this school of thought lead to changing concepts which show the raising academic and public interest and the need for further studies in this field. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), for example, states that “Germany has a major interest in holding a dialogue with the global development partners on key global issues, and in doing so on an equal footing so as to promote mutual learning” (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2011: 5). The emphasis on ‘dialogue’, ‘equality’ and ‘mutual learning’ as well as the description ‘global development partners’ are a fairly new trend in mainstream development discourses.

This paper wants to contribute to these discussions and debates by examining, from a postcolonial point of view, whether official statements of actors in the context of the ASA-Programme are only *hollow words* or if they are reflected in the *actual practice* of the programme. Therefore it seeks to uncover what is lacking in the practical implementation of the one-year learning cycle in which the participants of the ASA-Programme take part. It will especially focus on the maintenance of the existing hierarchy between actors in the Global North and Global South and tries to show how hegemonic discourses shape representations and relations in general.

In order to do so, the main part starts with a paragraph on methodology, followed by an introduction to the ASA-Programme and one of its projects, which is used as a case study. Thereby the background of the examination is presented. Afterwards the paper continues with a chapter in which a project proposal application form is analysed in detail through a postcolonial lense. This is done to show how research can be taken forward. The critical reading exposes some gaps between

the statements in the written concept which are related to concepts of Said, Foucault and others and the actual practice within the framework of the programme. Due to the realms of possibility which are especially limited because of constraints concerning the method and the useful data, the examination is done as precisely as possible.

In this way the article contributes to the critical debate within the framework of volunteer work and the ASA-Programme in particular. Its findings can be used to review dynamics, processes and lack of the overall concepts within the programme and its projects. It can add ideas to debates and discussions surrounding the further path of development cooperation in general. Additionally, the paper demonstrates how a postcolonial perspective can be applied to the analysis of programmes and projects in the field of volunteer work which may inspire other scholars as well as participants in such programmes to include a postcolonial perspective to their tools of reflection.

## 2. Methodological Approach

The examination is mainly done by a comparison of official documents of the ASA-Programme and the actual reality in one of its projects. It will be questioned if the formal papers which are related to the programme and its projects contain contradictions when they are applied in practice and if it is possible to identify cases of maintained hierarchies in the context of the programme. It must be noted that the study is based on the inquiry of only one project as an example and does not claim generality. This acknowledgement is needed because the implementation and realisation of the projects within the programme are very diverse. Hence, the article demonstrates how an examination from a postcolonial perspective can be done and which questions can and should be asked while analysing projects within the ASA-Programme.

Accordingly, the article is backed by a case study featuring the so-called *Speelhuis* project. It is one of the undertakings which had been proposed and accepted to act as a working opportunity for four participants during the practical phase within their involvement in the learning cycle of the ASA-Programme. The fact that the author of this paper participated in the ASA-Programme and spent his practical phase in this project gave him the opportunity to analyse the practice of the programme and this particular project through participant observation.

This ethnological method is widely used in cultural anthropology and usually describes various kinds of fieldwork (Spradley 1980). Agar defines it as an overarching term for every observation and formal and informal interviews which social scientists conduct (Agar 1996). The systematic approach distinguishes it from everyday observations. Consequently, what is seen and experienced has to be recorded

and documented in a structured way which is mostly done by writing field notes which are usually called ‘memos’ (Dewalt/Dewalt 1998: 259). Accordingly, a bundle of memos acted as a main source for the research at hand. They are based on the author’s observations and his interactions in the course of the described practical phase in Germany and South Africa.

Following Spradley, taking part in daily activities and natural interactions with the subject of study enables the researcher to get a deeper understanding of its research topic (Spradley 1980: 7). The method helps to get insights which otherwise would have been hidden behind official statements, published reports and other formal and easily accessible sources (Jorgensen 1989: 13). Hence, the author’s participation in the *Speelhuis* project gave him the opportunity to look beyond restricted pieces of information. Especially the informal interactions with actors involved in the project enabled him to observe and experience dynamics and to record statements which are only accessible through the use of such scientific tools.

Through his participation in the analysed project the author on the one hand got a lot of insights and was able to observe the dynamics of the programme and this particular project from a participant’s perspective. On the other hand it must be noted here that this personal involvement leads to subjectivity which is inevitable when working with the method of participant observation. Dewalt and Dewalt call this the “ethnographer bias” (Dewalt/Dewalt 1998: 259). Hence we have to acknowledge that the author of this article can not and does not want to claim objectivity. Nevertheless, as long as the insights which are derived from studies using participant observation are perceived as contributing to additions or changes of existing knowledge and while awareness for certain potential biases and how they affect the research exists, the method’s reliability should be given (Dewalt/Dewalt 1998: 291).

Nevertheless, the reliability of the method is subject of controversial debates. Therefore the usage must be accompanied by a study of its limitations and problems, especially described by Schwartz and Schwartz in *Problems in Participant Observation* (Schwartz/Schwartz 1955). Hence, the acquired information and knowledge about the case study is difficult to prove and to verify. Therefore most of the assumptions, claims and hypotheses in this paper are made with caution and in a restrained way. Consequently, the main aim of the article is not the development of a comprehensive critique but sensitisation and awareness-raising for possible concerns raised from a postcolonial point of view.

Besides the findings gained through participant observation, the official project proposal application form of the *Speelhuis*-Project acts as another main source of analysis. This document has to be filled and handed in by organisations which would like to run a project within the scheme of the ASA-Programme. This means

that these organisations, assuming their proposal gets accepted, become partners of the ASA-Programme and get responsibilities for the practical phase within the learning cycle. The proposal form consists of bureaucratic questions as well as a section about the intentions, aims and plans for the suggested project. While this is a key document on which the project is built upon, its content is of high value for the examination.

Together with other official publications of the ASA-Programme, it acts as a supportive source for the analysis. The study of these documents is accompanied by a review of academic literature such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) as well as *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1964) and James Ferguson's *The Anti-politics Machine* (1994). Furthermore, these academic writings set the theoretical framework for the examination presented in this paper and shape the author's perspective on the programme and the discussed project.

### 3. The ASA-Programme and its *Speelhuis*-Project

The ASA-Programme was set up by students in the 1960s to organise work and study visits in the Global South (ASA-Programm 2012e). In the following years the former student union run by volunteers developed further and was administered by different organisations like the *Carl Duisberg Society* or nowadays by *Engagement Global* which works on behalf of the German government and is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Engagement Global 2012).

After a conceptual shift from *working* in the Global South to *learning* about globalisation and its effects the overall aim of the programme nowadays is to qualify so-called 'Multipliers for Global Education'. 250 young professionals and students take part in the one-year learning cycle described above. While the seminars are supposed to raise awareness for a variety of issues concerning the relations between the Global North and the Global South as well as to equip the participants with knowledge and skills to become multipliers, the project phase provides the opportunity to explore, experience and learn *practically*. In general, the participants are trained to be able to commit themselves for a variety of issues of global concern.

Likewise the learning process which the participants are supposed to experience, the programme describes itself as a "dynamic learning program" (ASA-Programm 2012f) which underlines that not only the participants but also the programme learns and the actors shaping it are willing to change and improve it from year to year. Consequently, one aim of this paper is to support the programme's further development.

As mentioned earlier, the ASA-Programme is divided into four sub-programmes with varying set-ups and focuses. One of the often modified sub-programmes is

the *South-North programme*. It emphasizes the approach of an equal cooperation between the Global South and the Global North and tries to avoid discrimination and hierarchies. Therefore teams which contain two participants each from Germany and a country in the Global South are formed. They take part in a two-way exchange in which the participants from the Global South visit their German counterparts for three months and afterwards the roles change and the Germans are guests in the Global South. This is different for most of the other participants of the ASA-Programme because usually they do not have team-partners from the Global South (ASA-Programm 2012d).

In the mentioned *Speelhuis* project the author was part of a team with another German student and two South African community workers. Despite the general training to become 'Multipliers for Global Education', the project's overall stated objective was to exchange ideas about safe places in the afternoon for disadvantaged children in South Africa and Germany where the youngsters can spend time and are taken care of after school (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 11). Among other themes, the article raises the question if the officially announced objectives which show closeness to postcolonial thoughts are represented in the actual practice of the project and more specifically if the focus was indeed on the *exchange of ideas* or more on a *one-sided knowledge transfer* from the Global North to the Global South. Assuming the latter, this will open the space for a variety of critiques from a post-colonial perspective.

#### 4. Postcolonial reading of the project proposal form

The overall official project goals can be found in the project proposal application form which has to be handed in by organisations when applying to take part in a project in the ASA-Programme. This document contains different sections about expectations towards future participants, a proposed outline of the project, background information about the organisations and people involved as well as a detailed description of the plan on how the proposers imagine the project to be.

As it has to be expected that unforeseeable events and processes produce the necessity to change the initial plan for the project, the concept which is outlined in the project proposal application form may be seen as a binding declaration of intent. All actors involved have access to the document and can use it as a source for questioning the actual realisation of the project. In the following chapters this form acts as a main source for a postcolonial reading of the stated intentions and the actual practice of the project.

## 4.1 From Edward Said's 'Orientalism' to 'Townshipism'

Edward Said, one of the most influential writers in postcolonial studies, showed how the *Orient* was and still is created by the *West* (Said 1979). The following chapter describes the comparable process of *Townshipism*. The basis is the former South African township *Manenberg* which is today part of the city of Cape Town. One part of the case study project is set in this community. Hence, processes surrounding the former township are analysed and it is shown how a certain image about the residents and their surroundings are created by non-residents.

According to Said the term *Orient* is filled with meanings and does not represent the actual reality. He demonstrates how the image of an exotic and separated *Other* is constructed and argues that the discourse surrounding is done on purpose, especially to manifest the western cultural hegemony. In another book named *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1993) he expands his ideas to other spheres of the world, for example to Africa.

Following Said, James Ferguson analyses discourses surrounding development policies with a special focus on the Kingdom of Lesotho. He concludes that "development institutions generate their own form of discourse, and this discourse simultaneously constructs Lesotho as a particular kind of object of knowledge, and creates a structure of knowledge around that object. Interventions are then organised on the basis of this structure of knowledge" (Ferguson 1994a: xiv).

In the context of the *Speelhuis*-Project a similar process within the former township Manenberg, where parts of the project took place, can be observed. By analysing the discourse about this particular community, it is possible to find evidence for a latent deficit-orientated portrait of the area. Examples can be derived from documents, reports and statements made by people involved in the project. The created picture contains crime, poverty, unemployment, violence, drug abuse and other negative aspects of living in the community of Manenberg.

These features are not only often mentioned but also highlighted by the utilisation of underlining terms in the project proposal application form for the *Speelhuis*-Project. Here it is stated that "crime, substance abuse and unemployment figures are still high and social concerns are at an all time high" (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 9). It is difficult to prove that this statement is exaggerated because there is no recent data available which can be used. However, in conversations inhabitants stated that the situation is getting better and that the social concerns are far from being *at an all time high*. The same may be said about sentences in the proposal like "Manenberg is known for violence and drug abuse which makes the community risky" (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 17) or also "Manenberg is known for violence and crime and in many cases the children are the victims of these crimes" (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18).

The argument here is not that there are no cases which fit to the described aspects, but the statements in the project proposal application form only show one side of the coin. Only the negative features are mentioned without paying attention to the fact that the reality looks different or at least more diverse. Therefore this narrow way of describing Manenberg can be called deficit-orientated *Townshipism*.

#### 4.1.1 The Purpose of Townshipism

It can be assumed that the construction of this particular picture is grounded in the need for getting negative attention to raise funding for the project as well as the involved organisations and actors. In order for the proposal to get accepted by the ASA-Programme the project place must appear *attractive* for the decision-makers and future applicants who are interested in joining the ASA-Programme. The author of this paper can not deny that the negative portrayal of Manenberg might have boosted his motivation to apply. The perception of Manenberg and other places for which actors are looking for funding are therefore often catastrophised on purpose. This process is well described by James Ferguson in his publications about the *anti-politics machine* where he shows how a certain negative image of Lesotho is constructed in order to create a need for development aid (Ferguson 1994a, 1994b). More generally speaking, Ferguson demonstrates how development agencies portray target countries for development aid in the way they need to be shown. For him this means to present them as countries which are suitable for development projects. This in turns leads to the situation that the way they are shown and the way projects are conceptualised often “bear little or no relation to economic and social realities” (Ferguson 1994b: 176).

An example for this process can be found in the description of the need for the *Speelhuis*-Project in Manenberg as well. In the project proposal application form it is stated that “parents that work don’t have anyone that they trust to look after the children once they come from school” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18). During the author’s stay in the community he observed some of these cases but the majority of the children seem to be part of strong and wide ranging social networks. Not only high numbers of family members but also neighbours and other acquaintances took care of the children. These strong social relations are reflected by shared responsibilities for the children: The care is not bound to the parents alone but it is common that a number of people are involved. The ordinary picture which can be observed by walking through the streets is that elderly people, mostly grandmothers and fathers, are sitting in front of their houses watching the youngsters playing cricket, football or doing other activities in front of their homes.

Therefore it must be also questioned if the following statement in the proposal, “these children are roaming around in the community” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18), reflects the reality. At least there are no doubts that the generalisation

is wrong and that not all children whose parents are working have to be taken care of by an institution in the afternoon. Additionally it can be criticised that *roaming around* implies that they hang around on the streets and behave badly – or what people of the community call *naughty* in informal interviews and conversations – which, looking on it from a mainstream discourse, goes hand in hand with crime, violence and other aspects mentioned above. The writers of the project proposal form do not take into account that a lot of the youngsters find reasonable ways to use their time for activities like sports, games or other activities which are undoubtedly accepted by most of the societies worldwide.

Therefore the project proposal application form may be treated as a document which follows general paths towards, what Vasudha Chhotray calls “depoliticised development” (Chhotray 2011: 195). The statements in the form seem to be non-political but in fact have political impact in various ways. The most striking one is the production of a need for a development project in Manenberg.

#### 4.1.2 The helpless Township Other

By reading carefully through the proposal one can notice that the used language tends to create not only a deficit-orientated image but also one in which the people in the community seem to be helpless and highly in need of foreign support. Another quote underlines this thesis: “Children [in Manenberg] are vulnerable to acts of violence, rape, domestic violence and trauma. Children are not performing in their early education phase and drop out of school in a later stage of their lives, which increases the poverty cycle” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18).

This description is true for some cases but it is necessary to question the way it is written. It is not about *some* children or a *number of children* or even *most of the children* but only about *children* which again creates a generalised picture of childhood in Manenberg. The author of this paper observed that cases do exist in the community which match the description. However, even if there are some examples there are also many cases where trusted people took good care of children after they came home from school.

At this point it can be concluded that Said’s *oriental other* appears here as a *township other* and furthermore not only as an exotic and foreign *other* but as someone with a negative label. The belonging to the community becomes a generalised stigma. In South Africa, which is often, rightly or not, referred to as the *rainbow nation*, diversity is overseen. The result forms a representation of Manenberg which is connected to poverty, crime, violence, tragedy and other negative aspects. This representation is misleading in the same way as “orientalist discourse misrepresents the Orient, that it deforms and distorts a place and a people that actually exist“ (Hiddeston 2009: 91).

Postcolonial research can contribute to change this obviously false picture by adding another discourse to the existing and often misleading one, a discourse which focuses more on positive attributes such as functioning social structures, the existing resources and abilities of the community members or the well-being of a number of inhabitants. Nevertheless, as indicated above, this would not be in the interest of foreign NGOs and other actors looking for donations. Therefore a postcolonial perspective uncovers not only the construction of the helpless *township other* but also the reasons behind it.

## 4.2 From the Myth *non-political* to an actual Political Meaning

As touched upon earlier, the financial resources in the Global North, which are often presented as non-political, are in fact highly political when analysing funding issues. The dependency on money supply for institutions in the Global South is more or less always connected with conditions. In this way funding gets a political meaning for example in the sense that it contributes to or maintains the hegemonic structure, the existing hierarchy, control or the power distribution to shape the developments in the Global South.

Here it can be referred to Said's thoughts about political meanings of knowledge. He states that "the general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political [...] obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtained when knowledge is produced" (Said 1994: 136). In the context of development cooperation knowledge is often presented as unquestionable facts, which overshadows the process of obtaining knowledge, and reflects a narrow perspective. This perspective is often a so-called western one in the sense that actors from the Global North perceive themselves as the ones who have true knowledge about the right ways to work on challenges in the Global South. Due to the fact that they are in most of the cases also the funders of the projects, the perception of having money and knowledge leads to the assumption that they should shape development in the Global South according to their ideas and concepts.

## 4.3 A regime of truth in Foucault's sense

Foucault has never examined these kind of colonial discourses himself but his methodology is highly relevant for postcolonial research. His ideas influenced scholars in this field and especially Edward Said used his theories extensively in his works interpreting discourses in "more coherent and more historically grounded terms" (Hiddleston 2009: 82). Especially Foucault's writings about the ways in which knowledge is produced by discourses can be used to understand the latent power structures of development cooperation. The process of shaping knowledge backs up these structures (Hiddleston 2009: 77).

Foucault demonstrates this process by analysing the discourse through which the madman was created throughout the history as external to reason and civilisation in his book *Madness and Civilisation* (Foucault 1964). According to him madness is never a given reality but is created by those who are in a position of authority and can accordingly guide a discourse into a certain direction (Hiddleston 2009: 78).

Similar processes can be found in the discourse about the Manenberg community where crime, like madness, seems to be exaggerated by the discourse. People belonging to the community are often described as helpless, unmotivated, unskilled and subordinated as exemplary showed above. It is again possible to find further evidence by browsing through the project proposal application form. A few examples are presented in the next chapter.

### 4.3.1 The unquestioned role models from the Global North

The image is produced that the people in Manenberg need role models from the Global North and that they tend to be, like Foucault's madman, external to reason and civilisation. Manifestations become visible in the project proposal application form, especially when reading between the lines. Hints can be found that the focus of the project is on using an existing institution in Germany as an unquestioned role model for the development of a similar institution in South Africa because it seems that the German partner organisation assumes that the local people in Manenberg are not able to create such an institution themselves.

Such organisations in the Global North, in this case in Germany, have – as explained above – the power to shape the discourse about communities in the Global South, so to speak about Manenberg in South Africa. Not only knowledge is part of this capacity but also money, existing infrastructure and many other aspects. The result is that actors in the Global North get widely accepted authority which is recognised worldwide especially also in the Global South.

This unquestioned authority seems to influence also the director of the organisation in Manenberg: He visited Germany and got to know an institution which takes care of disadvantaged children and youth called Spielhaus in the City of Aachen. Seemingly without taking into account that the situation in Manenberg is different to the one encountered in Aachen he concluded that his organisation needs exactly the same institution for his community. He used the German example not only as a source of inspiration and to get ideas but wanted to copy it. This can be seen in the context of accepted authority in the way that Germans know how to do after school care for children and how to build a perfect institution for it.

The reflection on this latent underlying structure points to the questioning of the cultural hegemony of the Global North and its leading position in development discourses. Taking a German institution as a strong role model with the aim to achieve

the same level of development by building the same institution, the capacities and resources in the Global South are overseen and forgotten. In the context of the *Speelhuis*-Project the director could have thought about the range of empty buildings in his community instead of dreaming about a newly constructed building which copies the German example. The thought of we need the same may lead to a situation where people seem to blinker.

### 4.3.2 The uncivilized Minibus System in Manenberg

A more or less similar process can be observed in debates about the public transport system in Cape Town and in many other towns in the Global South. Often these systems are dominated by minibus taxis which can carry between 10 and 16 people. It is a simple system which is often criticised and described as inefficient by commentators from the Global North. This is also true for the discourse in the context of the *Speelhuis*-Project. Even if the ASA-participants from South Africa insisted on their position – that the minibus system is useful and that it is no problem to learn how to use it – the German ASA-participants were told by representatives from the German organisation that they need a car in Cape Town because the public transport system is not working at all. This opinion was formulated often and the voices from the two South Africans were not able to change the discourse. This can be seen as a good example for a regime of truth in which the power is in the hands of actors from the Global North even if experiences and expertise lay in the Global South.

Despite the fact that most of the commentators from the Global North have never used one of these minibuses and have never experienced how it practically works, opinions in the Global North tend to see the system as a chaotic and inefficient system which has to be removed or at least changed. For example, the French scientist Roland Lomme asks the provocative and rhetorical question “Should South African minibus taxis be scrapped?” (Lomme 2008).

Here again a discourse is shaped by actors from the Global North and tends to lead to the narrow assumption that a system which is closer to most of the public transport systems in the western world would serve the people better. Without taking local sources into account and without questioning if the assumptions are right, other opinions are marginalised in a way it is often done in the context of North-South relations (Hiddleston 2009: 79).

Following Foucault, the leaders of the discourse in the Global North constitute a regime of truth about the minibus system which hints to the general tendency that the power in development discourses can mostly be found in the Global North. Especially governments, NGOs, grant-makers and other institutions often have a monopoly on meanings and interpretations.

These voices which seem to represent an assumed cultural supremacy of the Global North in the above given example are not directly related to the ASA-Programme but to its partner organisation which is responsible for the practical phase. Therefore the question can be raised to whom such critiques are pointing. Obviously the partner organisation could engage itself more with postcolonial approaches and could try to change its perceptions and the way they are functioning. Nevertheless, the ASA-Programme itself could reflect on these issues due to the fact that they choose those partners and projects according to their own guidelines. If the chosen partners do not fulfil certain requirements like trying to avoid the reproduction of colonial stereotypes and hierarchies, the ASA-Programme has, according to their own standards, the duty to act. However, stopping the cooperation with such partners would be only one and the most extreme step. Offering training and support for members of such partners could be another way. Nevertheless, the ASA-Programme itself must reflect on the gap between its own ambitious goals, guidelines and the actual practice in an affiliated project in any case.

#### **4.3.3 From learning from each other to we show you how to do it**

A similar narrow perspective can be observed when focussing on the refusal of actors in the Global North to learn from the Global South. Even if they often repeat that they are open and willing to learn, their actual actions frequently differ from this ambition. Again, additional examples can be found within the *Speelhuis*-Project.

There, one part of the project proposal application form is dedicated to the objectives of the so-called “North Phase” of the project. This is the phase which the participants are supposed to spend in a project in Germany, in the case of the *Speelhuis*-Project in Aachen. Another part of the form is dedicated to the so-called “South Phase” which should take place in the Global South, in our example in Manenberg in South Africa. Getting to know, learn and participate are key words in the paragraph about the practical phase in Germany. Additionally the only expectation which is expressed towards the participants during their stay in Germany is interest (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 11).

Opposed to these aims are most of the one’s which describe the “South Phase” in South Africa. Even if the expression getting to know also plays a prominent role, most of the paragraphs focus on the usage of skills which the participants acquired in Germany. According to the form they are supposed to use the experiences from Germany in South Africa. This is especially obvious when the authors of the form stress that the main objective for the participants in Manenberg is “to provide developmental activities for 500 vulnerable children” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18). The following table illustrates the usage of the mentioned key words and their attribution to the two phases.

Source: Own collection

Additionally it seems that the authors of the project proposal form have the perception that development is an issue which exclusively concerns the Global South. The aim that the participants get insights into global interdependencies, development cooperation, knowledge transfer between the Global North and the Global South and global partnerships is only mentioned in the description of the time in South Africa (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 18). This may be interpreted in the way that the project was supposed to open the space for knowledge transfer from the Global North to the Global South without including the reversed way, the learning from the Global South. A source for this way of thinking can be found by relating it back to Foucault and the regimes of truth, in this case about the truth regarding the challenges in Manenberg and the way the project can contribute to improve the situation.

As described earlier, the ASA-Programme sees its activities as part of an equal two-way learning process leading from the Global North to the Global South and vice versa, especially emphasised by the South-North sub-programme. Approaches which tend to be one-sided therefore do not match and are problematic if they are part of the programme.

#### 4.3.4 Ownership of the Global North

Besides delivering the role model and the true knowledge to overcome challenges in Manenberg, the organisation in Germany seems to perceive itself as one of the owners of the *Speelhuis* in Manenberg. On the question why the project is proposed, the project proposal application form states that the director of the organisation in South Africa and the director of the organisation in Germany are “planning to implement a project in Manenberg named *Speelhuis* – project after school care for children and young people” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 7). This underlines that the German organisation does not only want to support the project but that they take ownership of it as well. The ASA-Programme approved the proposal and does not seem to be disturbed by the phrasing.

In the context of the exchange project this means that the purpose of the exchange seems to be the development of the project in Manenberg and not, as stated before, a knowledge transfer from South Africa to Germany. At no point the German organisation seems to be interested or even open for the ideas and thoughts of their South African counterparts which have a lot of knowledge and expertise about after school care for children as well because the organisation has been working in this field for a long time.

## 4.4 The unequal exchange

Therefore the overall objectives have to be scrutinised. The idea of the *Speelhuis*-Project and the South-North programme in general is to facilitate an equal exchange and opportunities for a knowledge transfer from the Global North to the Global South and vice versa. As written in the project proposal application form the participants “shall [...] learn from each other” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 11) besides other aims which are pointing in a similar direction.

Like these statements the *Memorandum of Understanding* which was agreed on between the city of Cape Town and Aachen states that “the aim of the partnership [...] is to create collective projects and to promote the sustainable development of both partners through these projects and regular exchanges“ (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 9).

However, in the case of the *Speelhuis*-Project even the name itself hints to another focus. Although the common language of the project is English the project proposers have chosen a name in Afrikaans, the language which is spoken in Manenberg. This points to the underlying idea that the focus of the project is on the development of an institution in Manenberg instead of opening the space for a process of learning from each other. From this perspective, a neutral English title would have been more appropriate.

A more obvious statement can be found about the concept for the *Speelhuis*-Project in the following chapter: “They [the participants] will gain knowledge about different forms of after school care for children and young people in different facilities [in Aachen]. This knowledge can afterwards be used during the project phase in South Africa” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 12). It seems that the official objectives to “learn from each other, exchange ideas and work together” (Hollmann/Williams 2009: 11) are not transferred into the detailed concept of the project but remains lip service.

## 4.5 Sending experts to the Global South and inviting entertainers to the Global North

Taking not only the *Speelhuis*-Project as an example but also other projects in the scheme of the official city partnership between Aachen and Cape Town shows that the focus of the partnership activities is mainly on Manenberg and the Global South in general. The list of projects which are presented on the official homepage show that the common practice is that so-called experts from Aachen are sent to Cape Town in order for people and communities there to learn from them (Partnership coordination City of Aachen 2012).

Often these experts from Aachen are only seen as specialists because of their origin and not because of their actual qualification. Within the project phase the author observed one example during the stay of a school class from Germany in Cape Town which he was supposed to supervise. The foreign students came to Manenberg to lay out a garden at one of the schools there. They were accompanied by some local learners who posed the question how the garden at their school in Germany looks like. The surprising answer of one of the German students was: “We do not have one. It is also for me the first time to work in a garden.”<sup>2</sup> Afterwards the students all together discussed why the Germans came to South Africa to build a garden instead of working at their own school. To sum this argument up, this conversation shows the latent hierarchy between representatives of the Global North and the Global South.

In the same way it is necessary to discuss the skills which are attributed to the representatives of the South African organisation. The expected contribution to the success of the exchange in the framework of the *Speelhuis*-Project differed from the expectations towards the German participants. The South Africans were asked to share their knowledge of local traditions concerning food, language and other cultural goods which can be described as soft knowledge. In opposition to that the organisation expected from the German participants, as mentioned above, that they contribute with hard knowledge, especially with their skills which they acquired at the university about topics directly related to after school care for children.

These dynamics are a general phenomenon and well described by Olajide Akinoyoye, a Nigerian actor and musician who is living in Germany, in an interview (Massing 2010). He explains that scientists, actors and business women and men with a non-German background are rarely recognised for their occupation or job but are often asked to cook traditional meals or to drum. Like the two South Africans in the *Speelhuis*-Project, non-Germans are not requested for presentations or lectures about complex topics in Germany but should contribute to entertain (Akinoyoye 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

The ASA-Programme describes itself as a dynamic learning programme which represents an open mind policy about criticism, new ideas and development suggestions. Therefore new perspectives are welcomed and can contribute to the further improvement of the programme and its projects. This article at hand tries

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2 The author of the paper noted this statement in the process of participant observation.

to offer insights into processes which lay behind the programme's communicated statements in order to uncover some misleading developments. Hereby, even if the focus lies on one particular project, it offers a general framework for postcolonial analysis of initiatives in the field of development cooperation and volunteer work by demonstrating which crucial points can be taken into consideration and which questions can be asked from a postcolonial perspective. Additionally it presents case studies and examples in which postcolonial readings offer new insights and cast light on dynamics which are not visible on first sight.

Learning from each other, working together at eye level or equal exchange are only a few of the mentioned key phrases which are popular among actors in the field of development cooperation and volunteer services, especially in the scheme of the ASA-Programme and within the framework of the *Speelhuis*-Project. These terms appear prominently in official statements, in documents, forms and conversations. In addition they are presented as objectives leading to the possibility to pit them against the actual practice.

However, the article uncovered some discrepancies between ambitious goals and the programme in reality, in particular analysing the case-study-project "*Speelhuis*". Among the encountered deficits, a latent discourse, coined as Townshipism, can be identified. It leads deliberately to the creation of a township other who is represented as in need of help and support from actors in the Global North. It has been shown how this situation is used by funders and other organisations from Germany to justify their authority in discussions about concepts for development projects.

Additionally, evidence was found for existing regimes of truth in Foucault's sense. Examples are the discourses about the minibus system and the unquestioned role models from the Global North. This is connected to the prominent idea that actors from Germany or other countries from the Global North should act as experts and taking ownership of developments in the Global South.

In general it can be concluded that deficits exist between the goals and the actual practices within the ASA-Programme and its projects which might be detectable in other initiatives in the field of development cooperation and volunteer work as well. It was possible to present some of them in this article at hand while there is no doubt that more can be discovered. Nevertheless, the overall path which the ASA-Programme and its projects are taking is not one which is opposed to postcolonial thoughts. The presented objectives and the content of the learning goals reflect this trend as well as the project list for 2012 in which a project proposed by *AfricAvenir* appears. This organisation commits itself to an equal partnership between Africa and Europe and tries to "visualize African views and positions in terms of a critical postcolonial approach in the public" (own translation; ASA-Programm 2012b: 10).

With the demanding aims of the ASA-Programme all people involved set themselves high standards which are difficult to achieve. The article pointed to some building sites where further work needs to be done when it comes to the realisation of these norms. One example is the choice of partner organisations or respectively the training of people who are connected to these organisations.

Due to the fact that it has to be expected that there are a lot more examples where changes are possible and because the method of this article, mainly participant observation, can be backed up by other scientific methods which provide more profound material, further studies are needed. They could lead to more precise theses and conclusions in order to develop the programme further and to reach ambitious goals also in other initiatives in the field of development cooperation and volunteer services.

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