

Encountering the Other: The Ovahimba Culture and People in Namibian Tourism Promotion

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ABSTRACT

Tourism and tourism images are an integral part of our daily lives. Images in tourism promotion also participate in cultural production that can create discourses of people and places and affect the way we perceive the world around us. This article discusses the ethnic representations produced in tourism promotion and reviews the features of the tourism images and historical aspects of the representations of Africa and its people. The article analyzes the representations of the Ovahimba, ethnic group living in Namibia. The focus is on the depictions of the Ovahimba culture, its members and their encounters with tourists in Namibian tourism promotion. Also, the various roles an ethnic group can have in place promotion is discussed.

Keywords: *tourism promotion, ethnic tourism, the Ovahimba, ethnic representations.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Images are powerful components of tourist destination marketing; photographs of scenery, landmarks and icons dominate all forms of tourism promotion such as travel brochures, television commercials and internet advertisements (Jenkins 2003: 305). Tourism is considered to be one of the major tools for modernization in developing countries. The governments give a significant role for tourism in order to develop economically marginal areas of these nations (Hall 1994: 114; Nuñez 1989: 267). Competition over tourists is hard on a global scale, and that is where the tourism promotion and advertisement often become decisive. In this contest of nations over tourist arrivals, governments and tourism operators develop, plan and manage destinations to attract more tourists to consume places and regions under the tourism realm (Saarinen & Manwa 2008). It is argued that basically any part of a culture can be put up for sale (see Winter 2007).

The encounters with locals and tourists (host and guest) are often in the center of tourist experience and they usually have both positive and negative impacts. The encounters and relationship between host and guest can be especially problematic when it is only being directed by outsiders and by non-local forces (see Saarinen & Manwa 2008). Scholars (see Brito-Henriques 2014; Salazar 2012; van Eeden 2006) discuss that tourism imagery of developing

countries is about fantasies, and often about an ambivalent nostalgia for the past. Therefore, the imaginaries of people and places cannot be considered merely as commercial representations, but they are historically contingent and encapsulate political values and ideologies of the surrounding societies. Images of “the other” have usually been constructed over centuries and they have been shaped in cross-cultural contacts (Salazar 2012).

This paper examines the visual representations of the Ovahimba culture and people in Namibian tourism promotion site in the Internet. In addition, the encounters between the Ovahimba and the tourists are scrutinized from a vast photography gallery. The Ovahimba live in northwestern part of Namibia, in the Kunene region and in southwestern Angola. They constitute about one percent (20 000) of the Namibia’s 2.1 million population. The Ovahimba are traditionally pastoral nomads, breeding cattle and goats, but, for example tourism is becoming an important part of their livelihood (Bollig & Heinemann 2002: 269, 300; NSA 2011).

The paper introduces first the ideas of different roles of tourism images, which are followed by a closer focus on the imagery of Africa in the light of historical and current aspects. After that, the representations of the Ovahimba, their culture and the encounters with tourists are examined. The discussion part aims to present different aspects of the representations of the Ovahimba culture, people, and encounters with tourists. It also discusses the role of the state in the ethnic representations.

2. TOURISM IMAGES

Global media continuously produces a plethora of impressions of the world, often even in a real time. Media can be very selective in terms of what kind of pictures it chooses to show to audiences around the world. For example, places across the globe have different images attached to them and in the case of developing countries images can include negative connotations (Salazar 2012: 872). Images and ideas in tourism tend to travel easily, together with tourists. They enter into tourism destination areas, originating from tourism generating places which are in turn also destinations. From there, they circle back and forth. It becomes hard to trace the starting point of the imageries the older they become and the longer time they have been circulating. Imaginaries circulate unevenly and their spread is shaped by processes that delimit and restrict movement. Circulation of imaginaries requires some sort of material and institutional infrastructure of movement. In order to understand how circulation works, we have to recognize broader socio-cultural structures and mechanisms that influence these circulations (Salazar 2012: 868).

Urry (2002: 12, 7) argues that over time the images generated of different tourist gazes, come to constitute a closed self-perpetuating system of illusions. This provides and directs the tourists in selecting and evaluating potential places

to visit. According to Saarinen and Manwa (2008), the first touristic encounter between hosts and guests is based particularly on the place promotion and the ways of framing and representing local people, cultures and environments to potential tourists. Thus, the previous characteristics guide the encounters and they can provide means for tourists to identify and encounter the local people (see Salazar 2012). Haldrup and Larsen (2012: 156) argue that tourists gaze upon and photograph places that they have already consumed before departure from different media. According to them, tourists are not so much framing and exploring as they are framed and fixed. They call it a hermeneutic circle that turns the photographic performances of tourists into a ritual of quotation.

Scholars (e.g. Palmer 1999) argue that tourism images are one of the main contributions forming the nation and national identity. However, the myths and traditions of nationhood promoted by the tourism industry may have little to do with the real lives of the people or how they personally understand their own national identity. According to Winter (2007: 109), participation in the creation of national identity is an area in which tourism is enormously productive. For example, the use of its linkages, visual imageries and the technology of advertising and communication makes tourism highly effective in the creation of attractions which act as signs of national identity. Also, national symbols, ceremonies and customs provide valuable material which can be used in order to provide elements for the creation of a distinctive image of nationhood for tourists (Palmer 1999: 316).

3. EUROPEAN IMAGERY OF AFRICA

There are strong historical roots in the representation of the African continent. In the European imagery, Africa has often been represented in photographs and art (Wels 2004: 77). European standards of aesthetics in the landscape and also in the perception of African people played an important role in photographs, literature and art of Africa and Africans in Europe during the colonial era. Photography became part of the colonial practices, for example in categorising, measuring, controlling and narrating colonial subjects (Corbey 1993: 363). Most representations depicted the paradoxical attitude of fear and attraction. This combination was often purposefully used in visual and literary representations to keep the audience and/or readership interested. The higher the contrast that was suggested between Africans and Europeans, the more it seemed to verify European superiority. In the images that presented Africa both as a biblical Eden and as a frightening 'dark continent' reflected this paradoxical European imagery of Africa (Wels 2004: 79–82).

The ambivalent imagery also included people: on the one hand the Africans were considered 'noble savages', and on the other hand violent barbarians (Wels 2004: 80; Pajaczkowska & Young 1992). According to Hall (1992: 255), in racism it is characteristic to construct the black subject as double: the noble

savage and the violent avenger. People living in Victorian prudence stereotyped Africans also as underdressed. The fact that women walked around bare-breasted was interpreted as a “proof” of their state of primitiveness and sexual willingness of African women (Wels 2004: 81).

Europe’s World Exhibitions (in the 18th and 19th centuries until the 1930s) celebrated the European imperial power. As a manifestation of the imperial hegemony of the European countries, the organizers of the exhibitions put the colonial natives on stage. For the Europeans, in the nineteenth century, the “Hottentot” became a representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female (Gilman 1992: 173). At the beginning of the 19th century, the Khoi-Khoi (“Hottentot”) woman Saartjie Baartman became a famous attraction in ethnographic exhibitions in Europe and after her death a mold of her body was exhibited (Corbey 1993: 354). Contemporary views highlighted the ideas of racial hierarchy that served the purposes of imperialism. In this ideology, in addition to Africans, Tasmanians, Australian Aborigines and several native peoples from Tiera del Fuego stood closest to the apes and prehistoric ape-men, and therefore were outstanding examples of “contemporary ancestors” and “missing links” (Corbey 1993: 355).

The colonial mentality also saw the natives as needing control. Gilman (1992: 195) argues that the need for control was a projection of inner fears of the Europeans. Colonial administrators also saw the native people as a subject of dependence. The literature and imagery of that time had, for example, imaginative depictions of natives waiting passively to be fed and fantasies of uncontrolled sexuality and fertility (Pajaczkowska & Young 1992: 202–203).

In a similar vein, when we review the imagery and discourses of Africa and its people today, we can find links to 19th century colonial history in the depictions. Wels (2004: 90) argues that in the European search for authentic experiences and authenticity, the stage for the African other is replaced from Europe’s World Exhibitions, journals and scientific ethnographies onto Africa itself. The Europeans want to see the Africans and the African landscape in the same way as they were taught to see them, already from the colonial period. According to Salazar (2012: 871), imageries are often composed of historically inherited stereotypes that derive from the colonial myths and fantasies. Brito-Henriques (2014) argues that the images in Portuguese travel photo-magazine has references to colonization and imperial domination and there is a discursive construction of otherness that imperialism and its racist stereotypes has shaped into its form. Echtner and Prasad (2003) have examined the tourism promotion of developing countries. They point out how tourism promotion portrays historical traditions and local peoples in Namibia and Kenya as being part of the surrounding nature, similar to their portrayal during colonial times. Bruner (2002) has commented on the different forms of media representations of African indigenous and ethnic groups (Masai, Samburu, Zulu and Ovahimba groups) among Eastern and Southern African pastoralists and notes how commonly these representations hold gendered images and primitive depictions

with colonialist connotations. Akama (2004) also states in his study of safari tourism in Kenya that tourism business promotes the Masai to tourists through their imagined exotic and primitive nature. Mowforth and Munt (1998) argue that turning primitiveness into a touristic attraction refers to a social process which has been conceptualized as 'zoofication'. This process places the humans, like animals, in a zoo, leading to dehumanization and loss of human dignity.

4. TOURISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

During the past decade, tourism and tourists have become a characteristic feature of the contemporary southern African societies. There has been a remarkable growth in the volume and significance of tourism across southern Africa. For example, tourism arrivals and receipts from international tourism have increased fourfold during the period 1990 – 2005 (Saarinen et al. 2009: 3–4; Rogerson 2009: 31–32). The economic significance of tourism and the fact that tourism develops rapidly means that new attractions and facilities are constantly evolving into new areas. Places, regions and resources are planned and transformed in order to attract an increasing number of tourists, and with the additional aim to attract investors. According to Saarinen et al. (2009: 3–4), even entire national economies in the region can be highly dependent on the needs of modern tourists and the tourist trade. For example, the South African tourism industry is the most important sector of the economy, leaving behind even the mining industry. In Namibia, the tourism industry reaches the third place in the economic rankings, but is the fastest growing industry considering its contribution towards the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (Saarinen et al. 2009; TSA 2013).

According to Rogerson (2009: 28, 34), the growth of regional tourism within southern Africa is an important new phenomenon. Tourism in the southern African region is considered to have considerable potential to promote economic growth and poverty reduction. Tourism is no longer in a marginal position during economic development discussions or in national development planning. On the contrary, nations like Namibia are having high expectations towards tourism and its positive effect on their society: in the National Development Plan tourism has been identified as a strategic sector which promises growth and job creation (NTES 2013). However, there are also constraints for tourism in southern Africa. The region has a poor image in the eyes of western tourists: for example, poverty, HIV/AIDS and political conflicts can negatively affect the numbers of international tourists. Travel costs are also quite high and there are limitations in air access. The distribution of local benefits from the tourism industry is challenging and limitations can restrict strategic tourism (Rogerson 2009: 35–37).

As stated above, Namibia perceives development through tourism in a positive way. The government acknowledges tourism as a key catalyst for growth and nation building. Tourism increases the value and importance of sector linkages and generates foreign exchange earnings. It also enhances employment, rural development, poverty reduction and empowerment of the local communities. Thus, the tourism industry can promote economic, social development and environmental protection in Namibia (NTES 2013: 4).

Namibia is concentrating on safari tourism and wildlife is the most significant attractor for holiday tourists. According to Namibia Tourist Exit Survey Report (NTES 2013), scenery and culture are also big attractors. These preferences are also visible in activities in which the tourists can engage with during their travel. Main activities of holiday tourists are game viewing on the safaris, nature/landscape touring and hiking/trekking (NTES 2013). During 2011, about 1.027.229 tourists visited Namibia. Most holiday tourists came from South Africa, Germany and Angola whereas, the biggest groups of overseas tourists were from Germany, Britain and United States of America (MET 2011). Windhoek, the capital, Swakopmund and Etosha National Park are the most popular places to visit in Namibia (NTES 2013).

In Namibia, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is responsible for tourism affairs. The Government also has an agency, the Namibia Tourism Board (NTB), which promotes Namibia for visitors. The Namibia Tourism Board was established in 2001 to promote the tourism industry internationally and locally. On their webpage they define their role in tourism as follows (NTB 2014): *“The Namibia Tourism Board is the Namibian Government agency responsible for bringing together both the private and public sector in implementing the national policy on tourism.”* The role of Namibia Tourism Board is interesting. As a government agency, the Namibia Tourism Board represent “an official voice” of the Namibian state in tourism related issues.

5. METHOD AND DATA

5.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This paper is based on the ideas of a critical discourse analysis. Despite some quantitative elements, which are made to clarify the vast data and to demonstrate category forming of the dataset, the study focuses on the qualitative research and analysis of the data. The aim is to focus on the practices and ways which the Namibian tourism marketing use to depict the Ovahimba, their culture and encounters with tourists.

Tourism destination images can be seen as one form of text that represent the world around us. According to Rose (2001: 136–137), *visuality* can also be thought of as a discourse. A specific *visuality* can make, on the one hand certain things recognizable in particular ways and, on the other hand, certain things

invisible. According to Hall (1992: 257), all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual. He also argues that representations are only possible because enunciation is always produced within certain codes. These codes have a history and a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. According to Sather-Wagstaff (2012: 173), all discourses are intertextual and interpretive. Discussion about one issue is always embedded in the contexts of what has been said before. Therefore, contexts and also interpretations relate to former statements and perceptions. According to Jenkins (2003), pictures and text can be considered as cultural products. These cultural products reflect certain meanings and are at the same time constructed by society and ideologies in the same way as they construct themselves, the society and ideologies, through multiplication and repetition. Gilman (1992: 171) argues that while individuals are shown within a work of art, the ideologically charged iconographic nature of the representation always dominates.

5.2 RESEARCH MATERIAL

In a globally circulating stream of pictures, tourism advertisement constitutes one interesting sector of image and picture production. The Namibia Tourism Board offers a vast picture database, the “media gallery”, with almost 4000 pictures (3959 in December 2014). Pictures in the media gallery present mainly Namibia and its nature, wildlife and different activities which the tourist can pursue during a trip. Pictures are relatively recent and there are no historical pictures included in the media gallery. Although pictures are not concentrated on local people, there are some pictures of the Namibian ethnic groups. According to the website of the Namibia Tourism Board (2016), there are at least 11 major ethnic groups living in Namibia at the moment. From all of these ethnic groups, the Ovahimba are the most popular in their appearances in the pictures of the media gallery. There are around 300 pictures of the Ovahimba in the gallery (see figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1. A representative photo of an Ovahimba village. Photographer: Tanja Vallo.

In comparison to the pictures of the indigenous San people, there are only 14 pictures presenting the San and their culture. It is not meaningful to count an exact share of the Ovahimba pictures because many of their pictures appeared in the gallery several times (pictures of the San and other ethnic groups were presented only once). Hence, the share of the Ovahimba pictures in the media gallery is even more than the amount of 289 specimens. In this study, the Ovahimba pictures that appear in the media gallery several times, are counted only once.



Figure 2. *A representative photo of Ovahimba children.* Photographer: Tanja Vallo.

5.3 ANALYSIS

In the data analysis, the pictures of the Ovahimba, their culture and encounters with the tourists are first identified from a vast photoset in the media gallery. The representations are then further analyzed in their specific cultural and social context. The attention is on the content of the photograph and on the ways in which different contents appear in the data set. Each picture has been analyzed and the focus has been given towards objects, postures, activities and other visual elements in the picture. To gain a deeper understanding of the content, the pictures are also reflected against previous studies and historical backgrounds. In a vast amount of pictures, two themes are consistent throughout the data set. There are pictures of the Ovahimba and their traditional activities, which here are called as a category of “anthropological documentation” and there is also a set of pictures depicting interaction between tourists and the Ovahimba, which here is called as a category of “participation of host and guest”. To demonstrate this theme setting that stems from the data, pictures are also counted and named by their main content (see Table 1).

Nearly 300 pictures compose a narrative structure in the gallery. The pictures take the reader/watcher on a journey to meet an ethnic group in the African landscape. They show a tourist group in an Ovahimba village and their

encounters with the locals. The journey starts from the first glimpse of the village and ends with personal leave-takings that can be identified as the western customary act of handshaking. Between the arrival and the departure of a tourist group, pictures show different encounters and different activities between the tourist and the Ovahimba. Among the pictures of the guest-host encounters, the pictures also show traditional customs and activities done by the Ovahimba. In these pictures, the Ovahimba are, for example, dancing and coloring themselves with ochre. This visual ethnic tour offers an interesting data set for a closer scrutiny.

6. ENCOUNTER OF HOST AND GUEST

In the data set of 289 pictures, division into two categories, according to the contents of the pictures, is apparent. The pictures show tourist group encounters with the Ovahimba, but also the Ovahimba are depicted without the tourists, doing their traditional activities. These pictures form the category of “anthropological documentation”. This category also holds the pictures of the cultural handicraft. Second category, “participation of host and guest”, pictures show the tourists and their interactions with the Ovahimba. There are a few pictures in the data set where only the tourist/s appear in the Ovahimba village. In these pictures, tourists are mainly watching or photographing the Ovahimba to pursuit their traditional activities (even though they are not showed in the picture). The pictures that show only tourists, are also considered to be part of the “participation of host and guest”.

6.1 ANTHROPOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

Category of “anthropological documentation” concentrates on the depictions of the Ovahimba. There are 158 pictures, where only the Ovahimba are present. In this category, about one fifth of the pictures depict the Ovahimba men, when most of the pictures concentrate on Ovahimba women and children. In the pictures of this category, the Ovahimba are usually doing some kind of activities. They show how the Ovahimba dance in a semicircle in their village, always one of them in the middle showing traditional moves. The pictures also show, how an Ovahimba woman sits on the ground and is spreading reddish ochre onto her skin. What is particularly interesting, is that in these pictures the Ovahimba activities are shown in careful details. Pictures show dance moves step by step and ochre spreading inch by inch. These kind of detailed presentations of traditional activities give an impression of documentation. Documentary aspects of photography can be understood as the representation of some important fact, or as means of recording an event, place, person or an object in ways which have ‘objective’ quality (Hamilton 1997: 81). In this

category, the photographer behind the camera, seems to highlight the most important traditional customs by documenting them carefully. Here, the photographer is an observer who documents the culture in an anthropological way. This style of photographing the ethnic group can be detected all the way to European voyages of explorations and colonial times. According to Rizzo (2005: 683), the depictions of the Ovahimba have roots in anthropology and this anthropological approach has also been defining the growing photographic popularity of Ovahimba culture. Most of the pictures in this category depict the Ovahimba with their traditional activities, but about one third of the Ovahimba pictures depict the Ovahimba also in a passive way. This means that the pictures of Ovahimba are portraits, framed from the waist upwards, or the pictures show how the Ovahimba are standing or sitting on the ground passively. In addition to the Ovahimba people in the pictures, the detailed documentation style also covers pictures of the cultural artefacts, cultural ornaments and decorations in Ovahimba's hair and clothing (see Table 1).

6.2 PARTICIPATION OF HOST AND GUEST

Category of "participation of host and guest" includes pictures of the Ovahimba together with the tourist group. Most of the pictures show how the tourists and the Ovahimba are interacting in the village. There are 116 photos of tourists and the Ovahimba together and six pictures depict only the tourists. In the pictures of this category, the camera is always present. Pictures show how tourists are standing, on their knees or sitting on the ground and they are zooming and taking pictures and snapshots of the Ovahimba with their cameras or mobile phones. In these pictures, the tourist encounters with the Ovahimba appear to happen partly through a lens of a camera or a mobile phone. When there is no camera objective between the encountering parts, the camera is hanging around a tourist's neck. The pictures show how the tourists are photographing also the children in the village and in some pictures the children are purposefully posing for the tourists and their cameras, for example on a branch of a tree. In addition to taking pictures of the children, the tourists hold and hug the Ovahimba children as well. In over 40 percent of the pictures in which tourists and the Ovahimba are depicted together, tourists are with Ovahimba children. Pictures also depict how the tourists and the Ovahimba shake and clap hands with each other, and they show how tourists are attending the traditional dance with the Ovahimba. In most of the pictures the tourists and the Ovahimba are interacting actively with each other, but there are a few portrait pictures where a tourist is posing with the locals. There are also seven pictures where are only tourists. In these pictures tourists are taking pictures, showing purchased handicrafts to each other, watch the Ovahimba activities in the village or are posing for the camera with some ochre colour on their skin or clothes.

Table 1. *Number of photographs related to Ovahimba and their culture in Namibia Tourism Board –site.*

Ovahimba	158
Tourists	7
Tourists and Ovahimba	116
The Ovahimba jewelry, handicrafts, and other objects	8
Altogether	289
Pictures in NTB	3959

7. DISCUSSION

The two categories formed from the data set, give interesting possibilities for a deeper discussion. In the first category, “anthropological documentation” the pictures depict the ethnic group of the Ovahimba without capturing encounters with the tourists. Here, the role of the photographer is interesting. Pictures that are taken in a documentary style, places the photographer as an objective observer in relation to the photographed object, the Ovahimba. The pictures do not show any interaction with tourists and they concentrate only on detailed cultural features, but it can be argued that the encounter forms through a camera lens. At some points, for example, in ochre spreading where female body parts are zoomed carefully, the encounter between the photographer and the object seems intimate. This intimacy is also transmitted to the reader/watcher through the photographs. In many pictures the attention is directed towards the female body. In addition to the pictures of the ochre spreading, the same focus on the female body is present in the pictures which visualize the traditional dancing. Here, the gaze is less directed towards the dance movements, but instead it catches the bare breasts (contrary to western tradition of covering the female chest area) and erotic aspects of the dance. In the category of “anthropological documentation”, several portrayal style pictures present the Ovahimba women in a passive way. Passivity in the pictures of the Ovahimba women is also noted as one characteristic for ethnographic photography, for example, in the 1930s and 1940s (Rizzo 2005: 693). The tightly framed portrayal pictures, the close-up shots, of the Ovahimba women create an image of an exotic African beauty. Following these observations, it can be argued that the visual presentation of the Ovahimba women through images include a variety of processes of “othering”: exoticization, eroticizing and objectification.

There are only a few photographs in the category of “anthropological documentation” that display handiwork and handicraft. They capture variety of

items sold by the Ovahimba in the village. Instead of cultural items, the cultural features are enhanced in other ways in the pictures. The images of traditional Ovahimba activities (ochre spreading and dancing) and, also the presence of the Ovahimba themselves construct and mark the cultural features in the pictures. According to Winter (2007: 108), tourism attractions can act as signs that have the ability to represent social values. In that light, the Ovahimba people in the pictures can be considered as cultural symbols and signs which constitute an interesting attraction for the tourist. Images of these signs, the mobile phone snapshots of the Ovahimba and pictures of digital SLR cameras, can easily be transferred to social media and home galleries and they can act as a proof of a “collected” and “encountered” touristic sign.

In the second category, “participation of host and guest”, images of the children are visibly present. In these pictures tourists are photographing children or interacting with them in affectionate manners (hugging and holding them close). The usual photograph show dusty, almost naked children with running noses in the arms of white female tourists. Some images show children who are posing for the tourists in order for them to take pictures. The images of the Ovahimba children in the media gallery create a perception of stereotypical African poor children. The practice of presenting children in tourism advertisements and children being as an integral part of a tourism business, raises many ethical issues concerning, for example schooling (Gössling 2001; Saarinen 2011) and money earning in an early age (Huberman 2005; Gössling et al. 2004). According to Saarinen (2011), there is a pressure of not sending the Ovahimba girls to school because young Ovahimba women are regarded as a main tourist attraction with their traditional “semi dressed” clothing. Schooling could challenge the ideas of traditional clothing and customs which could affect the communal income from tourism. Correspondingly, being a child often affect emotions of tourists and can increase monetary income from tourism related activities (Huberman 2005; Gössling et al. 2004).

Charity campaigns that are advertised in various media by development organizations, apply a representation of a child similar to the images of the Ovahimba children presented in this study. According to Manzo (2008: 635–636), the iconography of childhood can act as a signifier, a brand logo, for non-governmental organizations and their identity. As a metaphor, she argues, the iconography of childhood reproduces colonial perceptions of uneven power issues between global North and South. This also has paternalistic connotations which are characteristic to colonial mentality (Mostafanezhad 2014: 116). The images and representations of the Ovahimba and Ovahimba children can thus be linked to a broader discussion of regarding the role of poverty in tourism business. According to Crossley (2012), in the context of volunteer tourism, economically disadvantaged (local) people can become markers of authentic otherness that can be celebrated, objectified and consumed through practices of the tourist gaze. She further states that in tourism processes, poverty and encounters with poverty have become indicators of authenticity, and poverty can

act as a sight for tourist consumption. The Ovahimba and Ovahimba children can be understood to constitute a cultural symbol, a touristic sign that is possible for tourists to collect with their cameras. In a similar vein, as Crossley (2012) discusses, the Ovahimba and Ovahimba children can also stand for “authentic (poor) Africa” and in the encounters with tourists the Ovahimba and their children authenticate and mark “a real” touristic experience. The pictures where tourists are dancing with the hosts and hugging children in an Ovahimba village, also provides an image of a happy and importantly, a safe encounter, where locals are friendly and tourists are always welcome. According to Crossley (2012: 249), these kind of images of poor communities as contended and happy neutralizes their disturbing potential to tourists.

The images presented in the media gallery of Namibia Tourism Board emphasize the issues that are pivotal and worthy of photographing for tourists. The images in the website set a type of pre-directed encounters between hosts and guests and they can build certain expectations for the tourists and their potential travel to Namibia and an Ovahimba village. As stated before (see Salazar 2012; Saarinen and Manwa 2008), often the previous encounters with the host and guest guide the future encounters between them. These conceptions derive, for example, from the images used in different media. In this study, the pre-direction and guidance of an encounter between tourists and the Ovahimba appears in the category of “anthropological documentation” which familiarizes the particular ways tourists can photograph the Ovahimba. Here, the pictures are taken in a documentary style and the photographer seems to document important cultural features (e.g. dancing and ochre spreading) of the Ovahimba in a careful manner. In a similar vein, the category of “participation of host and guest” shows the ways in which a tourist can interact with the ethnic group of the Ovahimba. Here, shaking hands, purchasing souvenirs, dancing, spreading ochre and hugging children are the main activities to pursue.

On the contrary to previous studies (see e.g. Saarinen & Niskala 2009; Bollig and Heinemann 2002; Dann 1996), the analyzed images depict an interactive encounter with the host and guests. Hosts, in this case the Ovahimba, operate in an active way in both of the categories, “anthropological documentation” and “participation of the host and guest”. This can anticipate a new turn in touristic representations of ethnic/indigenous groups and maybe in the representations of the locals in general. Tourism advertisement that emphasize encounters between locals and tourists, could lead to the creation of a new imagery where hosts take an increasingly active part in relation to guests. Perhaps this can increasingly lead to, as Salazar (2012: 878) states, in genuine intercultural exchanges between the visitors and the locals. These intercultural exchanges can foster the creation of novel images and discourses that contest and replace previous often more inappropriate imaginaries.

It is particularly interesting that the Namibian governmental agency, the “official voice of the country”, relies in its tourism marketing of the cultural image of Namibia mostly on the pictures of the Ovahimba. Thus, Namibia

promotes its cultural aspects with a group that constitutes around one percent of the Namibian population. Only a small part of the pictures in the webpage of the Namibia Tourism Board, show different cultures and ethnicities currently present in Namibia. According to Hall (1994: 51), when selecting between different tourism policies, decision-makers actually choose between different set of values. These choices are usually considered as ideological and being part of, for example, state politics. These policies may affect, for example different cultural groups in different and unpredictable ways. In the light of the media gallery of the Namibia Tourism Board, the representation of Namibia as a tourism destination is a construction of thousands of pictures stored in media gallery. The image of the nation (hood) (see Palmer 1999; Winter 2007) is composed of pictures of wildlife and natural environments in which tourists can pursue different activities. The Ovahimba in the pictures, construct cultural image of the nation which constitute an interesting backdrop for cultural explorations of tourists. When considering the emphasized use of the Ovahimba pictures and particularly pictures of the Ovahimba children in cultural promotion, this creates an idea of a stereotypical Western image of Africa as primitive and backward. This offers a link into a broader discussion of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1993), which also has been noted in some tourism studies (see e.g. Olsen 2008). In the case of the Namibian tourism marketing and perhaps the Ovahimba themselves, they can use means which resembles features of strategic essentialism, here meaning the over-simplified image and representations of the nation and its cultural dimensions. These over-simplified representations can assist in achieving, for example, larger profits in terms of tourism receipts and other benefits.

Although there is a sign of a change in the nature of representations of the Ovahimba in terms of activity in the pictures, it can be asked whether this presented activity (ochre spreading, dancing, hand shaking with tourists etc.) fosters sustainable use of the Ovahimba culture in tourism business, creates greater intercultural relationships or enhances equality between host and guest in tourism structures, or is it just a another presentation of extended power relations with the stereotypical ways of exoticising and objectifying “Otherness”? As this study indicates, there are still many political and ideological issues to overcome to make tourism promotion socially and ethically sustainable in Namibia and elsewhere. It is important to take promotion materials into a careful consideration and recognize the ways in which imageries become constructed.

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