The Power, Privilege and Product of Representing the Others

A postcolonial rhetorical critique of Western representations of Global South menstruators

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Abstract

An essential strategy for development organisations to get attention and funding is to present specific narratives and portrayals of their targets of interventions. In this thesis I investigate a fairly new branch of the development industry, called Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), which is largely a Western focus on menstrual related issued in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South. These MHM organisations are worth scrutinising because they have only existed since the early 2000s, which mean they have had the chance to avoid the stereotypical and degrading representations that the older development industry has been criticised for. In addition, MHM organisations focus on a target group that historically has been the degraded and inferior part in all the constructed categories of race, class, gender and sexuality, which should require an extra high responsibility to avoid the reproduction of harmful representations.

Through an in-depth, postcolonial rhetorical critique of Western MHM actors' representations of Global South menstruators, I examine and discuss the roles and representations of the Western Self and the Global South Others and how messages contribute to or challenge oppression and unequal power relations. With the use of rhetorical tools for persuasion, and by composing purposeful narratives of Global South menstruators, MHM organisations rationalise interventions and justify their approach and solutions. Framing is power, and it is the ones doing the framing, in this case Western actors, who has the power. To frame menstruation as a crisis, and products as the main solution, affect the focus area of interventions and create expectations of menstrual management, or etiquette, which potentially feeds to menstrual stigma. Similarly, the act of representing is power. To represent Global South menstruators as confined and weak, while bursting with economic potential, facilitates for the "white saviour" to rescue the victimised menstruator and unleash her potential. Through a deep dig into rhetorical artefacts of representative MHM organisations, and a wide search in the surrounding landscape, I disclose and reflect upon representations, narratives and portrayals that justify and rationalise Western interventions in the Global South.

Keywords: Representation, Rhetoric, Global North, Global South, Postcolonialism, Development, Coloniality of power, Menstrual Hygiene Management, Menstruator

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Index

Introduction

"Representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of the mind." – bell hooks (1995, p. 3)

Whether we like it or not, perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world are shaped by the representations and depictions we are served with. Before speaking of others, let me humbly expose my fallible self. Some years back, a Norwegian newspaper presented me with a problem of Ugandan menstruators that I had never thought of before, although I used to spend several months each year in the country, living exclusively with Ugandans. Although completely new to the thematic, deeply embedded perceptions of myself as privileged, inventive and resourceful—compared to my Ugandan neighbours—made me believe that I, a white girl in her mid-twenties, could do something to solve this problem that not Ugandans themselves, but Western media, had presented me with.

Apparently, I was not alone…

From the early 2000s, the practices, facilities, and implications around menstruation, also called Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), has been increasingly recognised as a global public health issue. A growing number of academics, donors, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), UN agencies, grassroots women's organisations, multinational feminine hygiene companies, and social entrepreneurs are mobilising to bring attention and resources to address menstrual-related challenges in low- and middle-income countries (Sommer et al., 2015). Although finding its way into development action plans in all parts of the world, MHM interventions is largely a Western focus on women and girls in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South. Because of a persistent power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South, frequently addressed in this thesis as *coloniality of power*, there is an embedded possibility that Western development organisations (consciously or not) contribute to reinforcing Western hegemony in the South. It is therefore, in my opinion, both necessary and appropriate to examine philanthropic organisations with a critical eye. In this thesis I will do this through

a critical examination of the rhetoric of a Western MHM organisation targeting Global South menstruators[1].

Representations[2], the ways that people portray and present themselves or others, is an important part of development aid (Hesford, 2011). Without the descriptions of distant Others, of their situations, and of how foreign assistance can transform these people's lives, there would be little to respond to. Representations are thus a powerful rhetorical toolkit that can serve to mobilise, direct, and justify action (Nair, 2013). When examining the power-aspects within representations of distant Others, especially in a North-South context, categories like race, gender, class and sexuality—constructions that enables oppression—are labels one should pay special attention to (Davis, 2019; Lugones, 2007, 2010). The hierarchy within these categories has, for centuries, classified humans as either superior or inferior, rational or irrational, civilised or primitive, modern or traditional etc. (Baaz, 2005; Lugones, 2007). In the growing attention towards Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in the Global South, the targets of interventions are largely those who historically have been the degraded part within all of these categories. They are coloured, female, poor and perceived as sexually accessible[3]. It is thus of great importance to be aware of the potential roles such classifications, once constructed to oppress (Lugones, 2007), potentially still play in North-South relationships.

Although it is important to examine what representations are doing to people, one should not forget to pay attention to what people are doing with representations (Schiappa, 2008). In order to get attention and donations, development organisations have to report back from the field and present clear and pressing issues, preferably accompanied with strategies defining clear and measurable solutions (Bobel, 2019). This brings up major questions of this research: How is menstruation in the Global South presented as an issue by Western actors, and more importantly, how are the menstruators in question represented to a Western audience? These are important questions to ask because of the

[1] I use the gender-neutral word *menstruator* instead of girls and women, since not all girls and women menstruate, and not all who menstruate define as girls or women.

[2] The word representation has several meanings (*Oxford Dictionary - Represent*, n.d.). It can mean to be mentioned, to be visible, to be counted in— and it can mean the act of speaking on behalf of someone, as a representative of a group that one identifies with, or as a spectator of distant others that one does not identify with. It is the latter meaning I refer to in this thesis.

[3] Many development organisations frame Global South menstruators as at high risk of becoming child brides and teen mothers (Koffman & Gill, 2013). Such representations will be discussed in this thesis.

persistent postcolonial power inequality between the Global North and the Global South. In this research I will explore the ways in which Western actors cope with past, and largely condemned, colonial thinking in their perceptions and representations of the former colonised, or Global South "Other"[4]. I am especially interested in how this is handled by a group that I can relate to personally; white, Western, privileged individuals, organisations, and movements who wish to fight against inequality in the world—idealists whose privileged positions are largely built upon, and made possible because of, the systemic global inequality they have organised themselves to combat.

One way to fight global power inequality is to look for what has been taken for granted, acknowledge that oneself might be part of the problem, and constantly aim for what Marshall Rosenberg, calls becoming "progressively less stupid" (*Marshall B. Rosenberg Quote*, n.d.). Building on the awareness of the oppression and power inequality of the colonial era, my aim with this thesis is to recognise what is happening in the fields of representation today, and to understand the different roles we all play in current systemic oppression and power inequality. Through increased awareness and insight, individuals, organisations, and societies can be better equipped to take responsibility for, and improve (whatever that entails), our ways of seeing and understanding the world and other human beings.

My hope is that findings and reflections from this research can have relevance for the development sector as a whole. However, I will aim my in-depth focus at the fairly new development branch called Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and investigate how MHM organisations navigate within and around the legacy after colonialism and a persisting power inequality. To do this within the scope of a master thesis, I have decided to investigate the rhetoric of MHM organisations and analyse how the actors represent themselves and the targeted Global South menstruators.

In this context, representations are inextricably linked to an organisation's agenda. I expect that motives and interests of an organisation will affect their attitudes towards, and thereby their representations of, distant Others. In the same way, representations of these Others (that be the consumption of old representations, or the creation of new ones) can affect, and be used to justify, the means, strategies and approaches an actor choose to go

[4] I elaborate on the concept *Other* on page 23.

by. My choice to examine *representations* over *motives* does not mean that the latter is less important. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that political and economic motives can colour both how existing representations are interpreted, and how one chose to shape current and future representations. However, I believe representations are easier to identify (they are found in spoken words, on paper, on tape and in images), while motives have the capacity to hide behind appealing action plans. Based on this, I have decided to examine representations, while constantly paying attention to potential motives. Through discussing the implications of representations on those represented, new ideas and questions on motives may, as a result, rise to the surface.

In rhetoric, a text, speech, picture, video, or other pieces of communication are called *artefacts*. In this thesis I will conduct an in-depth examination of only a few relevant artefacts. The main artefact is a videotaped TEDx talk conducted by the founder of the North American MHM organisation Days for Girls, which I will compliment with a text and a video speech by the founder of the Ugandan MHM organisation, Caring Hearts Uganda. As my title indicates, my aim is to find out how Western MHM organisations represent Global South menstruators. I am, nevertheless, including a Global South organisation in my research to better understand how colonial constructs like race, class, gender, and sexuality are applied in power relations within a Global South country. This may give valuable insights on to what extent Western representations has been adopted or resisted in the South.

By going in-depth into the rhetoric of what I judge as representative organisations, I hope to reveal more of the understanding, perceptions, and experience of the temporally, geographically and epistemologically positioned individual actor. This approach may, through insight in the perspective of the rhetor, facilitate for personal reflection and self-examination. An aim for this thesis is to remind myself and the reader to pay attention to the power-systems we all are positioned within, and to practice our critical sense towards how the world and its people are represented to us, and how we take part in these representations ourselves.

Research on representations within the development sector is not new, but the MHM movement and -discourse is only a few decades old (from the 2000s), and I find it relevant and necessary to examine this specific field more closely. Since the targets of MHM

interventions belong to social categories that historically has been degraded within most, if not all, social constructions, I find it especially important to pay attention to representations within this field. Since the MHM movement emerged half a century after the traditional development industry came to existence (Rist, 2008), one may assume that their spokespersons will avoid much of the degrading rhetoric that traditional development discourse has been criticised for. New times does, however, come with new challenges and standards, and I believe there will be plenty of data to submerge in also here.

To best achieve the goals of this thesis, my approach will be interdiciplinary, which means that I will combine theory, methods and insights from several academic disciplins. My addition to the larger conversation will be the maybe not-so-common combination of an interdisciplinary approach together with an in-depth analaysis. I will also compare rhetorical artefacts by MHM actors from both the Global North and the Global South, an approach that I have not found conducted so far. If my contribution with this thesis could move the field just an inch, contributing to some new ideas, questions or insights, I will be contented. I have to clarify, however, that the discourse I will discuss in this thesis is constantly moving and evolving, and that what is written today may not describe the situation of tomorrow. Nevertheless, as a snapshot in time my findings can still bring valuable insights—and ideally facilitate for a push in the right direction.

How my journey started

On Women's Day, March 8th 2016, my mother sent me a link to an online article from the Norwegian newspaper, Dagbladet (Sødal, 2016), about menstruation and school attendance in Uganda. I realised that I had not thought about menstruation as a potential issue before and got inspired to engage myself in the topic through the Uganda-based organisation that I ran together with my Ugandan partner at that time. Long story short, as the gullible ideologist I was (is), I developed a menstrual product that was going to solve the challenges of cost, accessibility, and environment in Uganda. When I, however, after some time started to question the real effect of such a technical fix, I took a break from this project with an aim to get a deeper understanding of this new-discovered field of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in low- and middle-income countries.

My initial plan for this master's thesis was to focus on Ugandans own experiences, with the aim of listening to the people in question and find out how their experiences and

practices has changed over the generations through global (Western capitalist) influence. Then Covid-19 disrupted my travel plans and I decided to go back to the start, to what led me into this whole journey in the first place. What was it with the news article that caught my attention back in 2016? What made me invest this much time and effort into this specific cause? The March 8th article's rhetoric had worked its purpose in engaging me. But what is behind such rhetoric? Whose perspective is presented, who provides the solution and who possesses the power to act towards this alleged menstrual crisis (if there ever was one)?

Asking the right questions

If assuming that everything in history is connected, building on each other, or responding to each other through continuation or counter-reactions, we have to assume that thoughts from past colonialism and modernity[5] may have an impact on development initiatives of today. An underlying force behind this thesis is my fear that misrepresentations, once constructed to oppress and control, will continue to be passed on and contribute to maintain oppression and inequality, if not made aware of and accounted for. Santiago Castro-Gómez and Desirée A. Martín (2002), claim that "postcolonial theories have shown that any inventory of modernity which does not take into account the impact of the colonial experience on the formation of properly modern power relations is not only incomplete, but also ideological.*"* (p. 276). This thesis will be concerned with how, and to what extent, the impact of the colonial experience is considered by MHM organisations, in their work to "empower" and "modernise" Global South menstruators. To do this, I need to ask the right questions. Although my interest is general and concerned about the development sector as a whole, my main research question is more specific. Rather than a contradiction this is a conscious and strategic choice, spun from the idea that one can extract knowledge about the general from examining the particular (Hart et al., 2018). My research question reads as follows:

How do MHM actors from the Global North represent low-income menstruators from the Global South to a Western audience?

[5] I elaborate on modernity on page 13.

Although such representations are not exclusively consumed by a Western audience, I choose to phrase my research question like this because development actors largely search attention and donations from Western countries, and tailor their message accordingly. Through this research question I want to find out the ways in which representations and roles of the Western Self differ from the representations and roles of the Global South Other, how messages contribute to or challenge oppression, and which ways messages contradict or reinforce the status quo of unequal power relations. I am, all in all, concerned about what people are doing with representations, and what representations are doing to people (Schiappa, 2008).

Aims and objectives

If we are not aware of what is going on around us, we will not be equipped to understand it, or to do anything about it. With this research I aim to find out how Western organisations cope with the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in their representation of people from former colonies. I aim to identify and discuss implicit and explicit attempts of challenging or reinforcing oppression and unequal power relations, with a special attention to the use of representations that serve to challenge or reinforce misconceptions and stereotypes. Ultimately what I aim for is to find out whether, and in which ways, the status quo of unequal power relations is maintained in current messages of philanthropic Western MHM- and development actors.

To achieve this, I will study rhetorical artefacts in-depth, to discover what more the communication pieces tell us than their immediate message. I will examine speeches of founders of representative MHM organisations in North America and Uganda, and their representation of Global South menstruators. Since my aim is to examine Western representations, I will emphasise on the US artefact, and include other Western development organisations to generalise on my findings. The Ugandan artefact will be useful to compare and control the US artefact with, and to keep my discussion balanced and informed.

To guide my research, I will keep an eye on three identified forms of coloniality of power—knowledge, culture, and hierarchies—and discuss how these are maintained, reinforced or challenged throughout the artefacts. I will analyse what the messages says explicitly and implicitly and discuss what this can teach us about social trends. I will

measure my findings against existing theories that address oppression, like critical development theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory, and present my contributions to confirm, elaborate on, or challenge the existing scholarly conversation about this topic.

To reveal the foundation that I stand on, I will start by introducing some theories and concepts that I will navigate within, and then some historical background for context. From there I will briefly explain the methodology, before examining the chosen artefacts and discuss what the findings can tell us about the bigger picture. Lastly, I will conclude on how the findings may answer my research questions and reflect on some implications for possible ways forward.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

By positioning myself as interdiciplinary, I may not get as deep into spesific aspects of my findings as I could if I was dedicated to one single discipline. In return, I will have the privilege to look at the topic from many different diciplins and angles, which, I believe, will be a fruitful entrance into this multifaceted and complex topic. To answer my research questions, I will mainly include diciplines from the *humanities*, like history (Brumberg), literature (Said), rhetoric (Hart) and philosophy (Spivak), and from the *social sciences,* like human geography (Tvedt), political science (Medie), psycology (Fanon), and sociology (Quijano), among others. This will ensure an open discussion and facilitate for the creation of new questions together with a holistic search for answers. In this chapter I will explain some relevant theories and concepts that I will refer to, and actively use, to pursue the answers that I am looking for.

Rhetoric

Like poetry, rhetoric is an art. It creates a story out of nothing, and use words to bring to life feelings and actions (Hart et al., 2018). The story that rhetoric tells is always a story with purpose, it is never told for its own sake. The rhetor, which is the person presenting the communication piece—or rhetorical artefact—aims to guide the audience without appearing paternalistic. One way to do this, which we will get several examples of in the data material of this thesis, is to establish that there is something wrong with the world—problems that can be corrected by making the choices that the rhetor presents. As a definition, one can say that rhetoric is the "art of using symbols to help people narrow their choices among specified, or clearly implied, policy options." (Hart et al., 2018, p. 4).

According to the man known as the father of rhetoric, Aristotle, rhetoric is the ability to see, and take use of, the available means of persuasion (Litwin, 2007). He described three main forms of rhetoric: *ethos*, which base its appeal on the character and reputation of the speaker, *pathos*, which base its appeal on emotion, and *logos*, which base its appeal on logic and reason (Litwin, 2007). Common rhetorical modes are narration, description and argumentation (Rozakis, 2003), and a comprehensive examination of these modes will be a significant part of this research. Rhetorical theory is concerned with "composition,

forms, functions, means, venues, producers, audiences, effects, and criticism of discourse." (Allen, 2017, p. 1506). It addresses all aspects of the rhetorical situation—exigence, audience, and rhetor—as well as the larger contexts in which any given rhetorical act occur (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

One of the forces of rhetoric is its power to name things. Nothing in this world has a label before human beings, rhetors, give it a name (Hart et al., 2018). This can be used actively to highlight certain traits, or to affect what people should think of an object or a creature. Some people choose to anglicise their names to avoid discrimination, some women keep their original surname to avoid being seen as the property of their spouse, and some politicians choose to call refugees without legal residence *criminals*, to justify deportations. How one name something can have minor implications on people's attitudes towards the named subject/object, or it can have crucial consequences for how we approach life (lump of cells or unborn child), climate changes (natural or human made) and development (solidarity or neo-colonisation). Through rhetoric euphemism, harsh words like *torture* can be softened into words like *enhanced interrogation,* and the word *injustice* can become *fortunate or unfortunate*. To call someone adorable, humble, or weak gives a different image, and facilitates for a different approach, than calling someone fierce, strong, and inventive. In the examination of the rhetorical artefacts of this thesis, we will study how phenomena and people are named, or represented, and discuss the implications of this. As a rhetorical critic I will study how "namers" name things and how people respond to the names that they hear (Hart et al., 2018).

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory, which is the foundation that I am basing much of this research on, is the study of the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, with a focus on the human consequences of the exploitation and oppression of the former colonised. It is a critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of imperial powers and how this legacy affects the world today (Baaz, 2005).

A concept that overlaps with postcolonial theory is decolonial theory. Post-colonial and de-colonial theory emerged in different socio-historical contexts. They share, however, a common critique of the power that former colonisers had over the colonised, and they agree that there is still a long way to go in terms of rectifying the power imbalance created

during the colonial years. Where de-colonial theory[6] is a project of actively de-linking production of knowledge from a Eurocentric episteme, post-colonial theory[7] is a project of scholarly transformation within academia (Mignolo, 2007a).

Although containing the word *post-*, the term post-colonialism or post-coloniality does not refer to an achieved state beyond colonialism. As Stuart Hall (1996) argues: "what post-colonial certainly is not is one of those periodisations based on epochal "stages", when everything is reversed at the same moment." (p. 247). The shift from colonial to postcolonial does not entail a break where old relations disappear, and entirely new ones come to replace them. "In this scenario 'the colonial' is not dead, since it lives on in its 'after-effects'." (Hall, 1996, p. 248). As Simon Gikandi (1996) puts it, postcolonial theory is "one way of recognising how decolonized situations are marked by the trace of the imperial past they try to disavow." (p. 15). This speaks exactly to what this research project is all about. I explore the decolonised situation of Western interference in the Global South through development actors, to see if, and how, the approach, representations and relations are "marked by the trace of the imperial past they try to disavow." (Gikandi, 1996, p. 15).

As already mentioned, the end of the colonial era did not mean the end of Western hegemony and control. The former colonised continued, to a great extent, to be dominated by the former colonisers, but in new ways. From colonialism's direct occupational rule, the continued domination in the postcolonial era has been staged in the context of independent states, and organised through trade negotiations, aid conditionalities and debt management (Baaz, 2005). Achille Mbembe (2001) asks whether we have entered into a new period, "or do we find the same theatre, the same mimetic, acting, with different actors and spectators, but with the same convulsions and the same insult?" (p. 237).

[6] Decolonial theory emerged in Latin America, by Peruvian activist and political philosopher, José Carlos Mariátegui, in the 1920s, and grew with the liberation thoughts in the 1970s. Decolonial theory has a focus on untangling the production of knowledge from a Eurocentric episteme and is critical to the perceived universality of Western knowledge and the superiority of Western culture (Mignolo, 2007b).

[7] "Post-coloniality emerged from the extension of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan to the colonization of Palestine by Israel, and its Oriental underpinning (Edward Said) and to the post-colonial situation of India as an ex-colony of the British Empire (Ranajit Guha, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak)" (Mignolo, 2007b, p. 163).

Although global power relations in the postcolonial era have been shaped by, and must be understood in relation to, the colonial era, they are not the same (Hall, 1996). We may say that *post-,* signifies both *after* and *continuance* at the same time (Baaz, 2005). This duality is both a challenging and exciting place to use as a starting point for research. On one side it will be hard to conclude on whether a postcolonial phenomenon or approach (like development) is meant to break with past oppression and control, or if it simply is a way of retaining power. On the other side it is precisely because of a potential ambivalence and ambiguity in the contemporary Western approach towards the Global South that I find this topic not only intriguing, but also important to examine.

Regardless of its suitability for my research and its important contribution in academia, postcolonial theory does carry a risk of reproducing a form of Eurocentrism by exaggerating the role of the colonial as "the origin of history." (Abrahamsen, 2003; Baaz, 2005, p. 61). Critics argue that the European colonisation and imperialism is not unique in human history, referring to the Roman empire (27 BC-1453), the Ottoman empire (1200-1922), the Mongol empire (1206-1368) the Inca empire (1400-1533), and the Qing empire (1644-1912) (Tvedt, 2019). Anne McClintock (1995) warns about potential Eurocentric implications of the concept "postcolonial" in her book *Imperial Leather*:

> The prefix post-, moreover, reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Eurocentered epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-). In other words, the world's multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time. (McClintock, 1995, p. 11)

Despite some critical voices, I find the postcolonial, both as theory and concept, to be suitable to guide my research, since it, in this case, is exactly the remnants after the European colonisation and Western imperialism that I examine.

Modernisation theory

To illuminate the zeitgeist of the postcolonial era, I will here give a brief introduction to modernisation theory, which is the foundation that development has built its thinking on. Modernisation theory explains the transition from so-called *pre-modern* or *traditional* societies into so-called *modern* societies (Gavrov & Klyukanov, 2015). The theory assumes that with assistance, traditional countries can develop and reach the same stages as more developed counties. The concept of modernisation includes both the internal development of Western Europe and North America, and the process where other countries tries to catch up with these (Gavrov & Klyukanov, 2015). Modernisation theory aims to identify social factors that contribute to progress and development of societies, and it suggests that so-called *traditional* societies will develop when adopting *modern* practices, which then will make them both wealthier and more powerful (Kumar, 2020). According to the theory, traditional religious beliefs and cultural traits become less important in a society as modernisation takes over (Kumar, 2020).

While modernity (the centuries of Enlightenment) and post-modernity (from the mid-20th century) describe conditions of social existence, modernisation refers to the process of transitioning into an increasingly modern society (Shilliam, 2010). Modernisation theory in its academic form originated from Max Weber's ideas on the transitions of irrational, traditional societies into rational, modern societies, and was brought forward by Talcott Parsons in the 1930s (Knöbl, 2003). From 1945-1960, modernisation theory was much applied within social sciences (Knöbl, 2003), and a key feature was the idea that we all live in a single, now globalised, world with science as the only reliable truth and bringer of progress (A. Kothari et al., 2019)[8]. Its popularity coincides with US President Truman's second term Inaugural speech from 1949, which focused on how so-called *underdeveloped* regions in the world could prosper with American technology and knowledge (Knöbl, 2003).

Problems with dichotomies such as uncivilised versus civilised, backward versus advanced, and underdeveloped versus developed, caused modernisation theory to lose its popularity in the 1960s (Knöbl, 2003). Especially the tradition/modernity binary was

[8] In cases where there are several scholars with the same last name, and it is not clearly stated in the text who I refer to, I have included an initial in the reference to differentiate. In this thesis, last names that are shared by several authors are Kothari, Sachs, Moeller, Taylor and Bhabha, who all deserve to be identifiable.

problematised, since it became clear that tradition is not the opposite of modernity. There are no homogenous, stable traditional culture, and modernity means different things in different contexts. However, in the 1980s, due to the rise of Asian states and the fall of the Soviet Union—both events serving to confirm the ideas that there is only one proper route to development—modernisation theory again started to get increased interest (Knöbl, 2003).

Wolfgang Knöbl (2003) argues that although modernisation theory still exists in the social sciences, one should be aware that it is not a "stable, empirically grounded theory, no theory at least with strong explanatory claims. All there is is some sort of modernisation discourse, some vague ideas about possible developmental paths of contemporary societies." (p. 10). The Menstrual Hygiene Management movement that I examine in this research, came into existence within the postmodern era, and implements—as will be revealed through this thesis—interventions that indicate thinking that can, in several of its features, be linked to theories of modernisation. It is especially the goal of making a transition to conventional products in the Global South that indicates such thinking. Before we go deeper into this thematic, we will look at a growing theory criticising both development and the modernisation theory of which it springs out from.

Critical development theory

As briefly touched upon, there are reasons to think critically about development, despite its noble intentions. It has been argued that development, after the Second World War, was a geopolitical project to rescue the liberated colonial countries from the ideology of communism, and to steer them into a capitalist path instead (W. Sachs, 2009). In this context, development can be perceived as a form of imperialism (Munck et al., 1999), and thus a natural subject for critical scrutiny. And there is no shortage of critical voices.

According to Gustavo Esteva (1987, p. 138) "development stinks." Frederique Apffel-Marglin (1996, p. 2) considers it a "colonization of the mind", while Wolfgang Sachs (2009, p. 1) simply calls it "outdated". Several critics engage in the deconstruction of development, revealing the Eurocentrism of its discourses and practices. These critics view development as a Western idea that is not adjusted to, but imposed upon, so-called "developing countries". Rajni Kothari (1988) claims that "where colonialism left off,

development took over." (p. 143). Although I am not informed enough to make as insisting claims as these thinkers, it is undoubtedly out from a curiosity about potential relations between colonial thinking and development that I have chosen this specific research topic.

An early critique to classic development thoughts—like those of the modernisation theory introduced above—took place in the 1960s in the form of a Marxist-oriented dependency theory (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017). The arguments were that capitalism was unable to provide the necessary conditions for development, which was supposed to liberate people from economic exploitation and oppression. Another critique came after the decade of the 1980s had passed without growth, but instead showed an increase in poverty and inequality. It became clear that free-market capitalism was dysfunctional and politically destabilising (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017).

One critical counterpoint to development came from the analysis of its non-economic factors. Development theory depends on economic growth to meet the conditions for both social and economic development (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017). But in the 1990s, the failure of the approach, which involved *financial, physical, natural,* and *human* capital, led to revisions of development theory by including *social* capital, a value that promotes solidarity, trust and cooperation among people and communities. Social capital was understood as a resource accessible to poor people, enabling community-based local development different from the mainstream development (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017).

Marxist theories have criticised mainstream development for transforming agrarian, pre-capitalist societies into a capitalist labour-system, and for having an imperialist driving force (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017). Some schools of thought argue that the entire development project is a way of colonising the minds of people in developing countries, as a way of maintaining power and control. These critics search for alternative forms of development, often called post-development (Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2017). Some post-developmentalists promote an epistemology of the South that can redress the imbalance created by Eurocentrism, and instead produce a global knowledge for transformation (Munck et al., 1999). Others promote what they call a *pluriverse,* where there is place for a multiplicity of "ways of worlding" (A. Kothari et al., 2019).

An important aspect of both postcolonial theory and critical development theory is a notion of an ingrained, often hard to spot, persisting power imbalance between former colonisers and former colonised, called coloniality (Fasakin, 2021). Getting closer to the core of this research, I will dedicate the next few pages to this power-laden phenomenon.

Coloniality

Where *colonialism* refers to a historical period, *coloniality* speaks of a power-structure that persists today, founded on the former coloniser's relation to the former colonised (Fasakin, 2021). Coloniality is not modernity's "past" but its "other face" (Castro-Gomez & Martin, 2002, p. 276). Walter Mignolo (2007) confirms that while modernity is presented as a rhetoric of salvation, it hides coloniality, which is the logic of oppression and exploitation. According to Mignolo, modernity, capitalism and coloniality are aspects of the same package of control of "economy and authority, of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity." (p. 162). I will bring up examples of all these areas that this package of control affects when examining the data of this research.

Brian Noble (2015) also points at the coherence between coloniality and modernity. He further notes that coloniality, through maintaining a dialogue, ensures that the Other remains Other, "partially welcomed into the arrangement but necessarily in a subordinate position, subjugated, inscribed as other by self, thereby securing the power position of self." (p. 430). According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), coloniality "is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience." (p. 243). The concept "coloniality of power" goes, as the name implies, deeper into the power dimension of coloniality, which according to Arturo Escobar (2004), describes a fundamental element of modernity, and which can be applied to describe a global condition of coloniality.

Coloniality of power

Coloniality of power, a concept that will be frequently used in this thesis, is defined by Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007) as an interrelation of the practices and legacies of colonialism in social orders and forms of knowledge. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatseni (2013) elaborates by writing that coloniality of power is the continuation of colonial mentalities, psychologies and worldviews into the postcolonial era. He highlights the social

hierarchical relationships of exploitation and domination with roots in European colonialism, which continues to oppress through cultural, social, and political power relations. Coloniality of power can be understood as the hidden side of modernity (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009) and the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system (Grosfoguel, 2003). The concept identifies racial, political, and social hierarchical orders imposed by colonialism, which has resulted in a categorical and discriminatory discourse that is still reflected in the postcolonial world (Quijano, 2007).

Social constructions like race, ethnicity and nations—all products of Eurocentric colonial domination—were assumed to be objective and scientific categories, not referring to the history of power, but as natural phenomena (Quijano, 2007). These power-structures were, and still are, facilitating for an unequal power-distribution globally. Today, exploitation, social domination, and uneven distribution of resources among the world-population shows that the large majority of the exploited, dominated and discriminated against, are the very same "races", "ethnicities", or "nations" that colonisers constructed and categorised five hundred years ago an onward (Quijano, 2007). In addition to the construction of races, ethnicities and nations, María Lugones (2007) notes that colonialism introduced a construction of gender that has been used to "destroy peoples, cosmologies and communities as the building ground for the 'civilized' West." (p. 186). When colonialists in the middle of the 20th century withdrew from the colonies, they conspired, according to Akinbode Fasakin (2021), with power-hungry anti-colonial nationalists of the liberated colonies to craft a system favourable to postcolonial coloniality. In that way the former colonies maintained one hand on the wheel, although no longer sitting in the driver's seat. The leaders who took over—Fasakin (2021) names Ugandan President through 35 years, Yoweri Museveni, as example—behave like former colonial overlords, display colonial mentality and use "colonial governmentality to impose rules that deprive their people of agency and dispossess them." (p. 7).

With the concept coloniality of power, Quijano (2000) came up with a new way of examining the challenges brought by colonialism. He describes former colonisers' control over domains like economy (land, labour, and natural resources) authority (institution and army), gender and sexuality (family, education) and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity) (Mignolo, 2007b; Quijano, 2000). The still-existing power inequality between what has been perceived as the "superior" and the "inferior" can be

examined from several angles and with different lenses. For the purpose of my research, I focus on three forms of coloniality of power that, although weaved together, reveal different aspects of the ways Western actors represent the Global South-subjects of their interventions. Throughout my examination I look at *hierarchies*, especially within race, class, gender and sexuality, I look at notions of *knowledge* and knowledge production, and I look at attitudes towards *culture* and Eurocentric modernity.

Hierarchies

In the context of coloniality of power, hierarchies refer to the ranking and favouring of people and societies based on constructed factors like race, class, gender, and sexuality (Davis, 2019; Lugones, 2007, 2010). The valuation of knowledge and culture also disclose a hierarchical nature (Gikandi, 1996; Medie & Kang, 2018), but in order to elaborate I will discuss these separately in the following sections. In a hierarchy, one's ranking, according to status or authority, determine ones worth, ability, responsibility, and agency. One of these factors is race, which Quijano (2000, 2007) called a calculated creation by the colonisers. Based on phenotypes and skin colours—what colonialists claimed to be innate biological traits—a person was either considered inferior or superior (Quijano, 2007). Differences between individuals were exploited in the formation of these hierarchies, where the tone of one's skin to a great extent would determine one's place on the hierarchical scale. Quijano (2000) notes that "In some cases, the Indian[9] nobility, a reduced minority, was exempted from serfdom and received special treatment owing to their roles as intermediaries with the dominant race … However, blacks were reduced to slavery." (p. 536). By ranking people over each other, colonisers not only secured justification to oppress and exploit, they also put people of different backgrounds up against each other, making it possible for the colonisers to control big groups of people through the ones they favoured (Fasakin, 2021). An example of this is the colonisers racial classification of the Bantu people Hutus and Tutsis[10] in Rwanda, favouring and giving the Tutsi minority advantages over the Hutu majority, increasing the differences to a point that, in 1994, led to a genocide costing close to a million lives in less than 100 days (Prunier, 1996).

[9] *Indian* is here referred to the people which today often go under the description of Native American. Quijano (2000) mainly wrote about coloniality in America, while confirming that his theorisation applies to the expansion of European colonialism to the rest of the world as well.

[10] Hutus were described as short, jovial, simple, with big mouth and lips, while Tutsis were described as more intelligent, refined and natural-born leaders (Prunier, 1996).

Similar to how they attained power through a racial hierarchy, Lugones (2007) argues that colonisers gained power over people through fusing gender and race and creating what she calls a "modern/colonial gender system" (p. 187). She argues that gender, like race, is a colonial construction[11] meant to break down the colonised to give way for the civilised West. Although these examples show what was initiated in the colonial era, these hierarchical rankings still exist and provide people with different opportunities and agency based on race, class, gender, and sexuality (Lugones, 2007). Examples are many, like black people bleaching themselves and being complemented on lighter skin, people gaining respect by belonging to a higher class, men attributed with superior skills and abilities compared to women, and heteronormativity favoured over all other sexual and relational constellations. Although the politically correct stance today is to view all humanity as with the same inherent worth and rights, the mainstream white, upper-class, hetero man still has more power and influence than the black, low-income, queer[12] woman (and everyone in between). This shows that the colonial characteristics of power relations has persisted and established themselves into the current postcolonial era.

Knowledge

Eurocentric systems of knowledge and knowledge production has, from the colonial era, been made increasingly universal, while scholars based in the Global South are underrepresented and excluded from global knowledge production (Medie & Kang, 2018). This has direct implications for equality, knowledge advancement and representation. According to Quijano (2000), "Europe's hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and knowledge production under its hegemony." (p. 540). This resulted in a denial and repression of traditional modes of knowledge, on the basis of the superiority/inferiority binary enforced by the colonial hierarchies (Quijano, 2000). Today education systems, science, medicine, language and legal systems are largely based on a Eurocentric system of knowledge (Akena, 2012), discarding other forms of knowledge, like nature medicine

[11] Lugones (2007) specifies that everyone in the Eurocentered modernity are raced and gendered, but that not everyone are dominated and victimised based on their race or gender, like those linked to the former colonised.

[12] By Queer I mean sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender. The word queer has been used for something or someone perceived as strange, peculiar, bizarre, curious, different or freaky, and was, from the late 19th century, commonly used to describe people with same-sex desires (Robb, 2005).

or indigenous languages, as inferior and less important (Mitova, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

According to Michel Foucault (1972), power is intimately linked to knowledge, as the production of truth and rationality. For Foucault, an objective science is impossible, because it is the ones with power who decide what should be investigated and given attention. He claims that there can be no objects of knowledge in the absence of their production, and therefore truth is not objective but an effect of discourse. The power of the West to establish how the world should be understood and represented has shaped the way social reality is imagined and acted upon. In line with Foucault, Edward Said (1978) argues that there is no such thing as a true presence, only a re-presence, or a representation. He calls Orientalism[13] a "systemic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, military, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period." (p. 21). Knowledge is not necessarily produced as an instrument to justify oppression. However, within discourse, knowledge and power are joined—like in the development discourse where both the framing of problems and the provision of solutions often come from the West—with the potential of resulting in what we can call coloniality of power.

From the power/knowledge nexus and the politics of representation, we can see that concepts like development and underdevelopment are not self-evident categories, but discursive constructs of social, economic and political forces (Abrahamsen, 2003). Development discourse—or Eurocentric perceptions about development—thus legitimise interventions in so-called underdeveloped or developing countries in order to remodel them according to Western norms of progress, growth and efficiency. And "whenever a new problem of underdevelopment is identified, new practices of intervention are devised to rectify the deficiency." (Abrahamsen, 2003, p. 202). Through its interventions, development produces new identities and new ways of seeing and acting upon the world. One's placement on the "underdevelopment-development scale" affects people's identity and their sense of Self (Abrahamsen, 2003). Such changes in people's consciousness and knowledge of Self and Others, are signs of what coloniality of power can do.

[13] I elaborate on Orientalism on page 24.

Culture

One of the reasons why colonisers ranked themselves at the top, was based on the presumptions that the traits and culture of those that they colonised was inferior (Quijano, 2007). European cultures was counted as the only truly modern cultures, based on characteristics of modernity like capitalist economic systems, rationality, neoliberalism, and science (Quijano, 2000). Such Eurocentric thoughts still affect the power balance in the postcolonial world.

In the colonial era, exotic texts about "savages" were represented in travel reports, in philosophical interpretations about a hierarchy of civilisations, and in anthropological search for primitiveness. Such texts contributed to the invention of the primitive Africa (Mudimbe, 1988). Achille Mbembe (2001) argues that current discourse on Africa still evolves around the spectacle of the animalistic beast. According to him, the West still views Africans as beasts that can only enjoy fully human lives through domestication and training. From this perspective, Mbembe concludes that Africa was, and is, "an object of experimentation." (2001, p. 2). He questions whether it is possible to offer an intelligible reading on social and political imagination in contemporary Africa, if using the same conceptional structures and representations that once were used to define Africans as radically Other, as everything that the West was not (Mbembe, 2001).

Among the bearers of the colonial "white man's burden[14]" or the post-colonial "white saviour complex[15]" missionaries have, and still do, demonstrate coloniality of power in form of both knowledge and culture (Christopher, 1984). According to A. J. Christopher (1984) missionaries aimed at the radical transformation of indigenous society. "They therefore sought, whether consciously or unconsciously, the destruction of pre-colonial societies and their replacement by new Christian societies in the image of Europe." (p. 83). Coloniality of power results in cultural destruction for the inferior because "it insistently degrades the self-image of those who are colonised." (Hogan, 2000, p. 83). The continuation of a notion of Eurocentric culture as superior makes this statement relevant also for the descendants of the colonised. Kevin Mulcahy (2017) notes that "coloniality is

[14] This phrase comes from the British imperial poet Rudyard Kipling's poem "The white man's burden", published in 1899 (Hamer, 2009).

[15] I will elaborate on this concept on page 84.

not just a matter of external governance or economic dependency, but of a cultural dominance that creates an asymmetrical relationship between the center and the periphery, between the ruling hegemon and the marginalised other." (p. 237).

As Said (1978) observed, "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the major connections between them." (p. xiii). He argues that the formulations made by Western scholars, missionaries, and administrators about the differences between the East and the West had power to persuade the colonised to believe that "European identity was a superior one in comparisons with all the non-European peoples and cultures." (Said, 1978, p. 7). According to Frantz Fanon (2008) this was possible through a systematic moulding of the colonised to feel inferior.

Coloniality of being

The concept *coloniality of being* emerged amongst scholars working on coloniality of power and its implications on society. Maldonado-Torres (2007) gives credit to Emmanuel Levinas for the link between *ontology* and *power*, to Enrique Dussel for the connection between *being* and *history* and to Walter Mignolo for giving name to the concept "coloniality of being".

In line with Fanon's (2008) focus on colonialism in connection with lived experience and language, the concept *coloniality of being* came from the need to discuss the effects of coloniality on lived experience and not only on the mind (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). These lived experiences are the ways that ancestors of colonised or enslaved people—or those classified as equivalent to these based on traits like racial background—experience oppression, inequality, degrading and discrimination in their daily lives (in spheres like education, job market, wealth, housing, encounters with police force and opportunity to travel). While analysing the rhetorical artefacts of this thesis, I will identify the forms of coloniality addressed, and discuss how these affect the lived experience, both for those it favours and for those it curtails. This dualism, the constructed division between peoples and geographies, will be a red thread though this thesis. I will therefore conclude this theory- and concept chapter by touching into some of the core dichotomies that I scrutinise in this research project.

Global North and Global South

Global North (Western) and Global South (Non-Western) are geographic terms only to a certain extent, and should here be considered as what Said (1978) named "imaginary geographies", which describe positionality in relations of power and domination, with the many economic and geopolitical implications that comes with this. Global North may describe both historically dominant nations in the North as well as former colonised, wealthy ruling elites in the South. Similarly, Global South can be a metaphor for exploited ethnic minorities or women in affluent countries, as much as the historically colonised low-income countries as a whole (A. Kothari et al., 2019).

When I use the term Global North, or West, in this thesis, I mean countries associated with global economic and political power, including countries like Australia, Canada, countries of Western Europe and the United States. With Global South, I mean countries that often are referred to as developing countries, and think, in this context, especially of those that has experienced colonisation by Western countries, or "countries that have been marginalised in the international political and economic system." (Medie & Kang, 2018, p. 38). I am aware of the loss of nuances and other problems with dividing countries and people into categories like this. For that reason, I will avoid, unless it is observed in the data, terms like "non-Western", which emphasises on what one is not, and implies that the Western is central or the ideal. I would prefer avoiding separating geographies and people altogether, but since I am trying to trace remnants from a time where such binaries were used to justify oppression, I will have to relate to these constructions to a certain extent. A binary that will be central in this thesis is the division between the Self and the Other.

Self and Other

To be able to explore Western representations of Global South Others, I need to include the Self. These two are inextricably linked together, because the representations made of an "Other" is part of the process of identifying the "Self" (Bhabha, 1994; Schalk, 2011). According to Stuart Hall (1996), it is only through the relation to an "Other", and to what this Other is not, that a "positive" meaning of anything, including identity, can be constructed. Homi Bhabha (1994) notes that "The white man's self-perception as moral, rational and civilized required the image of the negro as barbaric and uncivilized" (p.

116). Identities thus seem to function as points of identification and attachment because of their capacity to exclude and leave out (Hall & Du Gay, 1996).

The Self/Other binary is basic for human consciousness and identity, not only in a colonial or postcolonial context. The theory explains how individuals comprehend what and who they are, by recognising what and who they are not (Schalk, 2011). Variations of this binary appear in the work of thinkers from many different fields, including philosophy (Derrida, 1976), psychology (Fanon, 2008), ethics (Österberg, 1988) and critical theory (Paipais, 2011). According to Jacques Derrida (1976), Western philosophy rests on binary opposites, such as truth/falsity, unity/diversity or man/woman, whereby the nature and primacy of the first term depends on the definition of its opposite other.

Achille Mbembe (2001) notes that "as a general rule, the experience of the Other, or the *problem of the "I" of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us*, has almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to Western philosophical and political tradition." (p. 2). When encountering distant Others, Western traditions has long denied the existence of any other Self than its own. Instead people from the Global South have been made into "objects of knowledge" (Spivak, 1990) for the Global North, rather than subjects of their own story. People from the Global South have been, and to a certain extent still are, defined by their differences from the West. Dichotomies like nature/culture, reason/emotion, irrationality/rationality, body/mind, passivity/innovation, feminine/masculine, civilisation/barbarism, unrestrained sexuality/respectability has informed representations of the colonised Other, whether in the Americas, Asia or Africa (Baaz, 2005). According to Mbembe (2001), it is in relation to Africa that the notion of otherness has been taken the furthest.

Said (1978) problematised the Self/Other binary in his critique of Western representation of the East. With his book *Orientalism* (1987), he played a significant role in introducing post-colonialism as an academic discipline. He problematised the Orientalist discourse—the West's knowledge and representation of the East—and examined dichotomies like Orient/Occident, East/West, slave/master, subjugated/subjugator, colonised/coloniser, them/us and Other/Self (Said, 1978). As touched upon above, Said called such polarities an "imaginative geography". He explained how these categories were created by the European civilisation, where the Western Self defined itself in relation to what existed

outside of its own borders. Although Said mainly talks about the Occident (Europe and North America) and the Orient (Middle East, Asia and North-Africa) the dichotomies he addresses also apply to what I in this thesis will call Global North/West (mainly Europe and North America) and Global South (low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America).

In his exploration of Said's *Orientalism*, Atif Khalil (2004) notes that the East—I will add Global South—is represented "by the West, for the West and through the West." (p. 322). Khalil claims that this representation is as old as Western identity itself, since it is through the image of the Other[16] that the West has defined itself. Ultimately, the process of defining the Orient tells us more about the West as moulder than about the geo-cultural construct called the Orient (Khalil, 2004). One of Said's main arguments is that knowledge is never disinterested, decontextualised or entirely non-ideological, and he does not accept a distinction between pure and political knowledge. He argues that imaginative perceptions of the Other/East/South are justified and sustained by material and political interaction with it (Said, 1978). The fact that Orientalism became structured and formalised as an academic discipline in the same time frame as the emergence of colonialism, and thus served to legitimate political conquest (Khalil, 2004), is a good example of this.

The Other/East/South is portrayed as mysterious by the West, but also recognisable enough to be deciphered. For the West to be able to say anything about it, it has to be placed between "the intelligible and the unknown, the decipherable and the ambiguous" (Khalil, 2004, p. 322). Bhabha (1997), who draws on much of Said's work, notes something similar in the construction of otherness and stereotypes. He uses the term "fixity" about the paradoxical mode of representation that he observes in colonial discourse. Fixity is both the unchanging order as well as disorder. The stereotyped Other is already known, but because it carries traits that cannot be proved, these need to be constantly repeated. An example of such assumed trait that "needs no proof, but can never really be proved" (1997, p. 293), is the unrestrained sexuality of the African. Both Africa,

[16] According to Quijano, the "Orient", although defined as inferior by orientalists and colonists, was the only group that were perceived to have sufficient dignity to be called "the Other" to the "Occident" (Quijano, 2000 p. 540). Africans and native Americans were simply called "primitive" (p. 542). Today there are no (serious) intellectuals that would exclude certain peoples from the possibility of being a counterpart to the Self. Since I am researching the present state, the concept "Other" will not be limited to what orientalists of the 18th and 19th century defined as the Orient, but applicable on any counterpart to a Self.

America and Asia were depicted by Europeans as "libidinously eroticised" (McClintock, 1995) and African slave women were called "sexually aggressive wet nurses" (Collins, 1990). According to Bhabha, this ambivalence is what keeps the colonial stereotype alive:

> [It] ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (Bhabha, 1997, p. 293)

According to Hall (1997), stereotyping can be understood as a representational practice that reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics. In this thesis we will see how both Global South menstruators and Western philanthropists, all nuanced and multifaceted individuals in reality, are reduced to a few, simple traits in a black and white narrative. In many cases such stereotyping reinforces oppositional binaries, favouring one part over the other. Stereotyping is, as Hall puts it, part of the maintenance of social order, and can often be found where there are "gross inequalities of power." (1997, p. 258).

In order to develop an identity, human beings depend on feedback from other people and the society. Those who do not experience adequate recognition, and only get represented by the surroundings in a one-sided or negative way, will find it harder to embrace themselves as valuable and of importance. Misrecognition and misrepresentation hinders and damages individuals' relationship to themselves (Iser, 2019). Victims of racism and colonialism have suffered psychological harm by the misrecognition of being degraded as inferior (Fanon, 2008). According to Bhabha (1994), colonisers had a goal of making the colonised "almost the same, but not quite." (p. 86) in order to civilise and control people, but never including them to participate as equals. In order to obtain recognition, the colonised developed strategies to escape their blackness, and turn "white" by adopting the culture and language of the coloniser (Baaz, 2005). Recognition, acceptance and respect constitute vital human needs (C. Taylor, 1994), and it is an aim for this thesis to dismantle and disclose some of the Western misrecognitions and misrepresentations that still seem to suppress Global South Others. Before dismantling or disclosing anything, I will lay out the genealogy of the feminist-inspired development-focus that has resulted in what today is called Menstrual Hygiene Management.

Development, feminism, and the matter of menstruation

Theories and concepts are, like everything else, products of their time, place, and the brains behind them. Although having established a theoretical and conceptual foundation to observe from, it may be helpful to have a historical perspective on the contextual circumstances that has influenced the emergence of the Menstrual Hygiene Management movement that I address in this thesis. Since there is not enough space to cover everything of relevance, I will present the historical background of those aspects that I consider most indispensable in the context of my research topic. By knowing the history of development, one can understand and apply critical development theory in a more informed way, and by being aware that even the empowering feminist movement has not always included women of colour, one can fathom the gravity of misrepresentation and othering. The purpose of this chapter is to connect more pieces and lay a foundation for the topic of this thesis. When knowing more about where a phenomenon comes from, one is more equipped to understand where this phenomenon is moving, which again may facilitate for ideas on what it will take to influence its course.

Development

The concept of development started to take shape in the Modern Age (modernity), by the seventeenth-century Enlightenment ideas of progress and by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of evolutionary development (Baaz, 2005; Quijano, 2000). As mentioned, modernisation differentiates between the urban and rural, modern and traditional, productive and unproductive, and is an understanding of progress as moving forward in space and time. People on the lowest stage on the modernity ladder were, in the eighteenth century, called *barbarians*, and if they did not respond to the European[17] modes of life, and thus lagged more and more behind as modernity moved forward, they were called *primitives* (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013). Primitives and traditions were perceived as separated from Europe and modernity (Mignolo, 2007a).

[17] Although claimed by many as a European process, Quijano (2000) emphasises that modernity, in form of newness, advancement, science and secularisation, has taken place in all the "high-cultures" (China, India, Egypt, Greece, Maya, Aztec, Tawantinsuyo) prior to the current world-system.

Although notions of development were established in the Enlightenment era, it was from the middle of the twentieth century that development started to take the shape that we know today. Western development organisations had an increasing impact on the rest of the world following the Second World-War (Tvedt, 1998). As earlier noted, US President Truman announced, in 1949, a program for developing the "underdeveloped" areas, which became a start of what today is referred to as "the development industry" or "the development machine" (Knöbl, 2003; W. Sachs, 2009), positioning US as a new leader in terms of Western (imperial) powers in the Global South (Mignolo, 2007a). One of the reasons for the provision of US aid, technology, systems, and solutions to so-called underdeveloped regions—many of whom were colonies gaining independence in the decades following the war—was to counter any attraction towards the despised communist ideologies (Knöbl, 2003). Some scholars argue that the development discourse is embedded in ethnocentric postcolonial discourses designed to hold on to existing hierarchies rather than to change them (Escobar, 2004; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1996). This embedded capacity of development initiatives to mask self-interested political or economic agendas makes it an industry worth scrutinising.

The establishment of the aid epoch and the aid system reflected the existence of a gap between the rich and the poor—between the West and "the rest" (Tvedt, 1998). The colonial thinking of "the white man's burden" which included "civilising" and "developing" the colonised, continued into the postcolonial era with the alleged duty to rectify former colonisers wrongdoings, but also to continue the commenced mission of developing the "underdeveloped" (Wright, 2012). According to Mignolo (2007), the concepts of development and underdevelopment are invented to distinguish temporal and spatial differences between the West and the rest.

Where people in so-called developing countries were perceived by Westerners as backward, women were the furthest back, which has affected how they have been portrayed and approached within the development industry. According to Jane Parpart (1995), development planners in the 1950s were drawing on the colonial discourse, which represented Third World[18] women as particularly backward and primitive, bound to

[18] According to Spivak (1996), the term "Third World" was coined in 1955, and the term has been used to unite vastly different areas and people into one single "underdeveloped" category (Sangari, 1987).

tradition and reluctant to modernity (Marchand & Parpart, 1995). In the 1960s, a new approach called Women in Development (WID), emerged within the development industry, with a goal of integrating women into global economies. Although established with the aim of empowering women in development, the WID discourse continued to legitimise representations of backward and oppressed women (Marchand & Parpart, 1995). One of the goals for the WID interventions was to encourage a shift from controlling women's *reproduction*, to instead focus on their role in *production* (Razavi & Miller, 1995; Wilson, 2011). Nevertheless, population control policies, which drew on pathologisation of women's sexuality, was not challenged until feminist movements in the targeted countries started to protest against them (Wilson, 2011). From the 1990s, through the Gender and Development (GAD) -initiative, there were new attempts to challenge old perceptions about gender and development, but the image of women as the impoverished, vulnerable Other, in need of being saved by Western experts, persisted also through this attempted renewal (Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Wilson, 2011).

The "girling" of development

The first notable shift toward girls as drivers of development took shape in the "Education for all" movement established in 1990 by UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank (Yi, 2016). In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals, especially the targets of goal 3 on gender equality and empowerment for women, linked girls access to education with economic growth (*UN GOAL 3*, n.d.). Throughout this decade, several action plans took shape: In 2004, Nike Foundation was founded to promote girl-centred investments in development programs (*Devex*, 2021), in 2007 the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM – later UN Women), and World Health Organization (WHO) created the UN Interagency Task Force on Adolescent Girls (UNFPA, 2009), and in 2008 the World Bank announced its Adolescent Girls Initiative (The World Bank Group, 2021) .

In 2009 the most visible of the girl-centred development initiatives, the "Girl Effect", was launched. The Girl Effect (*Girl Effect*, n.d.) was an effort to bring girls to the centre of development, arguing that if girls are empowered, they will grow local economies and reverse cycles of poverty. The Girl Effect started at World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where a two-minute video funded by Nike Foundation and UN Foundation was screened (*Girl Effect*, n.d.). The video tells the audience that the world is a mess and

that the solution to its problems is neither the internet, science, government, or money, but a girl. “Invest in her and she will do the rest” (MadFit, 2010) has become a well-cited Girl Effect slogan.

In 2010, Department for International Development (DfID), in partnership with Nike, introduced the “Girl Hub” to drive policy engagement, and in 2012 the UN “International Day of the Girl Child” was marked for the first time. In 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were set as the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), targeting both gender equality, education for all, and sanitation facilities. The same year, the Girl Effect became an independent organisation as a social business. With all this new focus on girls, the need for more data on girls’ needs has been raised. However, despite the lack of sufficient data, several new girl-centred development initiatives, including MHM organisations, have emerged (Sommer & Sahin, 2013).

Menstruation enters the development industry

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) has, since the early 2000s, been increasingly recognised as a global public health issue. A growing number of academics, donors, NGOs, UN agencies, grassroot women’s organisations, multinational feminine hygiene companies, and social entrepreneurs are mobilising to bring attention and resources to address menstrual-related challenges in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South. The most prevalent interventions are provision of sanitary materials, puberty education, and water and sanitation facilities for girls in schools (Sommer et al., 2015).

A pioneer in the menstrual hygiene field was Rockefeller Foundation, who in 2001 supported a series of case studies conducted in Uganda, Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe on schoolgirls’ sexual maturation and experiences of menstruation (Sommer & Sahin, 2013). Rockefeller later partnered with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) to remove the VAT on the import of menstrual products to African countries. This removal of tax cleared the way for multinational corporations, like Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, to develop their market in Africa, using corporate social responsibility (CSR)[19]-schemes to expand their reach (Bobel, 2019).

[19] CSR is a self-regulating business model meant to promote social accountability (Fern, n.d.).

With the growing interest in Menstrual Hygiene Management, academia has followed suit. A central researcher on menstrual-related topics is the North American professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Chris Bobel (*Faculty & Staff*, n.d.) who has spent nearly 20 years in the field. I am leaning heavily on her books *New Blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (2010) and *The Managed Body: Developing Girls and Menstrual Health in the Global South* (2019)[20] in this research. I am also referring to *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies* (2020), of which Bobel is a main contributor and co-editor. For her 2019-publication, Bobel conducted a research on the framing of Menstrual Hygiene Management. From this research, there was counted active MHM organisations in at least 38 countries in the Global South per 2018. The biggest number of organisations were located in India (46), followed by Kenya (26) and Uganda (19). The organisations were either NGOs (77 %), social businesses (21 %) or a hybrid of the two (2 %) (Bobel, 2019). The main focus of the majority of the organisations was, from Bobel's observations, products, followed by education, policy, infrastructure or a combination of these. Almost half of the 133 organisations working with MHM in the Global South were run by Western actors (Bobel, 2019).

Menstrual Hygiene Management

The concept

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a contested term, and there is not a clear consensus on what this social movement, largely directed towards menstruators in the Global South, should be called. UNICEF has chosen to leave out the word *Management* (which carries the risk of implying that one either "manages" or "fails" to care for one's menstrual needs) and have chosen to use the term Menstrual Health and Hygiene[21] instead (UNICEF, 2019). For others the word *Hygiene* is problematic, and there are social campaigns for removing this word from Menstrual Hygiene Management because of its potential to make menstruators feel dirty or shameful. The same campaigners advocate for renaming arrangements like "Menstrual *Hygiene* Day", into "Menstrual *Health* Day" (Parmee, 2019). Although Menstrual Hygiene Management is a contested term, it is the

[20] 2020 American Sociological Association's Sociology of Development Outstanding Book Award winner

[21] In a guide from 2019, UNICEF notes that their use of the term Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) includes Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), but also broader systemic factors that link menstruation with health, well-being, gender equality, education, empowerment and rights (UNICEF, 2019).

most used term to describe this branch of the development sector. The term, with its abbreviation MHM, is used in both the Global North and the Global South, and I will therefore, despite its weaknesses, take use of the composition Menstrual Hygiene Management in this thesis. The most widely circulated definition of MHM is made by Water, Sanitation and Hygiene expert at UNICEF, Murat Sahin, together with public health researcher and advocate, Marni Sommer. According to these two, good Menstrual Hygiene Management is when:

> Women & adolescent girls are using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. (Sommer & Sahin, 2013, p. 1557)

The history

Menstrual Hygiene Management in its practical sense, grew out from the male-dominated and technically oriented Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) development sector, fuelled by the fight for gender equality, education, participation and economic development that came with "the girling of development" (Bobel, 2019). Before the 2000s, menstruation was, with only a few exceptions (McMaster et al., 1997; Snowden & Christian, 1983), rarely a topic on the international development agenda. In 2004, however, NGOs began to address menstruation as one of the barriers for girls' education, and Menstrual Hygiene Management became part of a global movement to address the gender-gap in education (Bobel, 2019). Sowmyaa Bharadwaj and Archana Patkar concluded, in an article from 2004, that menstruation was neglected as a development focus, and called for a policy debate and a practical response to what girls and women needed to manage their menstruation in terms of materials, education and facilities (Bharadwaj & Patkar, 2004).The slow start of the MHM movement can, according to Sommer et. al. (2015) be explained by the siloed nature of donor funding, where *health* (menstruation) and *education* (school attendance) were not seen together, but supported through two different funding streams (Sommer et al., 2015). In 2005 however, things began to change, when UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) brought attention to menstruation's impact on schoolgirls (UNICEF/IRC, 2005).

When development organisations started to see the importance of menstruation, the FemCare[22] industry quickly jumped on board (Bobel, 2019). In 2007, the menstrual care brands Always, Tampax and Protcer & Gamble established a corporate social responsibility initiative called "Protecting Futures" in collaboration with local organisations—to provide education, facilities and products (their own) to girls in the Global South[23]. Social businesses and NGOs like Days for Girls, the MHM organisation I am examining in this thesis, joined the product fever together with the market. Despite no proper data on whether provision of menstrual products increased school attendance, NGOs and social entrepreneurs have continued to found MHM organisations with a main focus on products (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013).

From 2011, there was an upsurge in MHM initiatives. In May that year, WHO and UNICEF organised an expert meeting to formulate new goals for WASH to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (WHO/UNICEF, 2014). In 2012, WaterAid, in collaboration with SHARE (Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity) published a comprehensive resource guide called "Menstrual Hygiene Matters", directed at practitioners interested in creating menstrual-sensitive school environments (House et al., 2012). Simultaneously UNICEF and WHO decided to push for MHM to be incorporated into the next generation of development goals—the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also in 2012, the virtual conference "MHM in WASH in Schools" started as a yearly event, starting with 70 participants the first year, increasing to 700 participants from 80 countries three years later (Bobel, 2019). In 2013, several MHM events were arranged, like the social media campaign "Menstrualvaganza", and the international event "Celebrating Womanhood", where WASH engineers, UN representatives and interdisciplinary professionals gathered in Geneva to discuss the materials developed to spread awareness about menstrual health (George, 2013). "Menstrual Hygiene Day"[24] was born in 2014 to bring attention to the importance of menstrual health education and resources, especially in the Global South (*FAQ: MHDay*, n.d.). In 2016, WASH United had 180 events in 34 countries, and in 2017 this had grown to 350 events in 54 countries (Bobel, 2019).

[22] FemCare stands for feminine care, which includes female-oriented hygiene products.

[23] An age-mate of me has shared her story on how the menstrual care-brand Always, with their school visits and commercials, shaped her view on menstruation and pads throughout her school years in Uganda.

[24] One of the artefacts that I examine in this thesis, is published on the occasion of Menstrual Hygiene Day.

In 2014, Columbia University and UNICEF arranged a meeting to establish a ten-year agenda to promote MHM in schools. The meeting was called "MHM in Ten: Advancing the MHM Agenda in Schools" and involved 40 representatives from NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, the private sector and (mostly Western) academic institutions (Sommer, Caruso, et al., 2016). Several media outlets named 2015 "The Year of the Period" and the topic was given space in newspapers like New York Times, Jezebel, The Atlantic and Huffington Post (Dasgupta, 2015).

Scholarly engagement on MHM also raised in 2015, and in 2016, two systematic reviews looked at existing research and called for more rigorous research to build evidence base (Hennegan & Montgomery, 2016; van Eijk et al., 2016). Although most actors in the MHM industry admit the lack of evidence on the effects of MHM interventions, research deficiency has not haltered the rush to launch programs and develop products (Bobel, 2019). To add to the understanding of why the topic of menstruation has gained such interest—both within Western counties and as a Western development initiative towards the Global South—we will have a look at the feminist spirit of the time leading up to the growing MHM engagement.

From Western feminism to menstrual activism

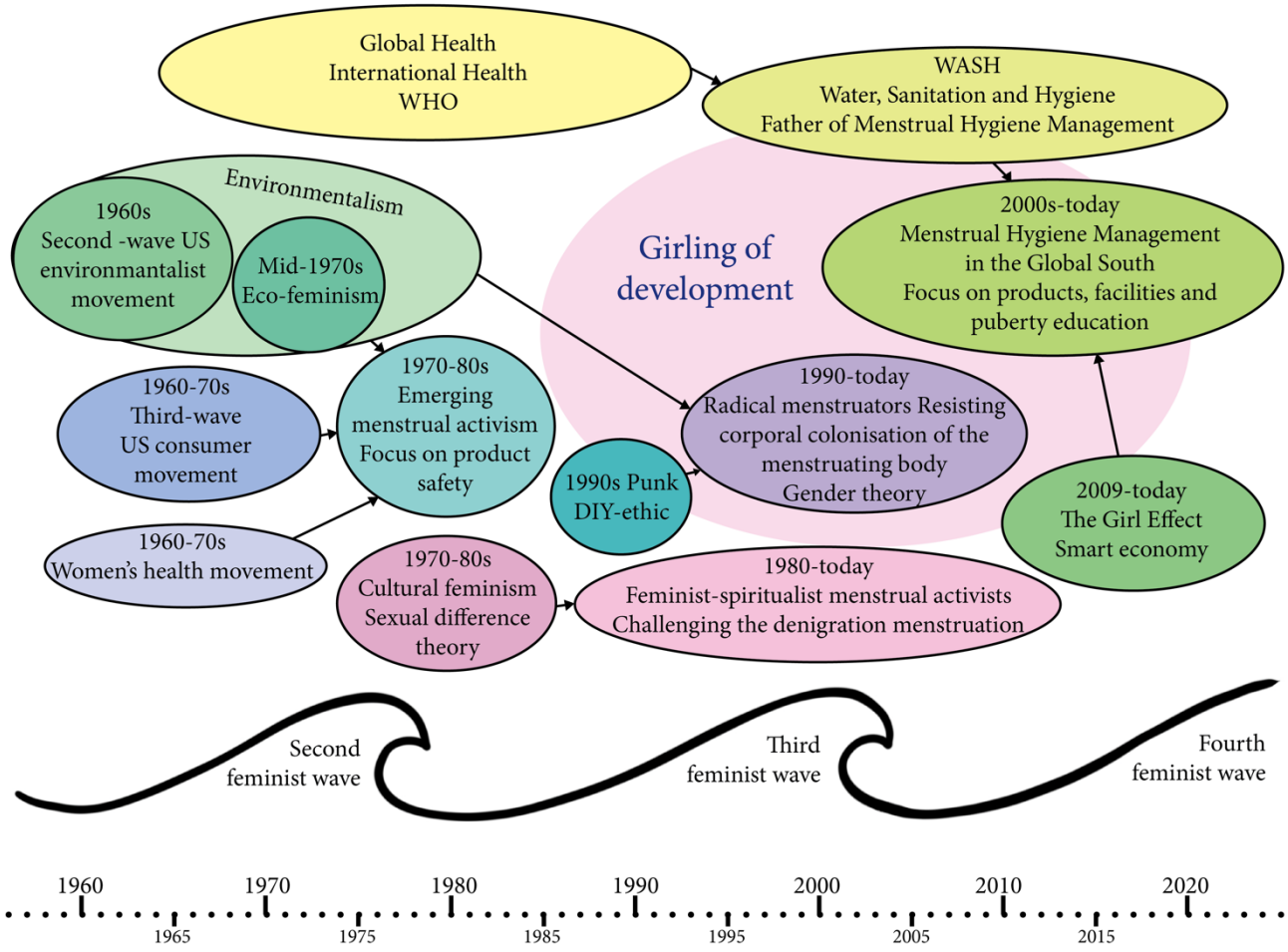
The evolvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management as an increasingly popular area of Western interventions did not happen in a vacuum. I have just given a brief summary of some of the MHM-related activities that have taken place the past 20 years, and I will now present one of the potential driving forces leading up to this engagement. As already mentioned, one explanation was the increased focus on the assumed connection between menstruation and school attendance, with its direct link to economic development. Another explanation for why this shift towards menstruation happened when it happened, could lay in other movements that has existed within Western societies and influenced thoughts and perspectives, such as the feminist movements. In the following, I briefly introduce the phases of Western feminism[25] that has existed alongside the evolvement of the development industry.

[25] Although Western feminism includes both the North American and the European feminist movements, I will here mainly use examples from North America, since the organisation I examine in this thesis is US founded.

Various feminist lenses on menstruation have affected views and approaches to this bodily process, and it is my claim that feminism, together with other simultaneous social processes, has contributed to the current understanding of menstruation as an integral part of development interventions in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South.

The first feminist wave, occurring in the 1800s and the early 1900s, when colonialism and slavery was still going on, was mainly concerned with (white) women's right to vote (*History of Feminism*, n.d.). Then the second wave of the 1960s and 1970s, the years when most colonies were abolished, included (Western) women's right to equal, legal and social rights (*The Second Wave of Feminism*, n.d.)**.** These two first waves were centred on claiming basic rights for white, Western women to participate in society.

It was not until the third wave, which started in the 1990s, that there was an increased attention towards international challenges. Race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and nationality was, from this time period, considered as important factors when discussing feminism (*The Third Wave of Feminism*, n.d.). It is within the time frame of this third wave that we see the explosion of Western MHM actors towards the Global South. In the fourth, and current, feminist-wave, starting around 2012, there has been a focus on sexual harassment (#MeToo), women of colour and gender equality, with the use of social media to address these concerns (*The Fourth Wave of Feminism*, n.d.). Both the third and the fourth feminist wave seem, based on their content, to guide and support the emergence of the Menstrual Hygiene Management movement. Under is my own visual interpretation, largely based on Bobel (2010, 2019) on how Western feminism and the development industry has facilitated for the increasing Western MHM initiatives directed towards the Global South:



To understand why menstruation started to be framed as a problem in the first place, one can go back to the end of the 1800s when menstruation became medicalised (Bondevik & Lie, 2012; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015). Earlier in Western culture, reaching menarche (the first menstruation) had been a marker of maturity, but during the Victorian era male physicians took over the definition and treatment of menstruation, increasing the demand for physician services, and the focus on products (Bobel, 2010). The first disposable menstrual pads were introduced in the end of the 1800s, and the increasingly materialised approach to menstruation became a marker of modernity, class privilege and respectability (Bobel, 2010). The use of conventional products grew throughout the 1900s, and the industry's message was that they would ensure girls and women with protection from their unreliable female bodies. Joan Brumberg (1998) writes in the book *The Body Project*: "When contemporary American girls begin to menstruate, they think of hygiene, not fertility." (p. 30), illustrating how perceptions has moved towards seeing menstruation as dirty, and thus a problem that needs to be solved.

From the early 1970s, North American feminists began to question the safety and environmental impact of menstrual products, and the construction of menstruation as a shameful and dirty process. Books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1970), about female health was written by radical feminists and sold to millions. As a reaction to the movement's dualism between the *self* in opposition to *nature*, a new wing called ecofeminism emerged in the mid-1970s. The three social change movements; "women's health", "consumer rights" and "environmentalism" led to the emergence of "critical menstrual consciousness" and "menstrual activism" (Bobel, 2010). One of the approaches to break with menstrual taboo in the 1970s was menstrual art. Nevertheless, the most common thematic around menstruation was still product use and the "hygienic crisis" rather than the politics of menstruation (Bobel, 2010). In 1978, Jeannine Parvati published the book *Hygiena: A Woman's Herbal,* where she connected menstruation to female sexuality. The book also included a pattern for sewing reusable cloth pads (1978).

During the 1980s, menstrual activism was still concerned with product safety, with increasing attention to the environmental impact, and from the early 1990s, menstrual products that aimed to care for both the consumer and the environment, started to enter the market (Bobel, 2010). Several alternative FemCare businesses were founded, with focus on green consumption and donations of washable pads to girls in Africa. From the 1990s and onwards, radical menstruation activists have blamed the commercial product industry for disease and pollution, for gender-based oppression and for appealing to, and reinforcing, menstrual stigma in their commercials. To these activists, menstruation is a natural bodily process that for too long has been colonised and objectified by corporations (Bobel, 2010).

Today a new form of menstrual activism is concerned about "menstrual equity" (*Menstrual Equity: A Legislative Toolkit*, 2019), which are the laws and politics that ensure menstrual products are safe and available for those who need them. British activists were the first to call this a fight against "period poverty" (ActionAid UK, n.d.). Menstrual activism, earlier a Western phenomenon, is today growing in the Global South, widely known as Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), which focus on providing menstrual products, water- and hygiene related infrastructure and reproductive health education to girls and women in the Global South (Bobel, 2019).

The main purpose of MHM in the Global South is keeping girls in school, which has been a major focus in the development industry for several decades (Porter, 2016). According to MHM advocates, products and facilities will *unlock* girls' potential and solve the gender-gap in education (*Education Is Gateway to Unlocking Women's Potential*, 2011). MHM interventions rely more on product provision than on structural and societal change in their approach, which can be criticised as a way to regulate and control the menstruating body (Bobel, 2019). Bobel (2019) notes that the way MHM is conceptualised shows how certain representations reflect the Western imaginary of the Global South, and that "entrenched gendered notions of what constitutes productivity, agency, modernity, respectability and freedom shapes the movement." (p. 7). In order to earn respect from whites, black women have, for instance, had to prove respectability to overcome the colonial social construction of the black female body as promiscuous and sexually available, a construction that has, and still, deny reproductive rights for black women (Bobel, 2010).

The menstrual activism within the West, formed in North America almost five decades ago, looks quite different from the activism currently emerging in the Global South. There is more focus on environment, health, and free choice in the Western movement, while education, the rights for products, and hygiene for all, is in the core of the engagement directed towards the Global South. The MHM agenda towards the Global South largely focus on moving girls and women away from traditional menstrual practices, such as using cloth, while promotion of cloth pads is an environmental centrepiece of menstrual activism in the West (Bobel, 2019). While the *impact* of products on health and environment are topics in the Global North, *access* to products is the main focus for MHM activists working in and towards the Global South. When health is mentioned in the Global South, it is mainly linked to the assumption that poor menstrual hygiene leads to bacterial infections, a claim that is not sufficiently proved (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013), but still widely used as an argument for the promotion of menstrual products.

One possible explanation for the different focus between Western menstrual activism within the Global North and towards the Global South is that different target locations involve different types of actors and activists. The movement within the West has a more feminist character, trying to normalise menstruation, advocate for free choices, educate

and break down stigma and discrimination (Bodyform UK, 2020; *Mensen NRK*, 2020). The menstrual movement directed towards the South, on the other hand, largely takes the shape of development aid, which then has a different backdrop. I would consider it likely that it is because of the development aid-frame that measurable means, like products and facilities, are higher on the list towards the Global South than social and political campaigns.

If the menstrual movement within the Global North and the MHM movement towards the Global South latch onto different sectors, I do not have a basis to claim that people from Global North and Global South are perceived, and treated, differently. They are simply concerned about different things. It is, however, from a more general perceptive, appropriate to ask what it does to the representations of people in Global North and Global South that the overall message sent to the first is concerned about freedom from menstrual shame, while the message to the latter is that it is only by concealing the menstrual blood with products that one can have dignity. Similarly, one may question the signal-effect of encouraging the first group to choose their life freely, while the latter group is expected to return the favour of product access by becoming economically productive. Such questions, among others, will be discussed in the main chapters of this thesis.

While we in the previous chapter went through some relevant theories and concepts, we have in this chapter had a look at relevant parts of the genealogy, or history, of Menstrual Hygiene Management. With, but not limited to, *development* and *feminism* as influential backdrops, we have seen how the development sector has become more girl-centred in the recent decades, how menstruation came to enter the development industry and how Menstrual Hygiene Management has evolved into what it is today. We have also looked at the differences between menstrual activism and interventions within the Global North and towards the Global South and prepared some questions that we will return to in the following. Before we reach there, I briefly outline how I plan to proceed to best achieve the goals of this research project.

Methodology

Although all roads are supposed to lead to Rome, some roads are necessarily shorter, straighter, and clearer, while others are longer, bumpier, and foggier. One may say that some ways are better than others, but that depends on whether the goal is the destination or the journey. For me it is both. The destination is clearly a goal, but the journey is equally important, because most of the discovery and learning happens as you go. Although my aim is to choose the most rational route to the goal, I will undoubtedly find myself on some detours, or digressions, along the way. Some of these may be dead ends, while others may reveal new and important dimensions that I would not have stumbled over on a straighter path. As I reveal in the subtitle of this thesis, the path that I have chosen to walk is one that I have named postcolonial rhetorical criticism. With this, I have chosen to pay attention to some of the things and phenomena that I will meet on my way, and to bypass others, since "every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing." (Burke, 1935, p. 49). What I choose to study closer can say something about me as a researcher and of the purposes of this research. I choose, for instance, the *postcolonial* aspect because of its capacity to situate us in time and place, which provides an indicator for which way we are moving, and potentially some inspiration on where we want to go. I choose to examine *rhetoric* because of its power to change the course of history (Hollihan & Klumpp, 2020), and I choose *criticism* as an approach because of its open, interested and explorative way to look for answers (Hart et al., 2018). With an interdisciplinary and purposeful approach, I believe we are in a good position to gain valuable insight.

The data I examine in this thesis consist of one major and two supplementary rhetorical artefacts. The strategy for ending up with these as my data was to search through the internet for all the MHM organisations I could come across, compare them, look at their size, scope, approach and other relevant factors, and end up with organisations that I found representative for the broader MHM field. I have chosen one North American and one Ugandan organisation, and from there I have picked rhetorical artefacts presented by these organisations to be the data for my in-depth examination. My approach will be to analyse the words and messages of the founders of organisations actively engaged in reducing inequality and ask how their rhetoric contributes to or challenge oppression, and how the messages contradict or reinforce the status quo of unequal power relations. To help me

navigate, I have organised my findings, which in line with my approach are power-laden statements from the artefacts, into three forms of coloniality of power, and considered these as either reinforcing or opposing the addressed form of coloniality of power. I have drawn on Quijano's (2000, 2007) theories on coloniality of power when composing and taking use of the table below.

Three forms of coloniality of power					
Hierarchies Race, class, gender and sexuality		**Knowledge** Eurocentric knowledge-production as superior		**Culture** Eurocentric modernity as superior	
Reinforcing	**Opposing**	**Reinforcing**	**Opposing**	**Reinforcing**	**Opposing**

Interdisciplinary method with an intuitive design

To answer my research questions, I will not be bound to any specific method, but rather draw inspiration from relevant approaches from different disciplines and use them in a constructive way for the purpose of this research. I will work qualitatively, analysing rhetorical artefacts in-depth through the lenses that the research questions, relevant theories, and methodical tools provide me with. Roland Barthes (1989) claims that being bound to method makes research sterile and may exclude important insights, "everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing." (p. 318). Instead of discarding methods altogether, I will go for a more open and intuitive approach, where I will be guided, but not limited, by existing methods, like those of rhetorical criticism.

When conducting a rhetorical critique, I can choose which role I, as a researcher, want to have. Brian Ott and Greg Dickinson (2013) describe three potential roles of a rhetorical critic: The interpreter, the inquisitor and the interventionist. As an *interpreter* I am concerned with what a text means, as an *inquisitor* with what a text does (socially and/or politically) and as an *interventionist* with judging text as a way of contributing to the social debate. In this thesis I identify especially with the latter two. I am both interested in what the text does in form of challenging or reinforcing oppression and unequal power relations, and in contributing to the social debate, with the aim of increasing awareness, critical thinking and ultimately aiming for positive social change.

Rhetorical criticism

"Rhetoric is any discourse, art form, performance, cultural object or event that—by symbolic and/or material means—has the capacity to move someone." (Ott & Dickinson, 2013, p. 2). Where rhetoric aims to move, rhetorical criticism aims to reveal *how* a rhetorical artefact informs, instructs, convinces, and thus moves an audience. To think critically towards a rhetorical message is not exclusively a task for scholars. Without reflecting upon it, every one of us daily judge messages around us critically. Kenneth Burke (1935) claimed that all living things are critics. If this is true, what is then the purpose of me writing this thesis? One of the reasons is that although all living things are critics, we are not necessarily very rational and conscious critics. As we know, from the worlds of politics, romance, food or fashion, bad choices are made every single day. Through conducting criticism in an active and scientific way, basing my claims on context, time and place in history, measured against existing findings and theories, I believe there is potential to discover new dimensions and nuances in a message that can bring insights that may facilitate for better, or at least more informed, choices.

Rhetorical criticism is an argument (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001), a systematic process (Andrews, 1983), a qualitative research method (Foss, 2017) and a performed response (Benson, 1993) meant to describe, interpret, evaluate, illuminate, understand, appreciate and produce metaknowledge (Hart et al., 2018; Ott & Dickinson, 2013). According to Jim A. Kuypers (2009), criticism is not a scientific method, but an art form. "It use subjective methods of argument and exists on its own, not in conjunction with other methods of generating knowledge." (Kuypers, 2009, p. 14). Whether considered as art or science there are, in any case, good and bad ways of conducting rhetorical criticism. Burke (1941) compared criticism as entering a conversation that had already began before you came, and that will continue after you have left. A good critic must spend time to find out what other scholars have already said, catch "the tenor of the argument" (p 110), and then find out when and where to join the conversation. Instead of claiming to be unique in addressing the topic of my thesis, I have read enough to know that I will never manage to be fully updated on every relevant contribution that exist, but to also enough to find it applicable to insert my observations into the conversation, as a humble contribution into a constant evolving search for knowledge and understanding.

Rhetoric has the capacity to create, reinforce and challenge social structures, power relations, and belief systems (Ott & Dickinson, 2013). Although it is not possible to conclude on rhetoric's independent influence on the social world, it is valuable to examine the ways in which rhetoric interacts with other social processes and phenomena (Ott & Dickinson, 2013). "If rhetoric is a manner of production, among the most important things it produces are ways of thinking." (Farrell, 1993, p. 153). If rhetoric in action produces ways of thinking, this should, I will argue, necessarily be valid for rhetorical criticism as well, since a goal with revealing the rhetorical grips of a communication piece is to make the reader see it in new and informed ways (Hart et al., 2018). According to Thomas Hollihan and James Klumpp (2020), rhetorical critics should accept their power as morally engaged social actors and use their insights to actively confront the ways in which rhetoric constructs human experience. Instead of detaching themselves from the consequences of their own critical stances, rhetorical critics attempt to enable the readers to understand both the moral and material consequences of particular rhetorical claims, justifications, and strategies (Hollihan & Klumpp, 2020).

Most messages bear the imprints of the social conditions producing them. According to Thomas Farrell (1980), the rhetorical critic treats messages as symptoms of larger social facts. The critic says: "I see a bit of X here and am willing to bet there is more X to be found in society at large." (Hart et al., 2018, pp. 26–27). In this research I want to analyse the words of actors who are actively engaged in empowering Global South menstruators, and ask how their rhetoric contribute to or resist oppression, and how the messages contradict or reinforce the status quo of unequal power relations. When analysing the rhetoric of a speech, I will look for what it says explicitly and implicitly, discuss what this can say about social trends, and use theories that investigate oppression, like feminist-, postcolonial- and critical development theory, to try to explain the power relations embedded in the messages. As a rhetorical critic I will look at the message in light of its context and aim to point out features that the "too involved" might see but do fail to notice (Hart et al., 2018). There are many ways to conduct rhetorical criticism, and for this topic I find Identity criticism and Ideological / Postcolonial criticism to be rewarding approaches.

Identity criticism

Our position in the world shapes our experiences, perspectives, and ways of knowing. In identity criticism there is a focus on the standpoint of the rhetor, which is a useful approach when analysing the ways in which the status quo of unequal power relations is maintained or challenged. Identity criticism can, because of its attention to oppressive attitudes like sexism, racism, heteronormativity, classism, sizeism, ableism and ethnocentrism, be threatening to anyone enjoying privilege (Hart et al., 2018). An identity critic will pay attention to who speaks for whom and on the rhetor's perceptions and agenda. Rhetoric has the power to change behaviour and habits of mind, and identity criticism exist to resist and challenge rhetorical messages and to not take any implication for granted (Hart et al., 2018).

Identification can both split and unite, and rhetoric plays an important role in how and with whom people identify. Burke (1984) desired to increase the capacity of humans to identify with each other, a capacity he believed would foster more caring, just, and forgiving societies. He saw identification as compensatory to division and warned about the dangers of inaccurate scapegoating that misplaced responsibility for social problems on people different from oneself. Burke's writings has, according to Hollihan and Klumpp (2020), influenced generations of rhetorical critics with his view that rhetoric has the potential to enhance the human condition and help people live together more peacefully.

Based on the ideas of identity criticism elaborated in the book *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (Hart et al., 2018), I have composed, and during analysis filled in, the table below as a tool for conducting an identity critique of the rhetorical artefacts of this thesis:

Identity criticism	**Global North view on**		**Global South view on**	
	Self	**Other**	**Self**	**Other**
In what ways does the artefact suggest that members of a particular group look, think, feel, and/or behave?				
How might this message challenge stereotypes associated with the group (gender, race, class, ability, etc.)?				
How might this artefact reinforce such preconceptions and stereotypes?				
How do the Self treat the Others vs the Self? (How are particular people advantaged and/or disadvantaged by such portrayals?).				
What identity markers does the rhetor feature/highlight, and how? About which makers does the rhetor remain silent? What elements of privilege are claimed or questioned? How does these invite audiences to respond?				
What does the rhetor present as "the norm"? Conversely, how might the artefact challenge the norm, inviting the audience to question previously held assumptions (about race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.)? How is the audience invited to understand and value these elements of the artefact?				
Are there specific experiences of people of diverse ages, nationalities, sexes/gender/sexualities, sizes, abilities, faiths, and economic classes (etc.) represented, or are people assumed to be "all the same"? How explicitly or implicitly is this handled?				
What are the implications of these depictions for people (of different classes, sizes, etc.), both in terms of how they see themselves and in terms of how others see them?				

Ideological criticism: Postcolonial criticism

Ideological critics recognise that the greatest oppression of all occurs when our minds are "colonised" by popular discourses (such as modernisation, capitalism, or development) (Hart et al., 2018). A goal for ideological critics, and for me in this thesis, is to expose the power-dimensions within rhetorical artefacts. Ideological criticism serves a lens through which critics focus not only on the rhetorical strategies of a particular artefact, but also on its social and political goals. They focus on the ends as well as the means of rhetoric, and judge those ends. In this sense, ideological critics are more evaluative, although they still must support their arguments with evidence. Three forms of ideological criticism which grew out of dissatisfaction with the established order in Europe and its former colonies are Deconstructionist-, Marxist- and Postcolonial criticism (Hart et al., 2018).

Postcolonial criticism, which is the branch of ideological criticism that I will use in this thesis, theorises not just colonial conditions, but ask why those conditions are what they are, and how they can be undone or redone. Like for identity criticism, postcolonial scholarship concerns itself with issues of power and agency, and carries an activist presumption (Hart et al., 2018). Postcolonial critics practice resistance to Western (mostly European and North American) ideals, and emphasise how Eurocentric (or Americentric) acts and ideas have "colonised" people's minds long after the end of the colonial era. Postcolonial critics pays particular attention to binaries, to who speaks for whom, and to the taken-for-granted "standards" of identity and behaviour (Hart et al., 2018).

As for identity criticism I have, also based on Hart et al. (2018), composed a table to help me conduct an ideological/postcolonial critique of the rhetorical artefacts:

Ideological / Postcolonial criticism	**Global North view on**		**Global South view on**	
	Self	**Other**	**Self**	**Other**
What social or political attitudes or statements would fit with this text? Which would not? Why?				
How is this text contributing to oppression and/or resisting or challenging it?				
Which elements of the message contradict and/or reinforce the status quo of unequal power relations?				
How do the Self and the Other constitute one another in this artefact? Which seductive cultural binaries are presented?				
How do the Self and the Other comply with and resist these mutual constitutions? Who speaks for whom? Whose identities and behaviours are held up as standards to emulate?				
How do these constitutions invite audiences to respond? Does the artefact reinforce or "trouble" (invite criticism of) binaries, or unequal power relations?				

A rhetorical message reflects the *truth* that the rhetor wish to communicate, which is a truth adapted to a specific time and to specific people (Hart et al., 2018). In the process of examining the "truth" that my chosen artefacts present, one can learn much about how the rhetors understand the world. Since it is people's beliefs about the world that leads to action, it is more interesting to find out what people believe than to do the impossible task of finding the "ultimate truth". With *belief* I mean both the conscious thoughts and attitudes, like "The world is unjust and needs to change", but also unconscious thoughts and attitudes that one not necessarily would want to acknowledge, or even recognise, like "Africans are passive and helpless, and in need of foreign assistance".

Strengths and weaknesses of design choice

Drawing on the described approaches, I will examine rhetorical artefacts from two representative MHM organisations that will be presented in the following chapters. I will process the different messages through the lenses of identity criticism and postcolonial criticism and pay attention to what the massages can tell us about various forms of coloniality of power. There are many other ways I could have approached the topic of this thesis. However, I believe I have found a suitable approach to gain insight and understanding on this complex and multifaceted topic, where my choices are rooted in scholarship, while at the same time allowing some freedom of thought. I believe that this informed, yet intuitive, process is an appropriate and productive way to answer my research questions. It is *informed* through various disciplines and the broader scholarly conversation, and it is *intuitive* in the way that I am not limited by methodical tools to decide what is interesting, valuable, and relevant to include or exclude.

Just like "every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing." (Burke, 1935, p. 49), my approach and focus will necessarily mean that I overlook other things and factors that could have been of interest and relevance. This will always be the case within soft sciences (*Soft Science: Dictionary*, n.d.). By choosing only a few artefacts for in-depth examinations I may consider findings from within the artefacts to be representative for the organisation, when instead it should have been attributed to the personal perception of the rhetor. Similarly, because I have considered the organisations representative for comparable organisations, I may end up making assumptions about these without necessarily being correct every time. Another weakness is that I have chosen to talk about *Western* MHM organisations, which then include organisations from a multitude of

countries. I have done this because I argue that there are enough similarities to consider them as one group, although it would have been even more correct to talk about North American and Ugandan organisations rather than Western/Global North organisations and Global South organisations. Based on this, I urge the reader to keep in mind that although there are similarities in the big lines, there may be individual differences and characteristics on the ground of each organisation and within each country.

Although I see many possible advantages in quantitative research methods, I will argue that what I give up in scope by instead choosing a qualitative approach, I get back in form of in-depth insight. As a rhetorical critic I will constantly look for evidence for general tendencies within the particular findings (Hart et al., 2018). I am not after judging an individual for her perceptions and worldview, for we are all products of our time and place. Instead, I want to use the speeches conducted by actors actively engaged in reducing inequality and ask how their rhetoric contributes to, or challenge, oppression and power inequality. Since no research method is perfect, my choice of approach comes with certain trade-offs. This examination will, for instance, not be representative for the past, nor for the future. It can, however, serve as a snapshot in time and say something about where we are right now.

Positionality and ethics

Commenting on systems, structures, and tendencies in a world where we all have been randomly placed into various positions of privilege and opportunities through the birth lottery, is a difficult task. Because we all have different standpoints, it is impossible to be neutral when encountering topics involving international relations. I have no choice but to examine this topic with all my privileges, biases and moral convictions that lurks in my luggage. Since big portions of this thesis will consist of my analysis and reasoning it should be viewed as exactly that—*my* analysis, and *my* reasoning; A white, Western, privileged young woman, currently pursuing an academic degree.

In the same manner as I will attempt to analyse my data critically, I urge you, who read this, to be critical too, since I, with my own agenda, will take use of rhetorical tools when presenting this thesis. As Hollihan and Klumpp (2020) explains it, rhetorical critics who want to confront the injustices that they observe, cannot dethatch themselves from the consequences of their own critical stances. I therefore need to have a sceptical stance

towards all truth claims, including my own. When interpreting findings, I should consider the cultural and historical context, any political or ideological interest they may serve, and how they may function to disadvantage or misrepresent certain people or groups.

This research project would not look the same if it was conducted by someone with a different geographical or disciplinary background than me. An American psychologist would probably enter this topic differently from a Ugandan historian or an Indian anthropologist. Instead of being a weakness, I consider it a strength that a topic can be addressed and processed from many different angles and approaches. Each perspective will contribute to the larger conversation with new pieces of information and insight. As long as the reader is aware of who is making the claims, and takes a critical and curious stance, I am convinced that there will be something for everyone to extract from any perspective presented, also mine.

There will, in any case, be challenges and ethical considerations to make. It may, for instance, be problematic to criticise the use of narratives about victimised individuals as means for the purpose of fundraising, when I reuse the exact same narratives as means to bring out a point in this thesis. This could, also in the case of this research, be considered as using someone who has not been given their own voice. My argument for still reusing such examples is that these stories continue to circulate on the internet, and I am of the conviction that the use of such narratives and representations should be scrutinised and questioned.

Another challenge is the division between Global North and Global South, Self and Other and other binaries that I fear may contribute to maintain a constructed and unnecessary distance between people and places. How then, to name a "group" of people whose ancestors have experienced the world from the oppressors or the privileged side, or those whom historically, and still today, has experienced different forms of structural oppression and discrimination? I am becoming increasingly aware of the many challenges I will face when addressing this thematic, since studying other rhetors' use of words makes me increasingly aware of my own. However, now that I have accounted for my position and bias, laid out some foundational theories and concepts, historical context and choice of approach—with its gains and trade-offs—I suggest that we critically and openly start to explore the data material that makes up the main findings of this thesis.

The deep dig

Sometimes archaeological breakthroughs happen by accident. Someone may dig unsuspectingly in the ground to clear a construction site, just to discover something shiny and odd deep in the soil. An archaeologist's closer look at the artefact may lead to the conclusion that this is a finding of significance, and that the surrounding area potentially is an important historical site. While construction plans have to be put on hold, archaeologists start to dig deeper where the first artifact was found, while simultaneously doing a wider search in the area, in hope to find other historical treasures that can contribute with evidence to what once was taking place on that very ground.

This analogy takes us to the main part of this master thesis, where my findings will be examined and reflected upon. Like someone digging to prepare for construction, with no intention to find a historical artefact, I was digging for something else when I came over the "spearhead" that has become the topic of this master thesis. I will now, like an archaeologist, dig deeper into this finding, study it closely and see what exists in the details. An archaeologist would not bring back every rubble and bit from a site, but search for pieces that can give explicit information about when, how and who. Similarly, I will not bring back every single observation I make either, but extract information about the specific things I am looking for to answer my questions, which in this case are Western representations of Global South menstruators. After extracting relevant information from this artefact, I will zoom out and look for what exists in the surrounding landscape. This wider search will include other examples, artefacts, systems and structures that will enable me to reflect on the implications of my findings in a broader context. In the spirit of this analogical entrance, this chapter has been named "The deep dig", while the next chapter will be "The wide search".

Context

In the previous chapters I have covered some theoretical and socio-historical context preparing for this part, and I will here, before moving on to examine the chosen rhetorical artefact, briefly lay out some of the immediate context surrounding this specific information piece. The main artefact is a 18:33 minute long TEDx talk, performed in Bellingham, Washington in November 2013, by Celeste Mergens, the founder of one of

the world's largest Menstrual Hygiene Management organisations, Days for Girls (TEDx Talks, 2013) [26]. The US founded organisation shares many traits with other MHM organisations that I have examined, and can therefore, according to my observations, be considered representative for a big portion of Western, especially North American, MHM organisations and the discourse that these operate within. The TEDx talk includes descriptions of the events that triggered the creation of the MHM organisation, it describes and explains the roles and characteristics of both the Global North- and the Global South partners in the development relationship, and it use narratives and portrayals to move the audience, all very typical rhetorical tools within the development discourse (Hesford, 2011).

Days for Girls and Celeste Mergens

Days for Girls (DfG) is a North American NGO and social enterprise, founded in 2008 by US citizen Celeste Mergens. The organisation provides menstruators from low- and middle-income countries with reusable menstrual pads, supplemented with health education and training. The goal of the organisation is to "increase access to menstrual care and education by developing global partnerships, cultivating Social Entrepreneurs, mobilizing volunteers and innovating sustainable solutions that shatter stigma and limitations for women and girls." (*Our Mission*, n.d.). Days for Girls has centre locations in Africa, Asia and South America, and chapter- and team locations in the US, UK, Europe, Australia and Asia. The fact that the active agents mainly are in the Global North, while the targets of intervention mainly are in the Global South is of great relevance for this thesis. Of the total menstrual kits that Days for Girls produce, 55 % are donated to countries in Africa, followed by 22 % to countries in Asia and 16 % to counties in Latin America. Two thirds of the kits are made and donated by teams and chapters in the Global North, while one third are sewed and sold by locally based enterprises in the Global South (*Days for Girls - Annual Report*, 2019).

Days for Girls' main sponsor is the charity foundation of a multi-level marketing (pyramid) company called dōTERRA Essential Oils[27]. Among other sponsors are

[26] See Appendix for full transcript.

[27] dōTERRA is criticised for exploiting vulnerable women through enrolling them into pyramid schemes and for falsely claiming that their essential oils can cure autism, cancer, Ebola and Covid-19. Of dōTERRA's more than 3 million (mainly North American) door-to-door sellers, 94 % earn less than one dollar per month, while the ones at the top of the pyramid earns billions (Profiloski & Gerdau, 2020). One

Starbucks Coffee, Goldman Sachs (global investment banking) and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The organisation has grown substantially over the 13 years that it has existed. According to its website, Days for Girls has, per 2021, impacted more than 2 million menstruators in over 144 countries (*Our Mission*, n.d.). The organisation has been awarded the Girl Effect Champion twice, won the SEED award for gender equity and entrepreneurship, and been named by the Huffington Post as one of the Next Ten organisations poised to change the world in the next decade (*Global Leadership Team*, 2020).

Days for Girls' founder, Celeste Mergens, has a master's degree in Creative Writing and Literature, and a second in Global Sustainable Development. She has been featured in Oprah's O Magazine, Forbes, and named an American Association of Retired Persons' "Purpose Prize Award winner", a Conscious Company Global Impact's "Entrepreneur of the year", and Women Economic Forum's "Woman of the Decade" (*Global Leadership Team*, 2020).

The growth, scope, visibility and recognition of this organisation and its founder makes me confident that the examination of the chosen speech is of relevance and will give a valuable snapshot of the current state. One should keep in mind that opinions and formulations tend to change with time and new insights. An eight-year-old speech like this could thus be considered outdated considering that my intention is to capture the spirit of the current time. I have, however, accounted for this by searching for newer content, and have come across recent speeches by Mergens where she confirms her wording of the TEDx-talk, which makes me certain of the actuality of the speech. Both in a podcast-interview by dōTERRA from 2019 (*DoTerra Interview DfG*, 2019), and in a podcast-interview by Days for Girls from April 2021 (Williams, 2021c), Mergens use the exact same words, narratives and representations as in the TEDx-talk from 2013. Also on the regularly updated web-page of Days for Girls, a shortened version of the speech is included in a textual version (*Our Mission*, n.d.).

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can ask why an organisation like Days for Girls, who work to empower less advantaged women and girls in the Global South, accept funding that comes from the exploitation of women elsewhere. This is a whole different discussion, but it says something about the organisation's drive to ensure expansion and could serve as an example of coloniality of power.

The TEDx format

TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is a series of inspirational talks presented within a strict and polished format. TEDx is a local version of the more global TED. The "x" stands for "independently organized TED event" meant to enable a multiplicity of participants and a global spread of TED events. Through storytelling and the sharing of "ideas worth spreading" the TED concept aims to bring inspired thinkers together to spread "ideas that matter" (*TEDx Program*, 2021). TEDx events are planned and organised independently by volunteers from the local community. The goal is to spark conversation, connection and community, and should therefore not have any commercial, religious or political agenda. A TEDx event is not supposed to be a stage for professional speakers, but a platform for those who don't often have one. The talks can be watched for free on TED YouTube channel.

As a rule, TEDx talks should last less than 18 minutes and are usually delivered by a single presenter. The events are multidisciplinary and focus on the power of ideas to change lives and the world[28]. TED presentations have a strict frame and should be clean, understandable and extraordinary. On the website for organisers there is a step-by-step-list on how to prepare a presentation from as far as six months before the date of the event (*Outline + Script*, 2020). With this much time for drafts, rehearsals and polishing, one can assume that the words and points finally presented are carefully weighted and purposefully chosen.

The TED guideline urges speakers to be transparent about the basis for any factual claims they make, and open about the scientific evidence they are based on. In the context of this thesis, it will be interesting to see which of the presented "facts" (accepted through revisions) that are taken for granted as truths, compared to claims that need to be supported with evidence. Another guideline is that the talks should not contain a political or religious agenda, nor a polarising "us vs them" language. This is even more interesting in this context, since I will analyse and discuss topics like power, agenda and representations of Self and Others. The TEDx guidelines prohibit speakers from promoting their own products, books, or businesses (*TEDx Rules*, 2020) and it will be interesting to look at how, or whether, Mergens will manage to present her organisation and its products without crossing this line.

[28] American-Nigerian writer, Teju Cole, criticise TED to be a stage for promoting what he calls the "White Saviour Industrial Complex" (2012a), assumingly referring to speeches like the one I will examine here.

When analysing a speech that is as carefully worked through as this one, I have to keep in mind that spontaneous formulations, which could have revealed something important about the speaker's thoughts and perceptions, potentially could be cleared away through revision and reformulated in a more politically correct way. On the other hand, the content that in the end comes through, after comprehensive processing and polishing, is something one can assume that the speaker openly and publicly stands for and wants to communicate to the audience. If I, for instance, find traces of coloniality in a speech like this, we can assume that this force is deeply ingrained and probably unconscious. This TEDx talk thus provides a golden opportunity to carry out a critical and thorough review of its content, and the carefully chosen rhetorical grips that have been made to communicate the message.

The speech

A message can be interpreted in several different ways, depending on what one searches for. There are many interesting elements in this artefact that are worthy attention, but not all are relevant for my research questions, which are concerned about representations and power relations. I will here identify and analyse representations of the Self and the Others and look for messages in the artefact that potentially reinforce oppression or any form of coloniality of power, as well as messages where such forces are attempted opposed or resisted. As a postcolonial rhetorical critic, I will focus not only on the rhetorical means and strategies of the artefact, but also on its social and political goals. I will focus on the ends as well as the means of the rhetoric used, and judge those ends (Hart et al., 2018). To answer my research question, I will keep an extra eye on three forms of coloniality of power: *hierarchies*, *knowledge* and *culture*. I will mainly concentrate on Mergens' words, while simultaneously paying attention to other factors, like her tone, expressions and choice of images, which are all forms of communication that impacts the message. After several rounds of pulling the text apart, categorising my findings and examining details, I shall now assemble the pieces of relevant information extracted, and present it in intuitive sections that hopefully bring out the points that I want to make. In respect of the text, and to avoid judging messages out of their context, I am constantly considering the speech as a whole, although singling out relevant examples.

The 18:33 minute long speech, published on TEDx Talks' YouTube channel in 2013, is, in short, about how Mergens, on a journey to Kenya in 2008, becomes passionate about

the children in an orphanage in the Kibera slum. While thinking of ways to help these children, a question on feminine hygiene, which becomes directive for this narrative, comes to her mind in the middle of the night. The unexpected answer to this question leads to Mergens response, and ultimately to the founding of her organisation, Days for Girls. Throughout the speech she uses ethos, pathos, logos, voice, articulations and images to describe herself and her capabilities, the people she aims to assist, the situation in the areas that she reaches out to, and the problem that she discovers and decides to respond to. Based on these observations I will present my examination in form of three main sections named Ready, Set and Go. More than illustrating a race, these sections are meant to show three main factors that Mergens provides in a process of naturalising her intervention. The first part shows how she positions the Self in relation to the Other, the second part shows how she describes the situation, or the stage, of where she is to act, and the third part shows how the sum of all this gives way for her to take on the mission to intervene. Each part contributes to legitimise and justify her actions and to prove the significance of the organisation that she builds up.

READY: Positioning the Self and the Other

The Self

The very first thing Mergens does when reaching the TEDx stage is to establish ethos, which means convincing the audience about her credibility and why they should listen to her. How, and with what words, she describes herself to the audience can say something about the way she positions herself compared to the other characters of the story, which is a core point of this thesis. Mergens first words are: “So my background is in part Global Sustainable Development.” (0:15). With this she shows that she has relevant theoretical knowledge on the topic she is about to present. She does not mention her main degree, which is in Creative Writing and Literature. The reason for this omission is potentially because of its lack of direct relevance, or to avoid the audience to confuse her narrative with creativity and fiction, rather than facts and true stories. In terms of coloniality of power, the inclusion of her education says something about her valuation of Western knowledge and knowledge production. She wants to ensure the audience in the Bellingham location, and the international audience watching the YouTube-video, that the philanthropist on the stage has relevant scholarly background to guide her actions. This

gives her weight and authority, at least from a Eurocentric (or Americentric[29]) perspective, and a solid position in an imagined human hierarchy.

Mergens explains that her work has turned out to become "one of the keys to reversing cycles of poverty" (0:24). Although she has not yet explained what her contribution is, her statement signals superiority, both in terms of status, knowledge and culture. The statement does not only prove her ability and power to bring change and the importance of her interference. It also, implicitly, communicates that there are "cycles of poverty" out there that need to be reversed by someone like her, who has come "further"[30] on a forthgoing path, broadly understood as *development*. Claiming to have a solution to the challenges that people in oppressed or disadvantaged situations face, is a typical trait of the "modernity project" (Docherty, 2016), which, from colonial times an onwards, has been a perceived mission to civilise and bring modern solutions and technology to "inferior" societies. Mergens expresses surprise that she has come this far in just a few years, which may serve as a humble way to showcase her success and actuality. However, it also demonstrates coloniality of power, or white privilege, in the way that a "random" US citizen can get the access, funds and authority to interfere in more than 140 African, Asian and Latin American countries without notable resistance. Although success and actuality in most cases are positive and desirable outcomes, the very (political, economic, and hegemonic) structures and forces that have enabled this success should not be overlooked. It is precisely because of its ability to hide in the best of acts and intentions that coloniality is so hard to discover and cure.

When telling about her first visit to a Kenyan orphanage, Mergens says: "I was of course really worried that my heart would break." (1:34). She positions herself as a soft hearted, emotional spectator, inviting the audience to immerse themselves and take part of the scene. "But I toughed it up because I believe in experiencing." (1:38) she concludes, portraying herself as brave and wise. Mergens credit her experiences for giving her new insights, explaining that "the question that I learned of, that opened this whole process,

[29] Since the words *Eurocentric* and *Americentric* both refer to the perception of a specific set of knowledge, culture and values as superior and universal, I will, for simplicity, from now on only use the word Eurocentric, which then is intended to also include North Americans, or anyone defined as Western who can be identified with this mindset.

[30] In the history of development, the perception of a linear and upgoing evolution or growth has been common and is still frequently used (Rist, 2008). Examples can be "reaching upwards", "climbing", "coming far" or "lagging behind".

was one so hidden in stigma that not many people have asked it at all until the last few years." (0:37). With this she shows that she has understood something important, making her a pioneer and a crucial part of the story. This statement can demonstrate coloniality of power, both in terms of knowledge production; the way her illuminated approach is a key for reversing poverty, and in terms of culture; the way her progressive modern thinking is not limited by stigma or taboos. "So, I have to give myself that" (0:49) Mergens continues with a smile. She reveals what can be understood as pride and positions herself as a leading role of this narrative.

Coloniality of power surfaces again when Mergens explains what first took her to Kenya, which was to "provide more sustainable education opportunities for secondary school." (0:57). She describes it as a matter of course, with no observable humility or insecurity, that people like herself are capable of solving huge structural problems, implicitly suggesting that this is something the Kenyan society has failed to manage on its own. Mergens' statement reveals different forms of coloniality, in terms of hierarchies; by coming from a better and more developed system, in terms of knowledge; by sitting on the solutions and good ideas, and in terms of culture; by being more modern, updated and progressive than others.

Mergens explains with words and images how political unrest in Kenya made the orphanage even more crowded than before. Demonstrating her power to impact a big number of people, she says: "So, I went to bed trying to think of ways to feed them better." (3:03), before continuing with "Because after all, this was friends of friends, gathering together and passing hat to find ways to help." (3:09). With this, Mergens draws on the stereotypical image of the charitable and philanthropic Westerners, volunteering and working hard to help the helpless. "This wasn't my orphanage, but I wanted to help" (3:12) she exclaims, and thus validates a terminology of ownership of institutions hosting vulnerable people. Western NGOs seemingly taken-for-granted right to own and operate in so-called "developing countries" can bring associations to previous colonisation of people and land[31].

[31] There has the past 25 years been a shift towards a more inclusive term of partnerships in development (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 1998) although criticised by many as empty rhetoric and neo-colonisation (Baaz, 2005; Noxolo, 2006). While the discussions of terminology and its implications goes on, development actors continue to say my/our school, hospital or orphanage (*Orphans in Need*, n.d.).

The examples above show how coloniality of power can be disclosed through the way the Self is positioned compared to the Others. Although admittedly privileged and advantaged, Mergens also shows attempts to adjust and downscale the image of herself as superior. Perhaps to express humility in terms of knowledge, Mergens states that she, through this work, has "learnt so much." (0:32). Later in the speech she elaborates that she has learnt from the feedback from the subjects of her interference, and from her own mistakes. Both of these examples may illustrate attempts to even out the power imbalance between herself as a Western actor and the people that she aims to assist. Some of her attempts to be humble and inclusive seems, however, a bit half-hearted or even sarcastic. When showing an image on the screen of herself and some Kenyan girls she says: "I'm the one with the teethy grin." (6:15). She laughs as she says it, somewhat jokingly stressing the visual difference between herself and the girls. Even if this posed "colour-blindness" was an attempt to proclaim herself as aware of, and resistant to, the colonial legacy of oppression based on race and class, the scene brings attention to visual differences like skin colour, with everything this entails, and serves more to substantiate the differences between the Self and the Others than anything else.

To show that she is updated and ready to break with outdated and insensitive approaches, Mergens says: "It's a miracle in what I like to call questionnairing." (10:31). When explaining this new and progressive approach, Mergens seem to position herself as an advocate for flattening existing power-structures. "You see, we started asking questions. We started asking: How does this work for you?" (8:34). With this she demonstrates that there is an active attempt to contradict the "colonial" way of imposing solutions onto others. "Because after all, how can we be relevant, how can we be culturally, physically and environmentally responsive if we don't ask those we serve what works for them?" (10:35). By demonstrating that she is aware of, and wishes to be sensitive towards, the context she works in, Mergens shows a consciousness that several development initiatives have been criticised for lacking (Hesford, 2011). The approach of questionnairing opens up for communication, although it is still the Western actors who get to ask the questions and to deliver the solutions. If there were any questions going the other way, about the strategy, the hierarchy, the products or the way that everything is organised, these have not been included in this narrative. By using the description "those we *serve*" Mergens may attempt to oppose a top-down approach. Serving someone is the opposite of being powerful, of receiving praise or attention, and is instead to do one's duty to the other. The

word *serve* gives no associations of imposing solutions onto others, of knowing more, or of being higher in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, where former colonised or enslaved people were forced to serve their Western masters, there is no sign of enforcement, degrading or inferiority in the form of serving that Mergens here presents. It can thus seem like her illustration of serving others is more related to how Christianity's Jesus[32] served the ones who followed him, which in no way compromised his authority, power or influence.

To engage the audience, Mergens uses a lot of pathos in her speech, which is an appeal to emotions and a way to convince through creating an emotional response. One way that Mergens does this is through expressing the emotions that she wishes to bring out in the audience. When looking at the video of the speech, I notice some patterns and variations between her facial expressions, her voice and her articulation when talking about, or describing, the different characters of the story. When talking about herself, she often smiles. She appears moved when she, with a smile, credits herself for asking a question that not many people had asked before (0:50). Her smile becomes even wider when she admits how proud she was of herself when providing people in Kibera with sustainable solutions (2:18). This smile could express pride, potentially combined with shyness over proclaiming this pride. Her positive expressions when talking about herself may also function as a strategy to gain goodwill from the audience and make them like her and be positive towards the work that she is doing. The way that she brings her own emotions and experiences into the speech facilitates for the audience to trust her and identify with her. She is not only the narrator, the teller of the story, but also the protagonist, the person at the centre who brings the story forward.

The Others

Although the main character appears to be the Western Self, the story is concerned *about* the Global South Others, which in this case are the menstruators in an orphanage in Kibera. It is because of these less fortunate people, which she has made it her mission to help, that Mergens is on that TED-stage, telling her, and *their*, story. Mergens explains that when she first visited the orphanage, the children captured her heart, "And since I couldn't adopt all 400 of them…" (1:45) she starts, describing them as if they were puppies in a shelter. This statement confirms the notion of the power that she, as a Western actor, has to save and transform lives, while simultaneously stressing, like many

[32] Mergens identifies as Christian (Williams, 2021c).

other actors in the development sector, that the "needy" are overwhelmingly many (Loewenberg, 2014). Only the assumption that these children were up for adoption, let alone transnationally, demonstrates a power-dimension with a taste of coloniality[33].

After her harmless, or harmful (depending on the eye that sees), joke about her wish to adopt all 400 children, Mergens explains that she instead "brought them my gift, sustainable options." (1:48). With this, she shows that she is not letting her soft and caring heart weaken her, but instead uses her knowledge to present better and more sustainable solutions. Again, the communication is that she can offer a form of knowledge that is of higher value and better effect than that of the Kenyan people. One of the sustainable solutions she brought were stoves that would run on saw dust to save scarce firewood. She exclaims: "I was really excited about this, and frankly very proud of myself." (2:13). By this, Mergens aims to persuade the audience to buy this as a success story, even without any evidence of its success other than her own words saying that the stoves may "save them hundreds of dollars a week, that could then be used for food." (2:08). There is no information on whether this stove was Mergens' own invention, but nonetheless she takes the credit for it and expresses pride over having introduced it to inhabitants of Kibera. This is another example of white privilege and supremacy. In the name of development, Western organisations use fields in the Global South as testing grounds for innovations and ideas, based on less scientific evidence than what would have been accepted in the Global North (Mbembe, 2001; *What Went Wrong?*, n.d.).

Mergens explains how she thought she had found her passion in life: "I was gonna help orphanages be more sustainable, liveable, and a little less crowded." (2:22). I would argue that these are ambitious words coming from a foreigner, and that they reveal coloniality of power through the indication that she, as an individual, has power to make such an impact on sustainability, lives and infrastructure in this Kenyan society. When she says: "We were finding sustainable ways for the community to enable themselves to offer this" (1:09), Mergens confirms the notion that "we", the Western Self, can provide "them", the Kenyan Others, with necessary tools to help themselves. There seems to be an attempt here to show that she opposes the typical, paternalistic top-down approach, by acknowledging the subjects in question's ability to help themselves. The attempt fails,

[33] Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) claim that several intercontinental adoption agencies deceive low-income families to give up their children for adoption to Western countries to profit on the adoption parents (Migiro, 2015).

however, to resist coloniality of power when she expresses that it was a “we” that were finding sustainable ways for “them”.

Mergens explains how “amazing volunteers” (5:47) joined together to sow reusable pads that would solve the problems connected with the conventional pads that she had first distributed. The new cloth pads were “All stitched with love. In fact, three of them sowed so fast and furious that their fingertips bled.” (5:56). This feeds to the stereotype of Western philanthropists as loving, hardworking, willing to sacrifice and tirelessly battling for the good (Baaz, 2005). The fact that most of the sowing is done by Westerners to be sent to the Global South is not problematised nor questioned. Instead, the act of sowing is presented as a touching example of empathy and loyalty towards the less fortunate. “But we made it, and we took eight huge duffle bags to Kenya. And they were so grateful when we got there.” (6:04). By saying Kenya instead of the orphanage, Mergens generalises a whole country and makes it sound like all of Kenya were grateful. And by emphasising that “*we* made it” and “*they* were grateful” Mergens expresses a distance between *us* and *them*, confirming all the three forms of coloniality of power that I emphasise in this thesis, through (1) indicating a higher level on the hierarchy, (2) claiming superior knowledge and progressive solutions, and (3) demonstrating that the Eurocentric modern culture, securing hygiene and opportunities, is universally valued and pursued.

“But they have more to teach us besides their love and gratitude.” (6:54), Mergens states. Where the first part of this sentence recognise that the girls have agency and knowledge to offer, the last part confirms the stereotypical image of the humble and grateful, inferior Other. Although organisations like Days for Girls most likely meet other responses than only love and gratefulness, this is a typical representation that development agencies share with donors and other audiences (Hesford, 2011), which signals success and control, and generates goodwill and engagement. Gratefulness equals accept, and thus justifies and supports the continuation of the interventions.

In addition to being described as passive and grateful, the girls are also depicted as active agents, included in the development of the DfG-pad though their role of giving feedback. However, instead of the potentially empowering position this could appoint them to, the representation of them as agents is modified through ridicule. Mergens makes fun of the way the girls speak when they give feedback that the pad shifts forward and makes them

look like a "maan" (9:04). The audience laugh and she corrects the phonology: "Like a mæn" (9:10). Although the joke most likely is meant to be harmless, it reveals a lack of recognition that English is a (colonially imposed) second language and not the mother tongue of most Kenyans. The comment serves to cement the differences between herself and the Others, and although it succeeds in making the audience laugh, the girls that she teases are not dignified through the joke. To make fun of someone who is not there to accept or respond demonstrates the power and privilege that comes with being the storyteller. Although Mergens, with this comment, may wanted to depict the girls as adorable and funny, it suggests a lack of respect for the content of their feedback. This brings the question of whether it is the progressive new approach of "questionnairing" in itself that is being elevated as genius, and not the actual feedback this approach is supposed to lead to. If so, I would go as far as to argue that the whole questionnairing-scheme is a form of "whitewashing" to make the approach look more progressive and ethical than what it really is. This would reveal coloniality in that the approach appears to be inclusive, while masking the fact that nothing much has been done to even out the unequal power-balance.

Mergens shows her response to the girls' feedback: "Okay cops, we'll put pockets at each chin, we've got this." (9:11). By calling them cops, she brings attention to the new (and maybe not prepared for) role of the menstruators. Instead of being silent and grateful they are given a voice, which shows an attempt of adjusting the power inequality between "actor" and "partner"[34]. Nonetheless, by labelling the feedback-givers as "cops" one can get the impression that even simple, and requested, feedback is experienced as bolder and more ungrateful than it would have been if the relation between the parts were equal. Whether the use of "cops" reveals that she is offended by the girls' critical feedback, or that she wants to praise them for using their newfound power to participate, the need to give them a title in the first place, solely for speaking up, shows that such inclusion, because of a deeply embedded coloniality of power, is not an intuitive and integrated thought.

[34] Many terms have been tested to even out power-differences in development projects, like *participation*, *empowerment*, *ownership* and *partnership*. Although the term "partners" communicate equality, Baaz (2005) calls it "empty rhetoric" (p. 9) used to hide the power imbalance that still exist between what was earlier called "donors" and "receivers". Baaz argues that creating of a non-paternalist equal relationship has proven to be difficult in practice.

To credit the girls, Mergens explains that "their wisdom is as great, or greater, than ours." (10:47). While this might be an attempt to challenge the status quo and educate the mainly Western audience that people in the Global South are not dumb or uninventive, Mergens nevertheless contributes to making a division between *us* and *them*. Comparing who has the most wisdom confirms that there is a divide, and although this is an attempt to challenge negative Eurocentric assumptions, it could contribute to maintain a perceived distance that complicates communication, association and understanding.

Calling some of the named menstruators *friends* is a way of challenging oppression and victimising, and to identify with the target group. Mergens explains that one of her friends, "Diana in Uganda, now makes a living, making pads and teaching others to make pads." (11:13). Mergens here brings empowerment and independence as positive outcomes of the interventions and suggests that the goal is not to keep the receivers of assistance dependent and passive, but that it is positive that some of them are able to take the knowledge on and make their own way. Mergens does not mention if this friend is part of an expanded program organised by Days for Girls or if she works independently of a Western initiator. In any case, the way this woman achieved her new and empowered situation is credited to the organisation.

By mentioning "another amazing hero" (11:23) Mergens opposes the traditional roles of the white saviour as hero, and instead gives this status to 12-year-old Gotsu whom the organisation has reached out to. Her young age contributes to making the story even more extraordinary when Mergens describes what this girl manages to achieve. Although the story is about this girl, it is also about the fruits of the organisation's interference, told to amuse, surprise and engage. Mergens explains how her team provides knowledge via local ambassadors which turn into self-help and empowerment. A locally trained ambassador taught Gotsu how to make pads and left resources. "And see who it was that picked up the ball." (12:17). Mergens explains how the girl, when the DfG-team returned six months later, had taught 200 fellow students how to make pads, and that she no longer considered herself an orphan, but a leader of women (12:36). This story about the extraordinary child becomes a symbol of hope, the inbound will to prosper and the huge ripple effects that the interventions potentially can bring.

SET: Setting the stage

To give content and meaning to the narrative, and to further justify her interventions, Mergens uses much of the speech to describe the situation of the area where she works, to set the stage. Mergens describes a poor Kenya, where only 8 % of the population has achieved secondary education (1:02). With the assumption, which is a broadly accepted notion, that education is an indication of development and success, she is considering Kenya and its systems, cultures and peoples, as lagging behind, establishing the situation in the country as deficient.

In her description of the Kibera slum, Mergens seems to point a corrective finger to the colonial stereotype of Africans as lazy and backward (Siegel, 1989) when saying that the slum "is filled with resourceful people…" (1:25). Although communicating that poverty is denying resourceful people to use their resources, these words implicitly open up for a recognition and critique of still-persisting oppression and exploitation as causes for this poverty. The completion of the sentence, saying "…millions packed in spaces so small." (1:27) can, on the other hand, be understood as objectifying and degrading. People *live* in Kibera, and although one may question to what extent people live under such conditions by choice, they are not passive objects to be "packed". By suggesting that people live too densely, Mergens reveals a Western notion of space as the ideal, not considering that individualism and physical distance may not be universal values. Although formulations like this may help the audience to imagine a situation of many people living on limited space, the rhetoric of saying *millions* without mentioning people, and using the passive word *packed*, and the undefined word *places* (so small), facilitates for associations towards insect colonies, rather than of human beings living tightly in their respective homes. Although potentially an attempt to give an alive description in a few words, no harm intended, such descriptions could be experienced as degrading, homogenising and alienating, maintaining a hierarchy where the Western spectator stays on top, looking down at and describing the Others.

With the sentence: "And they invited us to go see an orphanage there." (1:31), Mergens contributes to spectacularise suffering and legitimise this type of institution. The practice of visiting orphanages or other development projects in low-income countries is a widespread activity amongst Western volunteers, often given names like "poverty porn", "poverty tourism" or "poorism" (Nisbett, 2017; Selinger & Outterson, 2021; Whyte et al.,

2011). This way of spectacularising suffering is meant to trigger empathy, but critics claim that such visits bring more harm than good to the orphanages. While the Western visitors often get credit from people in their home countries as brave, compassionate and noble for going there (Alaso et al., n.d.; Guttentag, 2009), such visits is argued to maintain and reinforce a "white saviour complex"[35] (Africa, 2021). As with many other interventions intended to promote development, orphanages are institutions with dubious effect. According to Stephen Ucembe (2020), orphanages contribute to *creating* orphans. Many African children are not orphans in the word's true meaning but are placed at orphanages by parents who cannot afford to give them what they need. Even for those children who have lost both parents, there would be, in most cases, extended families who could have cared for them, if the orphanages had not made the institution the natural and encouraged option (Chege & Ucembe, 2020). By making the Kenyan orphanage a central part of the story, as the place where Mergens was inspired to develop and test out her idea, she indirectly naturalises and approves the existence of orphanages instead of questioning whether such institutions, which is a legacy after colonial rule (see Chege & Ucembe, 2020), is an acceptable option for disadvantaged children and families.

As part of setting the stage, Mergens brings the audience into scenes of poverty and structural challenges in Kenya. She makes sure to include "the election violence of 2008" (2:29) which adds the drama that any good story needs, but she skips explaining the political situation or the causes of the violence. She continues, with wide eyes, using pathos to bring life to the dramatic scene: "Machetes and fires and people displaced and killed." (2:36). With such descriptions, and with the lack of context and scope, Mergens risks reinforcing stereotypical images of Africans as uncivilised and violent (Baaz, 2005; Mbembe, 2001). By mentioning the traditional agricultural tool *machete* as a weapon, she may strengthen existing notions of Kenyans as exotic or backward, and thus reinforces the difference between the Self and the Others.

A highlight of the story is when Mergens discovers, in form of a voice (from God?[36]) in her dreams, the million-dollar question. "And one night I went to bed with that inside me, worried about their hunger. So, imagine my surprise when I woke up at 2.30 in the

[35] I explain this term on page 84.

[36] The rhetor is a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Bobel, 2019), which makes me assume there is a possibility that she assigns this voice in her head a level of holiness.

morning, not with questions of solar lighting and solar solutions and food, but this question: Have you asked what the girls are doing for feminine hygiene?" (3:18). The question both reinforce and oppose coloniality of power at the same time. By recognising that the children in the orphanage are like anyone else, including the experience of menstruation, Mergens aims to demonstrate a collective "us". Nevertheless, the fact that this realisation came as a revolutionary eureka-moment, that "no-one" had thought of before, only confirms how great the distance to, and lack of recognisability with, these Others has been. Mergens continues: "I hadn't even thought of that question. It had never occurred to me. It was on none of the lists of any of the solutions I saw for it enabled." (3:43). She presents the idea as a revelation that surprised her in the middle of the night, both renouncing and taking credit for the idea at the same time. She presents this insight as elementary and significant, attempting to persuade the audience to believe that this is a crucial breakthrough.

The way that Mergens talks about this discovery fails to show any recognition or understanding that menstruation has existed and been "managed" in Kenya just as long as any other place inhabited by human beings. She instead adds a sense of urgency to the narrative when continuing: "I was stunned and I flew from my bed and ran as fast as I could to the computer to email this question, and to my surprise got an immediate answer."[37] (3:52). Adding that the answer comes immediately reinforces the sense of urgency. "And the answer: Nothing." (4:03). With this word Mergens has stated the Problem with big P, which is the reason for founding her organisation and for preparing this TEDx-talk. "Nothing. They wait in their rooms." (4:05). This has become a well-sited sentence in media, interviews and talks[38] demonstrating the urgency of an extreme and unbearable situation. Mergens expresses a disbelief that she invites the audience to take part in, by repeatedly asking herself how this could be possible. This demonstrates both pity and empathy towards those at the bottom of the hierarchy and facilitates for the feeling of shock and wonder over how these menstruators in Kibera go through their periods.

[37] On the DfG webpage, it reads that the person she emailed was the Assistant Director of the orphanage.

[38] A Google search for "Nothing. They wait in their rooms" results in more than 1700 hits referring to this very story.

Without saying it explicitly, the speech reveals an understanding that Eurocentric modernity, with its products, facilities and welfare, is superior to, and should be the desired goal for, poor and "less developed" places, like Kibera. Mergens elaborates, with a face and voice expressing the sadness and disbelief that she wants the audience to feel: "The answer was: They sit on a piece of cardboard." (4:19). She uses the momentum of this shocking discovery and adds: "And it turns out that, all over the world, if women and girls want the dignity of being freed from their room, if they want to participate in education or supporting their family, and not being without hygiene…" (4:22). This sentence is very generalising, and becomes even more controversial when continued with: "…they have to resort to things like leaves and newspaper and trash, or unsecured cloth, or leaves… I said that already (laughs), corncobs, cornhusks, bark, stones. Anything to not have to stay in their room, because they are not there by choice." (4:34). These descriptions are shock-factors of the story, also well-cited in texts about the organisation, as well as central on their website. Such rhetoric, inviting horror and disbelief, and triggering empathy through the emphasis on suffering, comes with the potential side effects of reinforcing stereotypical images of Others as dirty and primitive.

Through describing and demonstrating how poverty makes people choose food over menstrual care, Mergens adds: "And that too turns out to be true all over our planet." (5:32), which again reveals coloniality of power through generalisation. By not mentioning any examples of who these other people are, it is impossible to control the truthfulness of the statement. Independent on the level of truthfulness, the statement contributes to homogenising a big part of the world's population, and thus reinforcing existing perceptions of differences between "us" and "them". These descriptions portray a choice between degrading and harmful practices on one side, or confinement and starvation on the other side, and give the impression that there is an uncountable number of people in the world who live in this situation, trapped and in despair, waiting to be saved.

Using pathos, Mergens turns quiet, looks down, and puts her hand on her heart after describing the misery that menstruation brings to people, before lifting her head and naming, with tears in her eyes and a moved voice, her organisation, Days for Girls, for the first time in this speech (5:40). I cannot tell whether these are sad tears, provoked by the magnitude of the problem, or happy tears, moved by the assumed impact that the

organisation has for Global South menstruators. Maybe it is both, since touching the audience with the problem and then serving a solution is a clever rhetorical act to create engagement. Another thing she does to engage the audience emotionally, is to speak to them as if they were part of the story, which they potentially could be if they decided to donate or volunteer. Whenever talking about the volunteers, Mergens lifts her eyes to the audience, and her voice becomes louder and more cheerful (5:47), inviting them in. When shifting to the menstruators and their situation, her head and voice again drops (7:37). However, one cannot convince purely through emotions, at least not in the long run. To succeed in engaging people, the whole set up has to make sense. To make sure of this, Mergens makes use of logos throughout her speech. Logos appeals to the logic sense and is a way of persuading the audience by reason. Reason can both be made by using numbers, facts and statistics, but also to rationalise on human characteristics. If the Western Self is represented as strong and inventive, and the Global South Others as weak and passive, it seems only logical and right to reach out a helping hand. While this hand may have the best intentions, it does not, as we will see below, always demonstrate cultural, economic or environmental relativism and sensitivity.

"I'm embarrassed to say that it didn't occur to me that there was no place to dispose of these disposable things I'd sent, right?" (6:22). With this, Mergens admits her shortcomings, which can be a way of resisting the colonial notion of Western knowledge and solutions as superior. At the same time, it can also show how unthinkable it is (for her) that there exist places with no sufficient systems for waste disposal, which in that case instead brings attention to the shortcomings and backwardness of the Others. She explains how soiled, disposable pads were placed in gaps in the fence surrounding the latrines, and "filling the pit latrine that had to be shovelled with… by hand." (6:39). The statement is possibly meant to trigger an understanding of the urgency and necessity to find a solution, but it also risks facilitating for a feeling of disgust. Is she sure about her claim that the girls shovel the pile of latrine waste by hand, and does this mean by bare hands or by using a tool? To underline her point, Mergens says that such circumstances "adds to health issues and stigma against women and girls, the very thing we were trying to avoid." (6:46). Although Mergens may be right that having to dispose of soiled pads in places visible to others adds to existing stigma and shame, she does not seem to reflect upon the role of menstrual products, with its core argument to hide one's menstruation, in reinforcing menstrual stigma. As Bobel (2010, 2019) notes, the constant focus on

products' ability to hide one's menstrual status fails to communicate that this bodily process is normal and healthy and not dirty and shameful.

When the girls were asked for feedback on the later introduced DfG cloth pads, they mentioned the problems of washing and drying the pads in public, and that they instead dried them under their beds. Mergens explains: "in other communities it was taboo to have them hanging out. Anything menstrual related is completely taboo." (9:23). By explaining that it is taboo in *other* communities, no one can correct her on whether this is the case in the community of this specific narrative. In addition, she uses the word *was* rather than *is*, which further softens the claim. Such word-juggling can serve as a way to hold on to the image of an exotic taboo, even in cases where there is a lack of sufficient evidence to claim so. By generalising and saying that anything menstrual-related is completely taboo, without explaining whether she means universally or in the places her organisation operates, Mergens leaves it to the audience to decide. From the way the story is built up it can seem like she wants the audience to apply this taboo to poor, uninformed communities and not to the progressive "modern" world. The possibility that menstrual stigma in the Global South is fuelled by Western (consumerist) notions on cleanliness, respectability and shame (Bobel, 2019; Lahiri-Dutt, 2015), is not considered in this narrative.

The danger when a spectator gets to tell the story of others, who are not there to correct or confirm the content, is that the representation consists of the storyteller's own perceptions mixed with the images she wishes to serve the audience, which it not necessarily reflecting the full truth. To strengthen the shock-factor of her story, Mergens chooses to describe strategies for absorbing menstruation that is by no means representative for the majority of the menstruators in the countries her organisation operates in (Agarwal et al., 2018). She has the power to present such claims because her main audience is not familiar with the areas that she refers to ("all over the world" can be anywhere or nowhere). Instead, the audience—including the TED censors that has let this through—depends on trusting that the information she shares is correct. Conflicting with Mergens' undocumented descriptions is the fact that the majority of menstruators in low-income countries who do *not* use conventional products, instead use cloth, pieces of fabric that can be thrown or reused (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013; van Eijk et al., 2016), and not materials like leaves, trash, bark, and stones.

Expressing that alternatives to conventional pads are dangerous and unhygienic is degrading towards Global South menstruators, and signals a perception of less civilised people, although hidden behind the excuse that poverty is the explanation for this. If there are menstruators who use the alternative methods mentioned, they are here dishonoured by having their practice taken out of context. Absorbable banana-leaves can work in a sufficient, dignified, and not least, environmentally friendly way in places where these resources are available, and free bleeding into suited ditches of sand or stones may be the desired approach in places where such is practiced, and not necessarily associated with suffering, desperation and confinement (Bobel, 2019; Joseph, 2017; Knight, 1991). Instead, with the notion that the Western way of "managing" menstruation is the only proper way, these descriptions serve as spectacular images that are meant to move and affect the audience to understand the importance of the interventions soon to be presented.

GO: The power and privilege to act

After discovering the Problem, Mergens demonstrates her power to act, and her personal significance, by saying: "I knew I had to do something." (4:57). She lights up, proclaims hope and appeals to emotion, before again landing in reality: "And I wish I could tell you that my first response was something innovative, but it wasn't. It was to provide disposable pads." (4:59). Here Mergens decides to share her lack of sufficient considerations of the context. She has demonstrated coloniality of power by implementing a Western solution, and in her speech, she admits that this was not a good idea. Although this concession proves a newly won humility and respect for the context she is in, the unapologetic way she admits her mistake indicates that it is okay to try and fail, even though the testing ground consists of real people and their living environment. She excuses her slip with: "After all that's what I'm familiar with." (5:08). Later in the speech this happens again when Mergens describes an early version of the reusable pads: "We made them with ribbons at the end, and a pad that looks like a pad and of course we made them white because that's what pads are, right?" (8:52).

Explanations like "that's what I'm familiar with" and "that's what pads are, right?" can be understood as ways to admit and excuse her human errors, but they also reveal an instant (Eurocentric) assumption that her own (Western) ways of doing things is the better option. It may also be a way of saying that only what is good enough for her should be good enough for others, with an intention of expressing a wish for equality, where everyone is

worth the same and deserves the same. The question is, good enough according to who's standards and directives? Why should the Western standard be the one to emulate? These examples shows that coloniality of power is both found in the unconscious moments where unintentional notions guide thoughts and actions, and within sincere and active attempts to oppose this very force. She challenges coloniality by wanting the best for the Others, while her understanding of what this "best" entails, which is based her own standards, does the exact opposite. It is precisely because of these infiltrating properties of coloniality that I am conducting this research. It takes a trained critical mind to notice, and steer away from an in-built, naturalised coloniality, and my argument is that there is a need to actively look for such forces to be able to tackle and eliminate them.

One example, where the wish can seem purer than the result, is the strategic way Mergens includes the voices of the girls in the narrative. This grip makes them seem included in the narration of their own story, but the main goal seems to use this as a way to demonstrate the organisation's impact on their lives. Mergens retells how the girls exclaimed that this intervention had saved them from danger and exploitation: "Before you came, we had to let the teachers and principle use us if we wanted to stay in class." (7:03). In a way suggesting that this situation applies to all of them, on a regular basis, Mergens elaborates: "In order to not be bound to their rooms on a piece of cardboard going without even food and water, unless someone remembered to bring it to them, they had to be exploited." (7:26). In addition to generalising the group of many hundred girls, she also generalises the adults around them, potentially reinforcing stereotypical notions of the Others as brutal, driven by sexual desires and obstacles for progress (Mbembe, 2001). Mergens depict girls stuck between two inhuman options of suffering, with no way out, unless saved. Instead of acknowledging the complex situation that the girls are in, structurally and individually, Mergens, through conscious rhetorical choices, reduces everything into one single problem, with one simple solution. The chances are higher that potential donors will be moved to contribute when presented with simple and tangible factors, compared to a complex, multifaceted reality where even the effect of the supported interventions are uncertain.

To further stress the pressing circumstances of the menstruators, and thereby defend intervention, Mergens explains: "It was a choice they made because if you've dropped out of school and you're an orphan, your consequences and opportunities almost all include

being exploited." (7:38). With no statistics or resources to confirm her statement, Mergens affirms the stereotype of the vulnerable and sexually accessible African child (Hesford, 2011). She continues: "If there were only ten girls who could say that changed for them, everything we've done would have been worth it" (7:50). By this Mergens demonstrates that she cares about the individual and not only big numbers. Although it is common for development organisations to aim to impact as many as possible, Mergens wants to communicate that, in her opinion, the individual life counts more than the statistical success of her organisation.

However, as she continues, Mergens reveals that the transformative help has reached many more than ten girls: "Instead, because of amazing grassroot of thousands of volunteers, that stretch from New Zealand to Australia to Europe, all over Canada and all over the USA…" (7:59) (Note that she mentions only Global North countries) "…a magnitude of more than 100.000[39] girls have been reached in five years." (8:11). The statement above reveals how Mergens, not only through words, but also in the practical execution of the interventions, divide the world into one resourceful, progressive and powerful part, and one humble, powerless and receiving part. Taking this for granted, without reflecting upon, or being critical to, where these notions come from, shows how coloniality of power still exists and is embedded in current discourses and consciousness. Mergens illustrates the success of product distribution with an image of a group from Australia who brought pads to Madagascar (10:58). Nowhere in the speech does Mergens explain why pads have to be brought from the Global North to the Global South, or why these groups of Westerners are needed to deliver them personally. Regardless of the role of these groups of visitors there is reason to be critical to the necessity of their presence. Although volunteer trips is a popular practice among development organisations, there are several indications that their presence is not undividedly positive for the communities they intend to assist (Guttentag, 2009).

When the audience applaud over the great number of menstruators reached, Mergens responds: "So, that applaud should go to all of these amazing people." (8:26), again honouring the Western volunteers for their effort in the fight for menstrual equity. Despite the growing international attention towards menstrual health, there is not enough evidence confirming that provision of sanitary products has the profound effects presented by

[39] In 2021 this number has reached over 2 million (*DfG Media Kit*, 2021).

organisations and accepted by donors (Benshaul-Tolonen et al., 2020; Hennegan & Montgomery, 2016). As much as two thirds (*Days for Girls - Annual Report*, 2019) of the DfG-pads are sowed by people in Western countries in their spare time, instead of within the countries where the perceived need is. This carries the potential to reinforce dependency and a loss of agency and control. It is important to remember that Mergens, and the other Western staff and volunteers, most likely are fully devoted in doing good and to empower menstruators in low- and middle-income countries. Nevertheless, the strategies, the control, and the direction of knowledge and products going one way (North to South), and gratitude the other (South to North), shows that Mergens has chosen a way that makes herself and the Western team appear as heroes of the story, and the "receivers" as passive and helpless victims, grateful for whatever they are granted.

Mergens explains how the organisation trains local ambassadors, who knows the language and cultural context, to educate local communities about menstruation and how to make pads (11:34). Although the Western organisation is still the one in charge, providing the knowledge, resources and materials, and thus maintaining a level of dependency from the target societies, it can be considered a step in the right direction that these ambassadors are local and not Western. This is if we take for granted that reaching out to these communities is the right thing to do in the first place, which is a whole discussion on its own. Mergens does admit that distribution of pads is not the only solution and emphasises that all good solutions that humanity can create together weave together (14:00). Here she includes "humanity", and dismisses that solutions only come from the West.

Mergens criticises the Western world for leaving half of humanity, "entire communities and nations, locked behind doors." (14:15). While perhaps referring to the girls confined in their rooms while menstruating, this statement also seems to criticise and oppose the broader Western hegemony and oppression of Global South countries, which continues to confine communities and nations into poverty. This is probably the clearest recognition in the speech admitting that there is still a big gap between North and South in terms of power. Mergens builds up a nerve by first inviting the audience to feel the guilt and discomfort by this claim, before quickly releasing the tension by bringing an alternative to the guilt. She lights up in a smile saying: "we can change this." (14:28). She explains that this injustice affects "all of us." (14:21). This sentence can be understood in at least two ways. It can substantiate the differences between us and them in the way that what

happens to *them* will have consequences for *us*, and therefore we must care (for own good). Or it can mean that *they* are a part of *us* (as a human family) and that it will affect us that our own have to suffer.

"We know that the poverty cycle can be broken when girls stay in school." (12:54). This statement indirectly justifies the focus on pads, since Mergens claims that pads increase school attendance. Here she appeals to logic and provides the audience with reasons to believe in, and support, her work. "It has a major impact and yet we know if a girl stays in school even one more year of primary school, according to several studies, that she will, her whole nation will have a flier growth in national product, she will have less…be less likely to marry early, she will be less likely to die at childbirth and she will be more likely to teach her children and lift her community with her voice and talents." (13:30). By mentioning research and listing up the positive outcomes interventions ultimately will lead to, Mergens is persuading the audience with the effective rhetorical tool logos. Although this statistic may sound great, Mergens has not provided any recognised research on the connection between provision of menstrual products and school attendance. Instead, she presents the organisation's own data.

Mergens gives an example from a school in Uganda that received pads from Days for Girls. She says that before the organisation distributed pads in the school, 25 % of the girls dropped out when they reached the age of menstruation (13:14). One year after the distribution of menstrual kits, this number had dropped to three percent (13:20). These unreferenced, self-reported numbers, which does not correspond with other research on distribution of pads and school attendance in Uganda (Hennegan et al., 2016a, 2016b; Montgomery et al., 2016), serves to prove the effect of the interventions. Such convincing numbers contribute to reinforce perceptions of Mergens and her organisation's importance, and thus their power.

When she says that "we can literally help reverse the cycle of poverty." (13:55), Mergens appeals to the audience as the Western *we* that has power to change the current situation. "We can do this. This is one of the things we can really do." (14:28) she continues in order to engage the audience, implying that the spectators have an in-built power to make an impact. Mergens concludes by presenting the organisation's goal, that by 2022, every girl should have access to menstrual products, with the major help from all the partners and

volunteers (17:48). “We’ll see what we take on next, cause we’re gonna make it.” (17:56) she says with pathos and conviction, inviting the audience in. Mergens lowers her voice, then raising it one level for each phrase in the ending punch-line, before the voice breaks at the second to last word: “We can. We must. Reach every girl. Everywhere. Period.” (18:09). She smiles, seemingly satisfied with her message and her execution of it, and we can hear some subtle laughter from the audience as they pick up the wordplay[40].

Recap

As I hopefully have managed to present to you, we have now been through the Ready, Set and Go of this speech, by first looking at the positioning of the Self and the Others, followed by the stage setting and description of the situation, before ending with the proclaimed justification and power to act. I will argue that this examination reveals the significance and power of representations. It is the representation of the Self as knowledgeable, resourceful and soft hearted, and the representations of the Others as vulnerable, helpless and stuck, that makes this whole intervention acceptable and even praised. Similarly, the descriptions of the circumstances and situation as unbearable and dangerous justifies action, even when this involves using menstruators and societies as testing-ground for measures with undocumented effect. Instead of bringing up questions of whether the involvement, the strategy, or the approach is the right thing to do, the whole text justifies and facilitates for the GO.

Using representations to justify interventions is something that happens in all kinds of international approaches, from past colonisation and well-meant modernity-projects, to the present’s ever-expanding development initiatives. Because of their potential connection to the surrounding landscape, the findings from this artefact scream for a broader discussion. It is not until we can place these examples in a broader context and see them in relation to space, time, other organisations and the world at large, that the analysis and reflections from this speech gets value as an indication of the state of our time. In the next chapter, called “The wide search”, I discuss the power and privilege of representing the Others, look at some major narratives and portrayals, and reflect on the possible implications of these for the represented parts.

[40] Period can mean both menstruation and “full stop”.

The wide search

As Farrell (1980) pointed at, a rhetorical critic treats messages as symptoms of larger social facts. My findings from the in-depth examination of the TEDx talk may thus be just the tip of an iceberg, or one spearhead amongst many. I have, as Hart et al. formulated it, seen "a bit of X here and am willing to bet there is more X to be found in society at large." (2018, pp. 26–27). I am, like an archaeologist, keen to see what more exists in the surrounding landscape, both to control and legitimise the observations made in the main artefact, and to get a wider understanding of the current state of the world. It is when finding generality within the particular that a finding gets broader relevance. My aim with this wide search is to know more about Menstrual Hygiene Management and its place in the development industry as a whole. With the examined TEDx talk as a base, I wish to open up for examples, research findings and theories extracted from, or developed for, the broader MHM- and development industry. Through this, we may get a clearer understanding on the direction that the field and discourse of MHM and development is moving, about current power relations, and about the implications that all this have for the involved parts.

To gain such information, I have conducted an extensive (online) search among MHM organisations globally and found common features amongst them. Of the more than hundred MHM organisations operating in the Global South, almost half are founded and run by Westerners (Bobel, 2019). These organisations are mainly North Americans (with organisations like ZanaAfrica and Afripads[41]) and British (with organisations like Irise International and Binti[42]), followed by a few in other countries, like the Nordic (with organisations like WoMena and The Cup Foundation[43]) among others. It is the Western MHM organisations' representations of Global South menstruators that is the main focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, with half of the MHM organisations being founded in the Global South, it is valuable to include observations made from a deeper examination of artefacts from the South as well, to balance, compare, and to gain new perspectives. In this regard I have conducted an in-depth examination of two rhetorical artefacts extracted from

[41] http://www.zanaafrica.org/ and https://www.afripads.com/
[42] https://www.irise.org.uk/ and https://bintiperiod.org/
[43] https://womena.dk/ and https://www.thecup.org/about-us (Swedish-sponsored, but California-based)

the Ugandan-based organisation Caring Hearts Uganda. Instead of including a written-out analysis of these artefacts here, I will select relevant examples that add perspectives to the topic of this thesis.

In this chapter I will discuss the potential ways in which examples from the TEDx talk illustrate more general tendencies. I will first discuss what possible power and privilege that lies in representing the Others. From there we will look at the differences in representations of the Self and the Other, from both a Global North- and a Global South-perspective and discuss their implications for approach and interventions. Then I will move on to different narratives and portrayals that I have identified through my wider search, and discuss how these disclose stereotypical representations, instrumental vs intrinsic valuation, the human rights-perspective and the framing of the alleged solution. Lastly, I will look at the implications such representations may have for the Other.

The power and privilege of representing the Others

A message carries the imprints of the social conditions producing it. How someone is represented, and the message in which this representation is placed, may thus give us information about current widespread perceptions and attitudes. If one can find generalisability and common traits between similar organisations and their messages, one will increase the probability that the representations and messages examined in the main artefact reflect existing social tendencies. From my research I have identified several common traits, both in rhetoric, focus and approach, among different MHM organisations. Many of them use, for instance, expressions like "period poverty"[44] to present the problem, which often involves descriptions of lost education and the use of unhygienic or hazardous ways to absorb menses due to lack of conventional products. Most of the organisations present access to adequate menstrual products as the main solution, often accompanied with some puberty education.

A communication strategy common for most MHM organisations is to present a video, or a written story with images, of a young girl telling her story of how hard life used to be before the relevant organisation appeared, and of how the intervention has given her opportunities that she did not have before. Such victimising representations are common

[44] ActionAid, UNFPA, Nobel Peace Center, Irise, AfriPads, and Binti.

not only within Menstrual Hygiene Management, but all over the development industry (Hesford, 2011; Wilson, 2011). Activist groups, like No White Saviors[45], are stressing that the cost that the depicted girl must bear for having her vulnerability captured on the World Wide Web for good, is rarely sufficiently compensated, or maybe even reflected upon, by the organisation depicting her (Alaso et al., 2020). The girl's story is used as a tool to generate attention and money from donors, and it can seem like organisations consider the potential personal cost of the exposed individuals as a reasonable sacrifice, justified by the gains it brings for the bigger cause, and comforted by the belief that the intervention has impacted the depicted individual positively.

To support my claim that the sharing of victimising stories is considered a reasonable sacrifice, or even an active strategy, I will share an example from Days for Girls, whose website has a selection of stories of what is depicted as poor and vulnerable Global South menstruators (*DfG Videos*, 2021). The way that a spokesperson for Days for Girls responds when the act of sharing such stories is addressed as a problem, suggests that the organisation believes in, and is comfortable with, this strategy.

In February 2021, Days for Girls launched a podcast series, bringing up topics related to the work of the organisation. In the second episode, the organisation's communication officer, Jessica Williams (2021), interviews menstrual health researcher Julie Hennegan (whose research I refer to in this thesis) about the importance of research to inform practical policies. Towards the end of the talk, the interviewer asks Hennegan if there is one story, from all of her research on menstrual health in the Global South, that stood out and affected her personally—seemingly looking for a touching contribution to engage the audience of the podcast. Hennegan answers: "Yeah, so I'm probably gonna give *not* the answer that you want to that." (22:07), explaining that she does not like the way that one single story is held up as an example meant to illustrate the truth for a whole group. She says that such stories can be manipulated and used to blow a situation out of its proportions. Stories need to be put in a context, and there is a need to elaborate on what else is going on to get a rich picture. "I love that you shared that." the interviewer responds. "It really illustrates to me that you are a true scientist." (23:31). Hennegan repeats that her answer is not helpful for the podcast, implying that she has noticed that the organisation uses a lot of these single stories that she criticises. But the interviewer says

[45] Further introduced on page 84.

that it's fine and that she wants the listeners to understand her perspective because "you don't often hear that, so I'm glad you shared it." (23:55). However, the topics of episode four and six of the podcast series is exactly about the importance of storytelling within menstrual health, showing that the critique from this researcher, and others with her, does not outweigh the gain of continuing to share spectacular stories.

When a menstruator is portrayed in a certain way, it is not just that one individual who has to face potential consequences of being exposed. It may reinforce stereotypical images of whole groups of distant Others, stereotypes that in the next instance may contribute to curb rather than enable opportunities. When targets of interventions are depicted as uninventive, passive and in need of outside help, it looks more reasonable, and perhaps even necessary, for development organisations to hold on to their powerful positions, instead of stepping aside and give more space to the ones who experience (and thus are experts on) the challenges they are facing. The fact that as much as two thirds of the Days for Girls menstrual-kits are made in Western countries and donated and transported to low-income countries (*Days for Girls - Annual Report*, 2019) could be an example of such retention of power. In addition to keeping power and control in the West, this may also lead to various forms of dependency in the receiving communities.

The reason for keeping much of the production and control in the Western donor-countries may be to create an experience of inclusion, ownership, and thus engagement and commitment, for the contributing donors, teams, and volunteers. Representations of distant suffering adds to this effect, and is shown to contribute in creating what Sharon Silwinski (2011) calls virtual communities of spectator witnesses, which evokes solidarity and a willingness to act for distant others. Critics of such representations argue that the project of capturing suffering visually is doomed to fail, and that the use of representations as a tool is insufficient and inadequate to facilitate for ethical relationship between Self and Other (Cohen, 2001; S. Moeller, 1999, 2002). Research shows how cultural, political, historical and discursive contexts of representations of distant suffering shape, and are shaped by, power relations. According to Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) and Nandita Dogra (2012), representations of distant others are still rooted in post-colonial discursive regimes of truth, which reinforce and transform dehumanising and victimising portrayals of people in the Global South.

The overall message in the MHM discourse is "Give a girl a pad and change the world." (Bobel, 2019, p. 27). By reducing a complex set of issues into a simplified and concrete problem with a quick fix, organisations may contribute to making the population who own the problems, seem either incompetent or self-destructive. If it really was that simple, that provision of products would be the key "to reverse cycles of poverty." (0:24) as Celeste Mergens claimed in the TEDx-talk, why is this not a higher priority in any society who wishes to prosper? Representations depicting vulnerable communities who do not know their own best can perpetuate ideas that those communities need to be saved from their current state, reducing entire cultures and identities into victims.

The examined TEDx talk is full of such representations. Mergens uses the story from the Kibera-located orphanage, with girls confined in their rooms (4:05), bleeding on cardboards (4:19), as representative for millions of menstruators all over the world (4:22). Without providing any other context than poverty, she lists up several harmful and unhygienic alternatives that menstruators use if they want to free themselves from their rooms (4:34). Many of the MHM organisations I have looked at describe the use of "hazardous" materials on their webpages[46]. When people from a great variety of low-income countries, communities, climates and cultures are generalised and seen as "all the same", it increases the risk of approaching people in ineffective, or even harmful ways. When spectators see people in ways that do not fit with reality, the targets of intervention may feel misunderstood, silenced and degraded.

Although the TEDx talk has many examples of representations of menstruators as victims, there are also descriptions and stories of active menstruators, who use the opportunity *granted* to them to reach their potential. The menstruators feedback on the design of the reusable pads (9:04), and the stories of the individuals who made production and sharing of knowledge to a path to prosperity (11:13, 12:17), are some examples. This turn towards more positive and progressive images reflects the evolvement of the development industry as a whole. Over the past decades, representations within the development industry have changed, and although there are still depictions of suffering within current representations, these are nothing compared to the patronising, dehumanising and out-of-context representations presented in the 1970s and 1980s (Cohen, 2001). As a reaction to this

[46] The Cup Foundation https://www.thecup.org/ is a clear example, depicting images of insufficient menstrual materials on their website's front page accompanied with big, red letters stating: "The Problem."

misrepresentation, development organisations began, in the 1990s, to use more positive images in order to depict their targeted populations as dignified and empowered agents, situated within a social, cultural and geographical context (Dogra, 2012; Wilson, 2011). It was in this corrective context that the empowered girl emerged as a key role in development (Hayhurst, 2011; K. Moeller, 2013).

Looking at the TEDx talk, there are both depictions of suffering and homogenising of scenes taken out of context (women and girls "all over the world" sit on cardboards while menstruating) and of more positive images, where individuals, like Gotsu, becomes the *shero*[47] of the story with her perseverance and cleverness (11:25). This duality illustrates the challenges of moving on from well-established strategies of gaining attention and donations, towards a more dignified approach, which in the next turn has its own set of challenges. Intensified competition and public scepticism towards organisations' efficacy and legitimacy has challenged the positive imagery of the Global South menstruator. Commercial media and consumerism are, according to some researchers, leading organisations towards a more corporate and competitive logic in their communication and strategies (Chouliaraki, 2013; Dogra, 2012; Orgad, 2013) where strategies to "sell" and expand outweigh ethical considerations.

Kalpana Wilson (2011) —in her examination of gendered and racialised representations within the current development industry—argues that contemporary representations of people targeted for development initiatives conceal relations of oppression and exploitation and hold on to a neoliberal model. According to Wilson, the new and more empowering representations of women and girls in the Global South are still racialised and victimised, only in new forms. Empowerment and agency are projected as gifts to be granted by the donor, and as something one can achieve only by doing "as prescribed", which implicitly reaffirms the civilising mission from the colonial era. Wilson argues that the development industry does not portray agency as having free choice over own lives, but to be transformed into hyper-industrious entrepreneurial agents. Women in the South are portrayed as in need of being "'rescued' from oppressive and 'backward' societies and 'civilised' through subjection to the discipline of global markets." (Wilson, 2011, p. 329).

[47] Female hero.

So far, we have touched upon the power and privileges of being the teller of the story, which involves being the one who chooses the perspectives, what to highlight and what to overlook. Representations and descriptions can be shaped according to underlying goals, and an effective way to cement a selected version of the truth, is to establish clear distinctions between the Self and the Other, where the first is given space to speak on behalf of the latter.

The Self versus the Other

The act of representing an "Other", is also an act of representing the "Self". As Sami Schalk (2011) notes, the Self is defined through describing the not-Self, the Other. A promo-video on Days for Girls' webpage shows a white, North American woman telling "her" period-story. She describes how her period forced her to use dirty materials, like leaves and corncobs, that gave her infections, and how her period made her drop out of school, become a young mother and resort to sex-work to provide for her children. "Of course this is not my story," —she says in the end of the video—"…but for millions of women and girls around the world this is a real possibility". "And the solution to a secure life is *this."* she says, holding up a menstrual pad (Ruth, 2014). As with most of the other videos shared from Days for Girls and other MHM organisations, the pad is presented as the silver bullet that will change the menstruators life and ensure safety and opportunities. What is different with this video compared to the more common videos depicting Global South menstruators' ostensibly true life-stories, is the use of a white, young, North American woman to tell a story that could "of course" [her words] never be her own. This is a rhetorical choice probably meant to make it easier for the Western spectator to identify with the *real* victims, the distant Others, through asking themselves: "What if this was me, or someone I knew?"

My reason for bringing up this video here is that it says something about the representation of the Self. It reinforces the contrast between the Western Self and the Global South Other by facilitating for a reaction of shock and disbelief that a North American young woman could own such a tragic fate. Although succeeding in not exploiting Global South menstruators' personal stories, the video generalises the lives of "millions of women and girls around the world". And although communicating that what is not okay for "us" should not be okay for "them" —which can also be problematised as Eurocentrism—the communicated *impossibility* that a Global North menstruator can go

through hardships comparable to those of Global South menstruators, contributes to reinforcing the differences between the Self and the Other. When the problem is the representation of the Others as helpless victims, it does not help to exchange the coloured, Global South menstruator with a white, North American girl to tell the story of the coloured girl.

According to Maria Eriksson Baaz (2005), the identities of development actors cannot only be understood in the relation to the here-and-now-experience of development work. "They must also be situated in the context of more general discourses constituted by colonial history." (p. 32). It is for this specific reason I find it important to examine the rhetoric and representations of MHM- and development organisations. One can despise and wish to counteract on the unequal power relations introduced in the colonial era, but this requires an awareness of how one's identity and perception of the Others has been affected by the socio-historical context of the colonial past and postcolonial present. If one is not aware of one's charged legacy, and the persisting forces of coloniality of power, I suspect that there is a higher probability of falling into patterns that many idealistically wants to break with.

The examined TEDx talk provides representations of both the Self and the Other, positioning the Self as the main character, or the protagonist, of the story. A protagonist is the one at the centre of the story, the one making the key decisions and the agent bringing the story forward. Although Mergens tells stories of other individuals, it is *she* who tells these stories, from *her* perspective. She is the person we get to follow, from her first meeting with the children of the orphanage, to her urge to change their situation, to the voice in her dreams giving way for a new and progressive way towards her goal—to free the menstruators from their confined and intolerable situation. I want to stress that even if Mergens invited some of the menstruators to the TED-stage to present their own story, this would not automatically make them protagonists. In MHM organisations' video-stories representing different girls, it is the organisation who function as the agent bringing the story forward. The girls function, as I perceive it, primarily as evidence for the effect of the interventions.

Where the Self, in form of the MHM organisation, mainly is represented as the bearer of resources, power, and agency, the Other, the Global South menstruators, are represented

as passive victims with lack of resources and power to change their situation. They are victims of poverty, and a rough, ruthless, patriarchal culture, in need of help, education and materials. The Global South menstruators' role in the story is to be humble, grateful, innocent, adorable (even adoptable), and full of potential, eager to learn and hopeful of the opportunities that the philanthropic spectator can give them. Mergens is silent about any contradicting traits, like those who might not be grateful, adorable or eager to learn. Instead, the artefact presents Others who praise the Western actor as a hero that changed their lives for the better, saving them from exploitation, confinement and humility. This "generous giver"/ "grateful receiver" binary is a rhetorical grip meant to seduce and move a Western audience. Such representations may also secure a power to interfere without being constantly scrutinised by critical eyes. Although the speech is available online for audiences all over the world, the lack of context and nuances suggests that it was not directed towards a Global South-audience.

As it has emerged from my extensive search, the Western hygiene-situation is presented by MHM organisations as the standard for Global South menstruators to emulate. There are, however, few signs in the MHM discourse suggesting that targets of interventions should become like Westerners in areas concerning power and agenda-setting. This approach, implying that the Others should adopt Western standards and norms but stay humble and "inferior", resembles Bhabha's description of the power-conserving colonial mindset of making the colonised more like the whites, "but not quite" (1994, p. 86). Focus on the differences and distance between the Self and the Others—like when Mergens brings attention to the visual differences between herself and the Kenyan girls (6:15) — may halter recognisability and a mutual understanding that could have facilitated for respect and a common ground between Self and Others. In fact, Mergens reveal in several interviews (*Celeste Mergens and the Fight against Period Poverty*, 2018; Williams, 2021c) that she grew up in poverty[48] in the US, and that it makes her identify stronger with the Global South menstruators than if she didn't have this experience. The founder of the Global South-organisation Caring Hearts Uganda, on the other hand, says she has never experienced poverty herself (Chano8, 2016), although witnessing childhood friends becoming victims of poverty. Binaries that place you in one of two separate camps may

[48] In an interview to Callaly Journal, Mergens says: "As a child I went homeless during periods of my life, and I'd go without food for several days sometimes." She explains that her family moved 32 times before she reached the age of 13, and that her childhood was filled with abuse and chaos (2018).

serve commercial and economic interests for development organisations, but it does not represent the reality where one can take up many roles at the same time and move fluently between connectedness and distance. One can only imagine the dialogue and opportunities that would come out of shifting the focus from what separates the Self and Others, and instead find a common ground to stand on.

The depicting of the Self as saviours of the Others, is sometimes named the "White Saviour Complex". The Uganda-based activist group No White Saviors[49] explains that development organisations can mean well, do some good along the way, but still be perpetuating the white saviour complex (L. Taylor, 2019). The full term is "White Saviour Industrial Complex" and was first coined in 2012 by the American-Nigerian writer, Teju Cole, after the release of the controversial American documentary "Kony 2012" (Invisible Children, 2021). The documentary depicts three young North American men who tried to mobilise the world, including American military, to intervene and arrest Ugandan militia leader and child exploiter, Joseph Kony, a campaign that gained huge attention and praise, but had a limited, and disputed effect (Harding, 2012). As a reaction to this white saviourism, Cole shared Twitter quotes like: "The white saviour supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening." (Cole, 2012c) and: "The White Saviour Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege." (Cole, 2012b). With this, Cole refers to the damaging effects of white saviours who prioritise emotional experiences achieved through minor acts of charity instead of tackling issues like oppression and corruption, issues that in many cases have been perpetuated by the Western world (Aronson, 2017). He asks Western development actors to consider the structural underpinnings and historical legacies that sustain the very infrastructure of the problems that is captivating their activist hearts (Talley, 2014).

Representing Others as helpless victims can lead to incorrect narratives of developing countries stuck with poverty, uneducated and uninventive, and in need of a (white) saviour. Such representations facilitate for the white saviour to take a paternalistic role, which creates dependency instead of empowerment and agency. As organisations are

[49] No White Saviors is a social movement connected to the work of the organisation Kusimama Africa, which consists of mainly female Ugandan scholars and activists working to decolonise the development- and aid industry, and give people back their voice and agency while challenging white supremacy and the persistent post-colonial power inequality (Nowhitesaviors, n.d.).

becoming increasingly aware of their white saviour complexes, many are attempting to avoid narratives of white saviourism and to address topics involving Western interventions in a more respectful manner. Although the founder of Days for Girls does not reject her role as a white saviour, she shows a few attempts to downplay it, by admitting her shortcomings and by aiming to give the menstruators a voice, through listening to their feedback and make corrections. While giving some credit to the girls for their contribution, most of the credit is still directed towards herself and her team for coming up with this "innovative" menstrual product and the progressive approach of "questionnairing" (10:31). This way of sneaking credit to the Self into the showcasing of the Others is touched upon by Ofra Koffman and Rosalind Gill (2015). These scholars argue that "girl-powering of humanitarianism is connected to depolitication, corporatisation and neo-liberalisation of both humanitarianism and girl power." (p. 1) . The scholars discuss the implications of the construction of girls as ideal victims and agents for change, and suggest that this approach is not solely about redistribution and justice, but serves to showcase and bring status to the Self as well (Koffman et al., 2015).

So far, in the discussion of representations, I have referred to the Western MHM organisation as the Self and the Global South menstruator as the Other. This brings out the dimension that I am looking for in this thesis, the Global North actors' representations of the Global South targets of interventions. We have seen how Western MHM organisations outpower Global South menstruators by claiming superiority when it comes to knowledge-systems, culture, economy and standards. To learn even more about the Western Self and its representation of the Global South Other, it can be useful to have a look at an MHM organisation that is founded within the Global South. Through examining how a Global South organisation represents Global South menstruators, it is possible to discuss what happens to representations when the storyteller is culturally closer to the targeted menstruators, and to reflect on possible explanations for the differences and similarities between organisations from the Global North and the Global South.

The Global South Self

As supplementary artefacts I have examined two communication pieces presented by the founder of Caring Hearts Uganda, Barbara Itungu Kyagulanyi. Since she has not held a TEDx talk, with its polished and worked-through format, I have looked at two different artefacts in order to have enough data to juxtapose the main artefact with. One is the

founder's self-written story on what led her to start the NGO, posted on Caring Hearts Uganda's website (Kyagulanyi, n.d.)[50]. The other is a video speech posted on YouTube on Menstrual Hygiene Day, May 28. 2019, where Kyagulanyi shares her thoughts on menstrual-related challenges and how to overcome these (Kyagulanyi, 2019)[51]. I will briefly lay out some context around Kyagulanyi and Caring Hearts Uganda.

Barbara Kyagulanyi grew up in Uganda as a daughter of two veterinarians. She has a bachelor in Social Work and Social Administration, and is currently pursuing a master's at Makerere University (Zadock, 2021). She is the author of the book *Golden Memories of a Village Belle* (2012) in which she describes her childhood in a rural village in Uganda. Kyagulanyi is married to musician and presidential candidate for the opposition party National Unity Platform, Robert Kyagulanyi (artist name is Bobi Wine). Barbie, as she is called by her fans, is known in Uganda from the reality TV-show named "The Ghetto President" (Chano8, n.d.) and through her engagement with various charity organisations. In 2015, she was awarded by Decent Africa as the "Most Decent Public Figure" (Baranga, 2016).

Kyagulanyi's organisation, Caring Hearts Uganda, was founded in 2012, and is concerned with issues of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and menstrual health among youth. The organisation teaches girls to make reusable sanitary pads, they provide water tanks and toilets with changing rooms to improve the sanitation facilities for girls in school, and they arrange counselling and motivational events (*Caring Hearts Uganda*, n.d.). Like Mergens, Kyagulanyi is a visible ambassador, and like Days for Girls, Caring Hearts Uganda is a recognised organisation. Although Caring Hearts Uganda is younger and smaller than Days for Girls, the organisation has the necessary components in place to be object for useful observations and comparisons. Instead of presenting a full examination of the artefacts from this organisation, I include relevant examples showcasing similarities, differences and characteristics that are transferred into, or created from, different contexts. Through this, I hope to add valuable perspectives and insights to the conversation about representations and power relations.

[50] See Appendix for full text.
[51] See Appendix for full transcript.

Similar to Mergens, Kyagulanyi, in the two examined artefacts, creates a distance between herself and the Ugandan menstruators, some of whom she grew up with. She describes a wedding scene from her home village as something exotic and different, even to her, as she had the privilege to live away from the village in a boarding school. She describes how she discovers that it is her fifteen-year-old best friend who is getting married, and although this recognition connects Kyagulanyi to the young bride, her shock and disbelief makes a gap between them. She condemns the tradition of child marriages and explains how her friends, one after one, got "married off" and became young mothers, and that they were "harassed" into marriages because of their menstruation (Kyagulanyi, n.d.).

Kyagulanyi recognises that she is in a privileged position to advocate against child marriage and oppression of girls. However, instead of being overconfident about her power to have an impact, she softens her claims by using phrases like: "I can *help* advocate", "I can *possibly* do something", "I can *possibly* speak to them", "We have had the *chance*" (Kyagulanyi, n.d.). Kyagulanyi thus positions herself as someone who wishes to contribute, but who does not consider herself a saviour capable of bringing change alone. She also explains that menstruation "has been seen as a taboo" (0:32, 1:07) instead of claiming that it *is* taboo. This is similar to Mergens approach when she says that menstruation is taboo in *other places*, instead of claiming anything about the society she focuses on in her speech. Like Western organisations, Kyagulanyi speaks of lack of menstrual products as a challenge, but instead of saying, like several Western MHM organisations, that girls resort to rags, newspaper and trash, she is more careful in her claims and instead says that "some of them have blankets that they use because they cannot access sanitary pads." (2:28).

While advocating for a more open discussion, Kyagulanyi links knowledge about menstruation to formal education. She problematises that uneducated mothers are the ones teaching girls about menstruation (1:29) and insists that this should instead be taken care of by the school system (2:11). This gives associations to Western notions of knowledge production, where the education system is superior to inherited knowledge and cultural practices (Mitova, 2020). By using formal development jargon, like when speaking of the "girl child" (2:45, 3:08, 3:26), it seems like Kyagulanyi wants to appeal to, or be seen as part of, the larger (Western-originated) development industry. The term "girl child" was first coined in UNs fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (UN Women, 1995) and

is not commonly used in everyday speech. Kyagulanyi's choices of approach and wording support the impression that she is having a Western or international audience in mind when speaking.

When challenging both males and females to talk about menstruation (0:44) Kyagulanyi positions herself as an advocate for gender equality, and beyond the, in Western eyes, "backward" patriarchy of her childhood village. According to Lugones (2007), perspectives like heteronormativity[52], patriarchy[53] and paternalism[54] were to a great extent imposed on colonised people as a means for the colonisers to gain power and control. Much indicate that many communities which are today judged as "lagging behind" on gender- and sexual rights, were more open and tolerant to gender- and sexual diversity before the colonisers interfered (Buckle, 2020; Murray & Roscoe, 2001). Not only does the roles between men and women of former colonies seem to have been affected by colonisers. The strict gender binary and the heteronormative view that was imposed on the colonised seem to have strongly affected the current situation for people in former colonies who do not identify within the accepted orientations as heterosexual male or female.

In Uganda, for instance, homosexuality was not criminalised until the country was colonised by Britain in 1894 (Tamale, 2014). Even today, US preachers whose homophobia has been discredited as too radical to get broad accept in the United States, have managed—perhaps enabled by white privilege—to gain great popularity in Uganda, and contributed to make the country one of the most dangerous in the world to be gay in (Kalstad, 2013; Nyanzi, 2013). However, the main foundation of homophobia was established in the colonial era. Before being colonised, *mudoko dako* was considered an alternative gender status in Uganda, and Kabaka (king) Mwanga II, who ruled in Uganda in the late 1800s, was known as bisexual (Tamale, 2014). According to the British colonial anthropologist, Jack H. Driberg (1923), the mudoko dako in Uganda "even simulate

[52] Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the correct sexual orientation, that there are only two distinct, opposite genders and that sexual and marital relations should be between people of opposite sex.

[53] Patriarchy is a social system in which men dominate powerful roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

[54] Paternalism is an authority's interference with the liberty and autonomy of those subordinate, with the intent of promoting good or preventing harm.

menstruations and wear the leaves prescribed for women in their courses." (p. 210). These examples suggest that both gender roles, sexual diversity, and menstruation had more open and positive connotations in Uganda before being subjected to Western influence.

Ironically, the tables have now turned, and Western countries and organisations are trying to "enlighten" Uganda and other "homophobic" countries to respect LBGTQ+ rights. Among several other Western countries, Norway held back aid (50 million NOK) from Uganda when President Yoweri Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2014 (Kirkerud, 2014). Western perceptions of Africans as sexually promiscuous and in need of being controlled and tamed in the colonial era (McClintock, 1995), and then (without necessarily discarding the first) as homophobic and lagging behind in the postcolonial era, demonstrates a Western drive to have an impact on countries in the South, not only then, but still today.

While reading about the gender-inclusive term "menstruator", I found that some Western organisations choose not to use the term[55], because of a notion that Global South countries are not ready for such a "modern" view on gender (Bobel, 2019). When Bobel, in conversation with a Western human rights expert, suggested to use the term, the response was: "I'd love to see the faces of the Kenyan delegation (for instance) when we suggest the language of menstruators. Some of it needs to be carefully balanced, and we shouldn't push too far." (Bobel, 2019, p. 103). Although not using the term menstruator herself, Kyagulanyi clearly demonstrates that menstrual-related issues should concern everyone regardless of gender. Independent of her personal opinion on different sexual- and gender orientations, I do not share the human rights expert's worry that Kyagulanyi, or other Global South actors, would have problems with the gender-neutral word menstruator.

Although positioning herself as inclusive and humble, Kyagulanyi also represents herself as busy and important, in contrast to the Others, the girls she addresses, who seem to be resigned and stuck in a backward culture (Kyagulanyi, n.d.). Through arguing that *we* need to equip *them* (4:08) she confirms existing representations of poor and powerless victims and resourceful and powerful saviours. Although much of Kyagulanyi's

[55] UNICEF, in a guide to Menstrual Hygiene Management, describes the meaning of the gender-inclusive concept "menstruator", but explain that they choose to use the term "girls and women" as a [sic] "shorthand term to increase readability" (UNICEF, 2019, p. 7) instead of "menstruator", despite the fact that the chosen term consist of 13 letters and three words, while the discarded term is a single 11-letter word.

representations of herself and her position in relation to the Ugandan menstruators are similar to those of Western organisations, the distance between herself and the target group is not as polar as for the Western actors. She shows, in the end of her video speech, that she considers herself as different, potentially more insightful, than Western organisations. She says that one single approach (like donating pads or having a seminar) is not enough (4:00) and communicates that the situation for the girls is more complex than what many Western MHM advocates express. Through this, Kyagulanyi puts herself in a position where she can both understand and represent the girls whom she grew up with, but also to be an authority that can demand action and criticise other MHM actors where they carry out uninformed or ineffective interventions.

The phrase "almost the same, but not quite." (p. 86), formulated by Bhabha in his book *The location of Culture* (1994), illustrates the colonisers desire for a recognisable Other that should become more like them, but without having an opportunity to reach the same level in the constructed hierarchy. Kyagulanyi may have no wish to get associated with the Western philanthropists, which she suggests are not doing enough. Nevertheless, her organisation's profile, work and approach share many similarities with those of many Western organisations. This may come from a notion that Eurocentric standards and ways of organising are superior to others (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Kyagulanyi does not necessarily believe that Western ways are better. However, being recognised as a classic (i.e. Western) organisation, with everything this entails, may be the easier path to choose, especially if one wants to be available for international donations. Although Kyagulanyi is not working with or for the West, she communicates in a way that implies that the West could be a targeted audience. She represents the people and culture from her home village in a way that make them seem exotic, with their special rituals and attires—and backward, with their patriarchal traditions and lack of initiative and resistance (Kyagulanyi, n.d.). Why would an independent and influential Global South actor be so critical and distanced to her own heritage?

In the book *Black skin, White masks*, first published in 1952, Fanon explains a concept he called "the inferiority complex" as a notion of blackness as uncivilised and inferior in a world ruled by whites. According to Fanon, these thoughts have been injected into the minds of black and colonised people who do not realise that they have been systematically moulded to be inferior. This leads to an acceptance of oneself as inferior, and a belief that

it must be the ways of the whites that leads to civilisation (Fanon, 2008). Although Fanon experienced French colonisation first-hand, while Kyagulanyi was born a couple of decades after Uganda became independent from British colonisation, the existence of a persisting inferiority complex is still plausible. This is because of the Western, white world's continued control over economy and resources in the Global South (Odeh, 2010). Economic control and exploitation of resources make the former colonised more dependent on the Western world, an effect Fanon called a "dependency complex" (Fanon, 2008), which feeds to the feeling of inferiority. During my stays in Uganda, it has happened that people have come over to me, called me "white angel" and given thanks for my presence in their country, and for helping their "helpless" people towards development. Such misplaced praise, in combination with false descriptions of own people as passive and helpless, is not only absurd and thought-provoking, but it also serves as a reminder that we are still far away from a decolonised world. Whether encounters like this reveal persisting inferiority complexes or—on the other hand, a use of persuasion and flattery to gain goodwill and respect from white Westerners—such stereotypical representations do, in any case, confirm the existence of an unequal power dynamic.

Whether it can be explained by inferiority complexes, dependency complexes, or entirely other factors, development organisations in the Global South are becoming more and more similar to organisations in the Global North. According to Tvedt (1998) "they share more or less the same rhetoric and have become accountable to donor states or international institutions." (p. 213). Ashish Kothari and his co-writers of the post-development dictionary[56] *Pluriverse* (2019), argues that the seductive nature of development rhetoric has been internalised across all countries in the world. The two organisations that I study in-depth for this research, Days for Girls and Caring Hearts Uganda, do share many similarities, both in their organisation structure and in their rhetoric. Kyagulanyi, who is closer to the targets of intervention than Mergens, both culturally and geographically, seem to look down at, at least in her representations, people from her own community and background. In addition to a possible fear of being judged as inferior herself in the international spotlight, this may illustrate an ambivalence between two identities; the identity of the girls and women in the Ugandan village where she grew up, on one side, and the more privileged, educated philanthropist who despise the traditions that holds the

[56] This book—by Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Feredico Demaria and Alberto Acosta—serves as a follow up to *The Development Dictionary* from 1992 by Wolfgang Sachs (2009).

girls back, on the other. It is doubtlessly possible to challenge and disagree with certain traditional practices without separating one's identity from the culture where these exist. However, it seems to be easier to get positive attention from the Western world when complying with Western notions of how development work should be conducted, and what progress should look like.

This need to resemble the West could be an expression of what Bhabha (1997) calls *mimicry*, which does not mean to blend in and become one with the ones in power, but to camouflage and make it hard to tell the difference. According to Bhabha, this can be a strategy of resistance. If the many similarities between the Ugandan and Western organisations is a result of mimicry, this may be a strategy for gaining world-wide attention, acceptance and recognition, while still holding on to one's own identity, values and goals. Although functioning as a resistance to forces like assimilation and oppression, the urge to mimic the more powerful counterpart can also be problematic. Such tendencies prove that still today Western Eurocentric culture, knowledge production and social structures are perceived as superior systems to be pursued. If a perceived necessity to mimic Western MHM organisations in order to succeed results in reproduction of negative, stereotypical representations of Global South menstruators as passive, helpless and weak—mimicry only partly serves the goal of resistance, while simultaneously confirming a state where power is still unevenly distributed between the Global North and the Global South.

Although one can say much about a person or a society by analysing a communication piece, it is important to constantly consider the context and the intended audience whom the message is meant for. While revealing some of one's personal characteristics to an audience, there might be many other sides that are not shown. The way that Kyagulanyi presents her message makes it seems like it was intended for, or at least adapted to, a Western audience. The artefacts I have chosen to examine are connected to her organisation Caring Hearts Uganda, where it might be desired to facilitate for attention and possible donations from abroad. The awareness of who is going to read one's text and listen to one's speech will affect the way a message is composed. While Kyagulanyi condemns Ugandan traditions and attitudes in the artefacts meant for an international audience, she promotes Ugandan culture and traditions through other channels meant for a

Ugandan audience (Chano8, 2016). In an interview in Kampala in 2016 she says: “Don’t let development and change in economical stuff take us away from our culture.” (7:07).

Although Kyagulanyi with this comment puts words to an important point—the power that development initiatives and capitalism has to break down culture and identity—she herself may unknowingly be a part in this seemingly unstoppable force. According to Mbembe (2001), it is impossible not only for outsiders, but even for Africans, to make correct observations about the African continent when taking use of discourses that was developed in a time where knowledge was produced to justify oppression. Even in their attempts to challenge destructive representations about themselves, Africans instead may end up maintaining them. This is because they try to change the descriptions made about them, instead of claiming that their entire nature, stakes and culture is situated elsewhere. Mbembe claims that whether in written discourses or in real life “there is no description of Africa that does not involve destructive and mendacious functions.” (2001, p. 242). With this, Mbembe shows yet another dimension, amongst many, that potentially contributes to shaping representations of people in the Global South.

So far, we have looked at the power and privilege of representing the Other, and how descriptions of the Self versus the Other contributes to maintaining the gap between people, which potentially limits communication and cooperation. We have seen that one-sided stories are preferred over a diversity of contexts and nuances, with an underlying notion that it is the spectacle that sells. It is mainly the Self telling the story, while portrayals of Others serve as the proof of the importance of interventions. Western standards, from sexual moral to menstrual materials, are taken for granted as the ones to emulate, and even when proven wrong, there is very little risk of being scrutinised or rejected. Although Global South perspectives invites more complexity and rejects the existence of a simple solution, mimicking Western rhetoric and approaches seems to be the path of least resistance. The recipe to success—by establishing a problem, positioning the Self over the Others, presenting a solution and justifying interventions—seems to be presented through a selection of narratives and portrayals. I identify and describe some of these in the following section.

Narratives and portrayals

Although there seem to be a standard recipe for how development organisations communicate their work to a Western audience, there are slightly different entry points and focus areas that can carry the message. In other words, there are several ways to find (or create) justification through narration. The different campaign videos by Days for Girls illustrate some of them (*DfG Videos*, 2021). These stories (although written, revised, directed, rehearsed and filmed in several takes) may represent true aspects of life for many menstruators in low-income countries, but still only a small fraction of their lives. In these narratives, *one* piece of the story is presented as the *whole* story and does not take into consideration the complex reality that is not captured on the screen, in the picture, or in the text. This may be explained and justified by the purpose and focus areas of the organisations and the need for a clear, and preferably spectacular, message in order to get attention. According to Jean Baudrillard (1983), people do not want rational, complex and inconsistent material. Instead, "They are given meaning: they want spectacle." (p. 10). Although they may be effective in terms of communication, such one-sided stories risk reinforcing stereotypical images and the impression of clear and concrete problems that can be solved with simple and tangible solutions. The way that issues are framed in international development is key for how we think about these issues, and for how problems and solutions are understood. Framing is power, and it is the one doing the framing, in this case largely Western actors, who has that power.

The British writer Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden"—first published in *The Times* (London) and *The New York Sun* in 1899 (Hamer, 2009)— is about how the white race was morally obliged to civilise the non-white through colonisation. In the seven-verse exhortation poem to colonialists, Kipling described the colonised Others as "new-caught, sullen peoples" and as "Half devil and half child" (*Internet History Sourcebooks*, n.d.). Although the rhetoric of this poem is controversial and outdated today, I will argue that current Western representations and approaches towards the Global South also reveal problematic, although more subtle, thoughts and perceptions. Based on the different representations that has emerged throughout my research—and put on the edge to provoke the thought—I have composed some Kipling-inspired lines that I argue could illustrate some of the current thoughts and perceptions that Western MHM- and development organisations hold (although not necessarily out-spoken) towards low-income menstruators of the Global South:

Poor brown woman
You are dirty, passive, weak

You are bursting with potential
To be the currency we seek

As a human-rights target
You are perfect, grateful, pure

Let us aim our silver bullet
Solve your problems, be the cure

This satirical rhyme introduces four themes displaying common narratives and portrayals of Global South menstruators, women, and girls that I have identified when examining MHM organisations and the broader development industry. The themes involve stereotypical representations of women and girls, their perceived economic value, their role as human rights targets and the supposedly simple solutions meant to save them. We will now look closer at these, one by one.

The stereotypical brown woman

Stereotypes reduce people to a few, simple, essential characteristics (Hall, 1997). From the beer-drinking German, the loud American, the passionate French, the pot-smoking Jamaican, the scary Russian, the greedy Jew, the terrorist Arab, the half-naked native American, the photo-addicted Chinese to the chronically late African. Stereotypes can profile people based on race, gender, class, sexuality, culture, religion, age, size and more, but common is that a group of people are reduced to a few traits, stripped from nuances and complexity. Here we will look at the stereotypical representations that Global South menstruators are attributed with by Western spectators, and because the artefacts I am examining are concerned about menstruators in Kenya and Uganda, I will emphasise on how African women and girls in particular have been, and currently are, represented.

According to several sources, colonial stereotypes have portrayed African women as sexually unrestrained (H. Bhabha, 1997), dirty (Collins, 1990) and animalistic (hooks, 1981; Mbembe, 2001). According to Hall (1997), stereotyping maintains social order and power inequality. In the examined TEDx talk there are several examples of stereotypical images of the Kenyan menstruators, such as the weak and vulnerable victim, the humble

and grateful receiver and the paternalist, exploitative traditional societies where girls are prone to become child-brides and teen-mothers. Gayatri Spivak (1988), through her well-cited statement: "white men saving brown women from brown men." (p. 297), illustrates how stereotypical images of Self and Others has led to a representation of colonisers as the protector and saviour of colonised women from their oppressive and patriarchal societies (see also Wilson, 2011). These representations do, however, not seem to consider the possibility that this "protecting" and "saving" demonstrates Western patriarchy (masculine domination) and paternalism (authority over the subordinate).

In the examined TEDx talk, Mergens portrays a society where authorities, like the teachers and the headmaster, exploit the girls in exchange for menstrual products and access to the classroom (7:03). One can ask how such black and white representations of girls as weak and vulnerable, and other parts of their societies as brutal and harmful (Mbembe, 2001), affect the agency and dignity of the described girls and their communities, and the priorities and approach of development initiatives. Susan Moeller (2002) explains that poor women have been the symbol of goodness and purity within development for long, a role increasingly shared with children the last decades. The Kenyan menstruators represented in the main artefact, are somewhere in between children and women, and the stereotypical representations of them as grateful, humble and vulnerable, and endangered by their brutal, patriarchal societies, makes them perfect roles in what Wendy Hesford (2011) calls "the rescue narrative". She argues that such representations limit girls' possibilities to influence and be moral agents and actors in their own lives.

Mergens presents a narrative of girls stuck in their room, forced to menstruate on a piece of cardboard, with no food and water (unless someone brought it to them) (7:26). She elaborates and says that poor menstruators worldwide who want to be freed from confinement, resort to leaves, newspaper, trash, unsecured cloth, corncobs, cornhusks, bark and stones to absorb or handle their menstruation (4:34). Such descriptions contribute to create and reinforce images of Global South menstruators as in danger and in need of saving. It also demonstrates coloniality or power through Western notions of what constitutes inappropriate or appropriate menstrual care. Through their representations and materialistic focus area, MHM organisations have the power to inform the views on what constitutes respectability of the Global South menstruators' bodies. "Menstrual etiquette", a result of ancient menstrual taboos (Knight, 1991), impose women worldwide to put

effort in hiding their menstruating status to the surroundings (Houppert, 1999). Access to products and facilities to maintain this etiquette then becomes a question of status or class. Women of colour, whose sexuality has been subjected to colonial stereotyping and constructed as dirty, animalistic and hypersexual, experience particularly high expectations to demonstrate respectability (Bobel, 2010). Evelyn Higginbotham (1993*)* argues that menstruation of coloured women who lack privileges is marked as *especially* dirty, disgusting, and unladylike.

An example of degrading descriptions connected with the lack of privileges is presented by Days for Girls' leader in Utah, Ann Lewis, in a YouTube video posted in 2015, viewed more than 28,300 times (Navanas Institute, 2015). Lewis retells the narratives of Mergens' TEDx talk, but perhaps because she has not been through the rigorous polishing and censorship of the TED format, her descriptions of the same scenes are even more extreme than those of the TEDx talk. Lewis describes the failed attempt to provide disposable pads to the orphanage like this: "The chain-like fence behind the row of latrines were crammed full of dirty pads. Dogs were dragging bloody pads through the streets, there were girls pulling pads from the fence, trying to wash and reuse someone else's pads." (3:45).

These descriptions are meant to illustrate the desperation the girls are in, but at the same time they widen the gap between what appears like a civilised and respectable Western Self, and an uncivilised, dirty, and animalistic Global South Other. The tension between precarity and spectacle, and dignity and discipline, contributes to maintaining a menstrual mandate[57] instead of freeing the menstruators from expectations, stigma and control. Despite the lack of sufficient data, a perception of a "backward", or lack of, menstrual care is used as an excuse to export Western practices to the Global South. Bobel (2019) reacts to this constructed narrative and claims that:

> The MHM campaign, then, promises to fix what is broken while turning a blind eye to the forces that create the poverty, the neocolonial legacies, and the sexist, racist, and classist standards of embodiment that circulate globally and collectively create girls' menstrual realities. (Bobel, 2019, p. 193)

[57] The expectation that menstruation should be silent and invisible (Bobel, 2019).

While stereotypical representations of Global South menstruators as dirty, passive and weak serves to wake empathy and facilitate for a rescue narrative, one should also ask what these menstruators are rescued *to*. The purpose behind the restored dignity and freedom of movement supposedly attained by successful MHM interventions, is not to let life continue as before. There is an underlying expectation that the investment in Global South menstruators will result in a desired return, a return that seems to extend beyond the well-being of the individual.

The girl as economic potential

Many MHM organisations argue that good menstrual hygiene management increases participation in education and work, which again results in economic growth and development. It was not until it was connected to school attendance that menstruation started to be framed as a crisis by development organisations (Bobel, 2019). Without the assumption that menstruation affects education, which again affects economy and development, there would likely be far less international attention towards menstruation in the Global South. Several organisations[58] working with MHM refer to the beforementioned Girl Effect when justifying their work. In short, the Girl Effect claims that through giving poor girls a "big push"—to use development economist Jeffrey Sachs (1999) concept—wealthy nations or development organisations can generate economic growth in low-income countries and communities.

Kathryn Moeller (2013) argues that the Girl Effect imposes an unreasonable responsibility on Global South girls to end poverty for themselves, their families, communities, nations, and the world. Instead of being depicted with all their nuances, depth and complexities, the development industry often simplifies the portrayal of the targeted people, giving them roles of either heroes, victims or scapegoats. The Kurdish journalist, human rights activist and former refugee, Behrouz Boochani, has problematised this, saying: "We are neither angels nor devils, we are really just human beings … Our stories are partly out of our control, they are in the hands of the media and the humanitarian organisations." [Translated from Norwegian] (Lauvstad, 2021). Representing someone as a *hero* puts unreasonable responsibility and expectations on this person, in the same way as representing someone as a *victim* is a threat to this person's agency, determination and dignity.

[58] One Girl (*Girls Education*, n.d.), Women Deliver ('Our Work', n.d.), UNICEF (*Gender Equality*, n.d.)

One of the most re-iterated Girl Effect slogans goes: "Invest in a girl, and she will do the rest." (Girl Effect, 2008). Within the thematic of this thesis, this translates to a portrayal of Global South menstruators as the solution to poverty-issues in their respective communities and countries, when granted an opportunity by the Western spectator. This rhetoric gives the impression that Global South menstruators are stuck with an unused potential that can only be activated through outside intervention. Without acknowledging the many challenges of Western hegemony or international aid, this narrative represents Global South menstruators' traditions and culture as the oppressor and disabler, and Western MHM organisations as the saviour and enabler.

In the TEDx talk, Mergens share some success stories to prove the developmental impact of the interventions. She explains how a 12-year-old girl teaches 200 fellow students to make their own pads (12:36), and about a woman who made production of pads her livelihood (11:13). These narratives demonstrate the menstruators inbound will to prosper, and the potential ripple-(girl)effect that the Western spectator can contribute to by donating or volunteering. After linking menstrual products with increased school attendance, Mergens explains that there are several studies[59] implying that only one more year of primary school will result in a huge growth in national product (13:37), and that girls will be less likely to marry early, die at childbirth and be more likely to teach their children and lift their communities with their voices and talents (13:43). To further confirm her claim, Mergens quotes World Food Prize winner, Pedro Sanchez, who donated his prize towards secondary education for girls: "An educated girl can have a profound impact on the development of a community." (17:10).

The language of menstruation is bound to the vocabulary of sexism and the grammar of capitalism (Williams, 2021b). The general Western representation of Global South menstruators seems to take for granted that without intervention, girls will drop out of school, marry young, have many children and thus reproduce poverty, but with interventions they can unleash their potential, get educated, contribute to economic development and have fewer, but wealthier and healthier children. In an article about the Girl Effect, Koffman and Gill (2013) criticise these generalising representations of Global South menstruators:

[59] Mergens does not provide references to these studies.

> This narrative brush aside the immense variation in education, marriage and fertility patterns across different developing countries and promotes a single picture of "life in the Global South" as plagued by child marriage, teenage motherhood and HIV/AIDS. Rather than acknowledge the historical and structural dimensions of poverty, emphasis is placed on women's domestic role and their high fertility. (p. 105)

Instead of aiming to ensure empowerment and agency for girls to choose their own lives—which for one may be to become a lawyer and a mother of a few, and for another to excel as a farmer and a mother of many—the goal of the Girl Effect, and a justification for many MHM organisations, is to make girls into tools for economic growth and development (*Girl Effect*, n.d.). The descriptions of girls as untapped resources (*UNFPA*, 2016) speak more of their instrumental than of their intrinsic value, which can remind of the way colonists once depicted the colonised as means to reach their own self-interested goals (*Slavery in the Colonies: US History*, n.d.). Although promoting empowerment for girls, the Girl Effect has a clear expectation of what this empowerment should entail, with education and economic growth as important factors. A central idea of empowerment is in "the abilities of people to make choices rather the differences in the choices they make." (Adjei, 2015, p. 64). Empowerment should not be to have to choose what others have chosen for you, like education and a career, but to be free to make choices for yourself, no matter how ambitious or trivial they are, and no matter if they contribute to economic growth or not.

Kyagulanyi also speaks of girls as means to economic growth, but in a slightly different order, emphasising empowerment of the girls as the main goal, while conscientiously adding the outcomes this will have for society at large. She mentions women empowerment as equivalent with women economic empowerment (3:51) but claims that there is no simplistic way to achieve this. She emphasises that personal empowerment for girls is key, and although she is calling for a *we* to equip and empower *them* (4:08), Kyagulanyi concludes that the goal should be for the girls to be given the confidence to know that everything they are doing is for themselves, before consciously adding: "and for their children, and for the nation." (4:10). While much of the message is similar to the US artefact, where girls are held back by poverty and patriarchal traditions, and in need of

outside help to unleash their potential, Kyagulanyi, perhaps because of her personal insight and attachment, seems to be more concerned about the girls own lives than on the effect they will have on economy and development. Her speech communicates that girls should be economically and socially empowered for their own sake, and that any positive ripple effect from this would be considered a bonus. This acknowledgement of girls' needs and right to power and agency takes us to the next common portrayal, where Global South menstruators have emerged as perfect targets for human rights.

Perfect targets for human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights were announced in 1948 (United Nations, 1948), while Western colonial powers were still actively operating in the Global South. Nonetheless, these rights were supposed to apply to all human beings, especially those vulnerable to oppression, discrimination and control. The first article of the human rights starts like this: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience…" (United Nations, 1948). The word *dignity*, together with *reason* and *conscience*, suggests that humans possess the ability to discipline themselves. According to Bobel (2019), this notion contributes to maintain the menstrual taboo with its constant demand to conceal the menstruating body. When applying a human rights framework to Menstrual Hygiene Management, one should pay attention to how power and privilege shape the menstrual experience. Menstrual stigma undermines agency and makes menstruators put in effort to find ways to fulfil the gendered, racialised and classed menstrual mandate imposed on them. If failing to meet this mandate, the menstruators risk losing status, legitimacy and cultural capital (Bobel, 2019).

Representations of women as pure and vulnerable, and thus the ideal targets for development initiatives, has, as mentioned, increasingly in the last decades included children (S. Moeller, 2002). After the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, children were construed as bearers, and not only objects, of human rights (J. Bhabha, 2006). Menstruating schoolgirls thus became perfect targets for human rights. They are in between childhood and womanhood, they are, from the age of menstruation, presumed at risk of becoming child brides and teen mothers, and they have the potential to have an impact on development when granted their rights to education and protection against child marriage and other "social failings" of their societies.

Hesford (2011) suggests that the spectacle of the sexualised girl-child in the human rights imagery create a new neo-liberal subject, beside the pure, but powerless woman. According to Jacqueline Bhabha (2006) children are, although represented as bearers of rights from 1990, still not counted as moral agents to exercise their rights. Instead, it is the principle of "the best interest of the child" that has become the leading approach. Human rights thus give the impression to promote agency for the individual, while they in reality function more as guidelines on how individuals should be treated. In the context of Menstrual Hygiene Management, human rights are to a greater extent used to promote the rights to products and facilities than the rights to self-determination and pluriversality. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) claims that "Menstruation is not a girl's or women's issue – it's a human rights issue." (UNFPA, 2019). Days for Girls refer to the human rights several places on their webpage and in social media. On December 11, 2020 the organisation posted this on Facebook:

> Today is Human Rights Day! … The ability to safely and effectively manage menstruation is an essential human right – one that is all-too-often overlooked in humanitarian response efforts… At Days for Girls, we believe that menstrual equity is critical to building a more just, equitable and sustainable post-COVID world. It is a basic human right, without which we cannot hope to achieve the SDGs… We hope you'll join us in standing up for the basic human rights of all menstruators, today and every day. (DfG FB, 2020)

To anchor MHM interventions in human rights can seem like the only right thing to do, as these are labelled as universal values. Nevertheless, when it comes to coloniality of power, it is not irrelevant where the human rights originated from. Through its Western base, human rights reflect Western interests and can be used as a weapon of cultural hegemony or a new form of imperialism. Emanating from a European, Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment heritage, other cultures cannot enjoy human rights unless they aim for the conditions and values of Western societies (Shaheed & Richter, 2018). In this way, human rights can be used as a mandate to interfere with other countries, cultures, communities or groups in a paternalistic way that maintains unequal power relations. As Rosi Braidotti, puts it, in an interview by the scientific magazine CCCB LAB (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona):

> The Enlightenment left us with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but women did not have human rights, nor did Jews, blacks or children. The concept of human has always been associated with relations of power, of exclusion and inclusion. It has never been a neutral or inclusive concept. (Andrés, 2019)

In the same way as my critique of the rhetoric of the MHM discourse does not mean that representations and interventions should not take place, critical remarks of the use of human rights does not mean that these should not be pursued. However, to be aware of where rules, guidelines and sets of values come from, and the power that comes with this, is key, if one wants to interact with others with humility and respect. Keeping in mind that Eurocentric notions of human value have changed tremendously over the past generations, once accepting a view where human beings could be sold as a commodity, it can be wise to admit the possibility that the Western-initiated human rights may still not be flawless. Being the ones setting the agenda, colouring the scenes, framing the problems and writing the rules, it does not come as a surprise that the Western actors also are the ones to present the solutions. This takes us to the fourth and last theme that I wish to highlight.

The silver bullet

As already mentioned, Global South menstruators are, by several Western MHM organisations, represented as bursting with educational and economic potential, but in need of being saved to unlock this potential. Instead of presenting a complex and contextualised strategy for how to meet the perceived unmet needs, many MHM organisations, according to my observations, instead choose a simpler route that is easy to communicate to potential donors. Menstrual products are concrete, cheap, easy to produce, possible to count and practical to distribute in big numbers. They are the "silver bullet" of Menstrual Hygiene Management (Bobel, 2019). This technical fix lays close to the corporate style that many NGOs are moving towards, and there are already many Western brands of menstrual products and social enterprises that use the concept of "buy one, give one"[60] where a business gets positive publicity through impacting low-income menstruators, while simultaneously making big business. The way that corporations and development actors refer to menstrual products as sanitary- or feminine *protection*, communicates that menstruators should be protected from their unruly, leaking bodies.

[60] Pixie Cup, Ruby Cup, Clean Cup, Hey Girls, Pads4Girls etc.

With its inbound risk of reinforcing stigma, such wording gives way for the simple solution that takes the form of products. But what are these products replacing?

When Bobel (2019), in her research about the framing of Menstrual Hygiene Management, interviewed different MHM organisations, about 18 % of the informants claimed that low-income menstruators use hazardous materials like animal dung, mud or mattress filling to absorb their menses. When she asked for documentation of such practices, none of the informants were able to provide any evidence (Bobel, 2019). Despite its lack of accuracy, similar descriptions of practices are consistent in the MHM industry, creating attention and benevolence from potential donors.

The Indian menstrual activist, Sinu Joseph (2007), claims that even in the cases when documentation on the use and effects of products is provided, it is deficient in both scope and accuracy. She notes that the most cited statistics on use of menstrual products in India, presented by Plan India (van Eijk et al., 2016), says that only 12 % of India's women use pads and that 88 % use alternatives like unsensitised cloth, ash and sand. The fact that the study only interviewed 1033 women, which is less than 0.00029 % of India's menstruators, makes it clear that it is wrong to speak of this statistic as if this was true for all of India. Joseph argues that even if 88 % actually did use alternatives to conventional products, which in most cases then means cloth, it is misleading to include the use of ash and sand in the same percentage bracket. She also questions the report's description of *unsensitised* cloth, asking whether the cloth pads sold and distributed by Western NGOs are any more sanitised[61] (Joseph, 2017).

It is not only in India that cloth is used as menstrual absorbent. The majority of menstruators in the Global South that do not use conventional products, use cloth that can be washed and reused (Agarwal et al., 2018; Sumpter & Torondel, 2013; van Eijk et al., 2016). This is the same strategy that menstruators in the Global North used until single-use products were introduced in the late 1800s (pads) and in the 1920s (tampons). There is no evidence that links the use of cloth to increased health risks (Bobel, 2019; Hennegan et al., 2019; Joseph, 2017). This does, however, not stop organisations from bringing up

[61] Stitched cloth pads can potentially be more difficult to clean and dry since they consist of many layers, while the loose cloth used by rural menstruators can be unfolded, cleaned and quickly dried with complete exposure to sunlight, which has an antibacterial sensitising effect (Joseph, 2017).

health risks of the use of cloth (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015). Some MHM organisations use the word *rags* instead of *cloth* when referring to the most common use of fabric as menstrual absorbent (Mbonye, 2018). The associations to a dirty *cleaning rag* make this option seem less appealing than the use of *cloth* would sound. These are rhetorical choices to communicate that there are no satisfying options to conventional pads, either disposable or reusable, although most of the conventional reusable pads, like the ones of Days for Girls, are made of exactly cloth[62].

In the artefacts examined for this research the pad is a centre piece of the story, especially in the US artefact. The whole TEDx talk evolves around the evolution of the reusable pad and how it is changing the lives of millions of girls. With the product in focus, the representations of the menstruators are used to illustrate the gravity of lack of products. With a description of girls confined in their rooms with only cardboards to bleed on, Mergens facilitates for the audience to imagine the great impact a pad would make in these menstruators' lives. Other problems that these girls face, like structural challenges of the organisation of orphanages, of stigma, oppression and the causes of poverty, are not addressed. Instead, *the problem* framed is menstruation, and *the solution* is products. As already mentioned, there is a lack of sufficient evidence that products increase school attendance (of which its alleged connection constitutes some of the main justifications for interfering), but this does not stop NGOs from acting. One of the most sited[63] sources for the much used claim that "one in ten girls in sub-Saharan Africa miss school during menstruation" is UNESCO, who attributes it to UNICEF, who claims to have been misquoted, admitting that data on this is scarce (Wilkinson, 2016).

To build up the sought-after evidence base, Days for Girls, an organisation reporting to have reached more than 2 million menstruators in 144 countries (*DfG Media Kit*, 2021), have started to gather its own statistics to prove the impact of its interventions. The following data is collected by Days for Girls from five Kenyan schools in 2016, one year after providing them with menstrual kits. 98% of the menstruators reported that they were able to attend school more often with their DfG kits, 93% said that there were activities they could do now that they could not do before receiving their kits, and nearly 90% were

[62] The Days for Girls cloth pad is made with a pocket to add a cleaning-rag as the liner. See the products here: https://www.daysforgirls.org/dfg-pads/

[63] The World Bank, World Economic Forum and The UK Guardian, among others.

still using their kits one year after distribution (DfG Statistics, 2017). There are probably both positive and negative outcomes from gathering one's own statistics. The organisation reaches out to many people over many years and has a unique opportunity to gather data. Nevertheless, there is a risk that they will fail to be objective and instead search for answers that justify their activities. The unspecific wording of the data collection referred to above suggests that this could be the case. The question: "Are you able to attend school more often now that you have a DfG kit?" (DfG Statistics, 2017) is both leading and unspecific. 98 % of the menstruators answered yes to this question, asked by an organisation that they might feel expected to be positive and grateful towards. If data on the specific number of days menstruators missed school before and after receiving the menstrual kits had been gathered instead, the result would be easier to trust as unbiased.

One reason for providing a simple solution to a complex problem is the constant pressure MHM organisations are under to capture and sustain attention and goodwill from funders. Images of distribution of menstrual products, the before and after-stories, and the provision of numbers and data, are easy to communicate and grasp, compared to more invisible structural, political or social approaches. The product-focus may also be related to the priorities of the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)-sector, which is where Menstrual Hygiene Management sprung out from. Sommer et al. (2016) notes that on a UNICEF-sponsored MHM conference in 2016 with 1000 participants, 66 % were from the WASH sector, while 11 % were from health, 9 % from education and only 6 % from gender. With such an overrepresentation from a technically oriented sector it is less surprising that the main focus is materialistic. This does not mean, however, that this focus is the best for the targeted population.

Although most MHM organisations, including Days for Girls and Caring Hearts Uganda, recognise and describe that there are other, non-material, challenges associated with menstruation, like stigma, shame and gender inequality, products remain the main solution. While products may help menstruators to succeed in hiding their menstruation (menstrual etiquette) and avoid negative attention, the same products, or the increased attention towards the lack of them, may reinforce more than challenge menstrual stigma. Despite this possibility, "Give a girl a pad and change the world" remains the core message of many MHM organisations. This simple solution ignores local knowledge, histories of oppression and decision-making in school, family and society. On their

webpage, Days for Girls' urge the public to "Remind people of the *need* and encourage them with the fact that there are *simple solutions* through DfG's impact in the menstrual health field - and encourage them to support DfG." [emphasis added] (Days for Girls, 2020).

Although distribution of menstrual products may have a positive impact on the individual receiving them, it can at the same time lead to new problems, like increased inequality between those who receive products and those who do not. It may also lead to dependency towards the distributor, or to challenges of waste management, like those Mergens experienced when first distributing disposable pads in the Kenyan orphanage (1:30). Joseph (2017) finds it provoking that Western MHM organisations put so much effort in distributing or selling packaged versions of cloth pads on the basis that it is environmentally friendly and safe, when the cloth that many menstruators use already has these qualities. This is the reason why comprehensive and rigorous research is important. Hennegan[64] stresses that one should not only look at products when measuring impact, but need to include other socio-cultural, practical, infrastructural and individual factors as well. Statistics on how many girls that shifted from cloth to pads does not say anything about how much these menstruators' lives have improved. Hennegan urges MHM organisations to invest in research and monitoring to find out what works, instead of celebrating what has been implemented, without having proof that the interventions have had a positive total impact on the individuals and communities addressed (Williams, 2021a).

Although phrases like "technical fix", "silver bullet", or "a simple solution to a complex problem" are not always explicitly used by MHM organisations, the underlying message about the problem and solution is still clear. The common portrayal is a poor, vulnerable girl, and the narrative is that from the day she reaches menarche[65] she risks dropping out of school, becoming a child bride and a teen mother—which constitutes the clear problem. The simple solution to this problem is provision of menstrual products that will keep her in school, empower her, save her from confinement or forced marriage, enable her to get an education and ultimately become an economic resource for herself, her community and

[64] The comments from Hennegan in this paragraph is extracted from the already mentioned podcast interview conducted by the communication officer of Days for Girls, Jessica WIlliams in February 2021.

[65] First menstruation.

her nation. This technical fix to a complex, multifaceted challenge, is among the main justifications for MHM organisations to intervene, and this materialistic approach plays a significant role in how the Global South menstruators are represented and how the alleged problem is framed.

As mentioned earlier, it is the one doing the framing that has the power. Joseph (2017) argues that menstruation is a constructed problem, to a great extent in the interest of those who sell menstrual products or are in power relations with dependants. She asks how it would be received if she, as an Indian, felt sorry for North Americans because they used toilet paper instead of water to clean themselves after defecating. With a mission to change this practice she could start to manufacture and sell handheld water faucets, conduct awareness campaigns to teach North American children to drop toilet paper and use water instead, and to dehumanise those who continued using paper, as a strategy to increase the sale of products (Bobel, 2019). With this imagined scenario in mind, it may be easier to see that there are reasons to hold back the applaud a little, and ask some critical questions, like: Who named menstruation a crisis? Who offers the solutions? And which other results or consequences, apart from the seemingly harmless pads (which claim most of the attention) comes as a result of Western MHM interventions in the Global South?

After reflecting upon these four identified themes displaying common narratives and portrayals in the MHM- and development industry, I find the harsh words in my Kipling-inspired rhyme to not be as exaggerated as they may first appear. There are several examples of Western MHM organisations describing Global South menstruators as vulnerable, at risk of sexual exploitation and in lack of privileges that rob them from menstrual respectability and dignity. The menstruators are also described as economic potentials that one can invest in and expect returns from, in form of economic development. The perceived innocence and helplessness of the menstruators make them perfect targets for human rights, and the most popular solution argued to provide them with their rights is the provision of products. Behind each of these themes is a Western Self who—through a purposefully chosen cast, scene, and focus—directs the narrative and portrayal of the Other, and thus constructs a version of the truth for (largely Western) audiences and donors to consume. The question is: What does this result in?

The product of representing the Others

From digging deep into the main artefact in the previous chapter, we have here zoomed out and looked at how the speech coincides with, and relates to, the surrounding landscape. This wider search has included other examples, artefacts, systems, and structures, and the generalisability that these observations suggest, enables reflections on the implications of my findings in a broader context. The title of this thesis is "The Power, Privilege and Product of representing the Others". In the first headline of the current chapter, I addressed the Power and Privilege, saving the last P (for Product) for now. Because any product, or consequence, necessarily will be an outcome of many different factors, it will be hard to know exactly what are, and will be, the products of Western MHM organisations' representations of Global South menstruators. Nevertheless, based on the observations made so far, it is possible to make some reflections.

A question that has followed me throughout this year of research sounds like this: To what extent do Western development organisations *take into account* the potential impact that the colonial history and persisting power relations (coloniality) has on their actions, attitudes and representations? I rarely reflected upon such questions myself the years when I ran an organisation in Uganda. I knew that Uganda was a former British colony—and I despised the fact that my whiteness could be associated with acts that I take total distance from—but I never reflected upon whether the legacy after colonialism had impacted my own thinking and behaviour. In retrospect I can, however, recognise that I have, in fact, taken use of my white privileges to get access, impact and respect in Uganda—all in the name of the good cause (of course). And although I often refused to be exalted by Ugandans who insisted to make me the guest of honour, give me their seat, or let me skip the line just because I was white, I did not spend much energy reflecting on why I, as a white Westerner, was treated this differently from my Ugandan peers. What perhaps revealed features of persisting inferiority complexes, I, in my ignorance, mistook for hospitality or harmless exotification of my whiteness. The self-examination that this research has become for me, raises the question of whether other development actors—who may not have actively delved into this topic—has thought of, and accounted for, the impact of past oppression and uneven power relations on their current practices and representations.

After getting an overview over different MHM organisations I do find indications of awareness and a wish to even out some of the existing power imbalance. This is often expressed through campaigns emphasising on empowerment, equality and human rights. However, the widespread notion amongst development organisations that people in the Global South are in need of Western solutions to be able to unlock their resources and potential, indicates an inbound, and perhaps unconscious, coloniality of power with unmeasurable consequences. Although Mergens and other Western development actors claim to be humble and inclusive, their message is clear on who is in charge, has the solutions, knowledge, power and resources. The Western situation, except from its superior place in the hierarchy, is presented as the standard to emulate. Such thinking brings associations to the colonial thought of making Others adopt the standards and rules of the Western Self, but to remain humble and controllable. The overall product of Western actors holding on to unjustly inherited power is then the maintenance of the status quo of unequal power relations.

A potential product of representing the Western Self, with its standards, knowledge, and culture, as superior compared to the Global South Other, is that it informs the approach of development organisations, potentially leading to unproductive and even harmful practices designed for a Western context. By admitting to first having been thinking from her own Western perspective, and that this was a failure with harmful results (6:39), Mergens points a self-critical finger to herself and other Eurocentric philanthropists and invites for improvement and renewal. However, the absence of consequences for the Western actor when making mistakes that affect a society and its environment negatively, discloses a privilege that Mergens does not address. Although acknowledging mistakes is a promising step down from the pedestal, trivialising errors may also send out signals that even a flawed intervention is better than no intervention, instead of questioning the act of interfering in the first place. As long as such attitudes exist within the development industry there is a risk that interventions with undocumented and potential harmful effect keep on affecting people in the Global South (*What Went Wrong?*, n.d.).

The homogenising and one-sided representations of complex individuals in complex situations, mirrors the “complexes” that exist in the gap between the Global North Self and the Global South Other—like the *inferiority complex*, the *dependency complex* (Fanon, 2008) and the *white saviour complex* (Cole, 2012d). Although the MHM

organisations I have looked at largely seem unaware of such complexes and their inbound coloniality of power, the overall rhetoric of current development organisations is far more nuanced than what it was a generation ago (Cohen, 2001). Mergens does, for example, challenge binaries by talking about humanity as one (14:00), and she acknowledges the existence of unequal power relations by admitting that *we* have left *them* locked behind doors (14:15). This confession is directly criticising and taking accountability for previous and current wrongdoings. One can only speculate what implications such concessions have concretely. Nonetheless, I will argue that if enough Western actors who work towards the Global South would acknowledge and take responsibility for current inequality, there is a possibility that perceptions, and thereafter representations, and ultimately actions, would take small, decolonising steps in a more equitable direction.

In the cases where Western development actors are not aware of the existence and impact of their own racial and hierarchical consciousness, there is a reduced chance that they will recognise how their actions may support and affirm the very structures of oppression and unequal power relations that they wish to eradicate. In light of the observations made in this research, I will argue that there are good reasons to have a critical view on Western development organisations' representations, descriptions and claims about and towards Global South Others. We can practice our critical sense by questioning such claims, which I suspect often are taken for granted as truths. An example to practice on can be the final punchline from Mergens' TEDx talk, "We can. We must. Reach every girl. Everywhere. Period." (18:09). To this we can ask critical questions like: Can we really? (and who are *we*?). Must we? (and in whose interest?). Why every girl, everywhere? (is universality necessarily better than pluriversality?). And why the full stop? (Should anyone, ever, be entitled to have the final word?).

Becoming less stupid, not paralysed

After examining specific artefacts and the broader landscape as purposefully as done here, with lenses designed to spot different forms of coloniality of power and oppression, there is a risk of becoming discouraged by the findings. However, just as strong as my wish is to address what is wrong in the world, is my wish to promote positive change. A purpose with this thesis is for me and others to become more informed, conscious and aware of our position in the contemporary world, and to strengthen critical skills toward our perceptions and the representations we are provided with or take part in constructing.

A danger with this consciousness, especially for a Western, white audience, is its potential to create or reinforce an unproductive form of "white guilt" which can, through pity, intensify unhelpful responses like white saviourism, or through shame, lead to avoidance and passivity. "White guilt" is the guilt that white people may feel about the slave trade and colonialism, and about the white privileges, racism and oppression that still exist today (Phillips & Lowery, 2018). According to Judith Katz (1978), self-indulgent white guilt-fixations make white people focus more on getting acceptance and forgiveness than of changing their own actions or beliefs. Acknowledging history and current privilege is important. This should, however, not result in an overwhelming and paralysing guilt that hinders the project of becoming "progressively less stupid" in a complex, historically charged and ever-changing world.

Concluding remarks and forward-looking reflections

The world is not just ever-changing, but each snapshot of the world looks different depending on the standpoint and perspective of the spectator. From where I stand, in this specific time and place—on the shoulders of thinkers and scholars before me and trough the selection of lenses at my disposition—I have been able to see that representations of distant Others entail significant amounts of power and influence, which can either be used or misused. In this interdisciplinary research project, I have investigated the ways in which Menstrual Hygiene Management actors from the Global North represent low-income menstruators from the Global South to a (mainly) Western audience. I have examined what these representations entail for both the spectator and for those being represented, explored the ways in which representations and roles of the Self differ from representations and roles of the Other, and discussed how messages contribute to, or challenge, oppression and unequal power relations.

What I, from this perspective, have observed is that Western MHM organisations in general, with the US artefact as a telling example, largely represent Global South menstruators as vulnerable and innocent, facing the risks of dropping out of school, being sexually exploited or forced into marriages when reaching the age of menstruation. In addition, the menstruators are depicted as full of potential and with an inherent will to prosper, if they are only granted the opportunity. The sum of these representations of the Global South Other differs significantly from the overall representations of the Western Self, who is described as privileged, inventive, resourceful and dedicated philanthropists. The typical narrative presented by MHM organisations (Bobel, 2019), and the development industry as a whole (Hesford, 2011), describes a passive and needy victim/receiver/object, and an active and generous saviour/giver/subject.

Although several of the representations that I have examined appear to express a wish to build connection and solidarity between the Global North Self and the Global South Others, MHM organisations' reliance on spectacularising the representations of menstruators risk increasing the distance and power inequality between them instead. An

example of such spectacularising is the emphasis on what is presented as extreme and hazardous menstrual practices, which creates an image of a menstrual crisis and serves to legitimise interventions, while the reality is far more complex. The most common practice other than conventional pads is the use of cloth (Joseph, 2017), which is not very different from the conventional cloth pads that MHM organisations distribute to save lives and build futures. As I have pointed out, the menstruators are not only depicted as vulnerable and at risk of child marriages and teen motherhood. They are also represented as full of economic potential, ideal to invest in (Girl effect) and a perfect target for human rights. And the "best" thing from this "too good to be true-deal" is that the way to achieve all this—empowerment, economic returns and human rights—is so simple that it is called a "silver bullet" (Bobel, 2019, p. 88). The solution is the cheap, countable, distributable and tangible pad.

To widen my perspective and add more nuances to the North/South-, actor/target-, giver/receiver binaries, I have also looked at the rhetoric of an MHM organisation from the Global South. I examined two Ugandan artefacts to compare and control the US artefact with, to gain more insight in the complex power relations that still persist between the Global North and the Global South. My observations suggest that both the organising, structure and rhetoric of the Ugandan organisation is influenced by Western practices. Possible explanations for the similarities between organisations from North and South might be that Global South organisations, through mimicry (Bhabha, 1997), wish to appeal to a Western audience and potential donors, or that they aim to be recognised (Iser, 2019) and accepted as serious actors within the Western-introduced development industry. In addition, Global South actors may feel subjugated (inferiority complex (Fanon, 2008)) under the "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2000) of Western actors who claims the defining power to decide what development and progress should look like. The inclusion of a Global South organisation into this research support existing postcolonial theories of a continuing power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South—not just within a giver-receiver-relationship, but also between actors divided by nothing but an "imaginary geography" (Said, 1978). This perspective has also contributed to shed light on the ambivalence between roles, cultures and expectations that comes with descending from a group of people that has been, and still is, treated as inferior, while at the same time, like Kyagulanyi, possessing privilege and agency.

Out of respect for the complexities of this topic, I wish not to conclude on whether or not, or to what extent, the representations examined reflects remnants of colonial thinking, although one could argue that there are clear indications of this. Through the examinations and observations of this thesis, I have identified several similarities between recorded representations of the colonial era and current representations of people in former colonies. However, in a research involving everything from past historical events, multiple actors and political and economic interests, to conscious and unconscious perceptions and driving forces, it would be impossible to put two lines under an answer. Where I instead can come closer to a conclusion is on whether the representations I have examined contribute to or challenge oppression, which then can say something about current power relations and be scrutinised and problematised on its own, regardless of history. Similarly, I can say something about whether representations seem to challenge and break down stereotypes, or if they stand behind existing misconceptions and thus contribute to reinforce the status quo of power inequality.

Through a "deep dig" and a "wide search", I have identified representations that, consciously or not, may contribute to oppression, negative stereotypes and uneven power relations, and I have found representations that potentially challenge these very forces. As I see it, Western MHM actors, and possibly the development industry as a whole, seem to experience an internal ambivalence. There seem to be a wish and aim to advocate for equality and empowerment of the "inferior", and at the same time I pick up a possible hesitation or discomfort over letting go of the power and privileges that has been passed on to them from a time where this "superiority" was taken for granted. In my opinion, this internal ambivalence appears as a perfect host for the hidden, persisting and often unconscious *coloniality of power*.

What should we do, then, with such information? Condemn Menstrual Hygiene Management and the whole Western development industry for being hypocritical? Stop engaging in the fight for social, political, and economic justice, because of its inherited possibilities of containing coloniality of power? Or focus on the positive changes that has been observed so far, expecting decoloniality to emerge by itself if we just give it time? I will say no to all of these options and suggest that we instead search for better ways to reach the goal. What goal exactly? That should be the first question. Whose goals are we trying to reach (and who are *we*?), who is formulating the problems, who provides the

solutions and who is perceived as the protagonist of the story? If the answer to this "who" leans more towards a Western Self, this could be a good place to start the work of transformation.

As we have seen, being the "teller of the story" is a powerful position to have. If the goals of increasing empowerment, agency and equality—as the majority of MHM- and development organisations speak of—are sincere, one move could be to pass on the microphone and let people represent themselves. The potential risk with such a move could be that entirely different representations, roles, problems, solutions and goals might be added to the table, and that Western actors lose some of the power and influence that they have been so used to possessing. Such a turn may be uncomfortable for those who has been enjoying privilege, but if equality is a goal, this could be a useful place to put in effort. I do not have enough grounds to say that a shift in representations, and in whose hands the microphone is placed, is the main solution towards equality—stronger measures are needed to change global economic and political power relations—but I am convinced that it could move us a step in the right direction. What we know for sure is that the journey is not over. I stand behind Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) who says:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 166)

Before we end this stage of the journey, let us pass through a small brainstorm and play with some reflections, possibilities and call for research to pave potential ways into this unknown future.

The big picture

The best way to know where to go is to know where you are at the moment. I now want us to take a step back and locate the position that the topic of this thesis has in the bigger picture. With the help from different disciplines, we will look at some tools, strategies, approaches, principles and philosophies that can challenge current North-South power inequality and facilitate for truer and more nuanced representations of both the Self and the Other.

After first digging deep and discovering phenomena that I wanted to explore in-depth, and then searching wide to see how my findings reflect bigger tendencies in the world, I find it necessary to establish what role and potential significance these findings have in the bigger picture. This research is evolved around representations, and although I consider my findings both relevant and of importance, I will be careful to claim the level of impact that the use and abuse of representations have in the totality of complex power relations between the Global North and the Global South. However, there is a reason to why I named my main findings—the ways in which representations is used as a rhetorical tool to justify actions—a *spearhead*. An archaeological finding of one spearhead may indicate a single event or, on the other side, suggest a myriad of activities. After locating the spearhead of this thesis, I needed to search with a wider scope to find out whether the findings of my main artefact could say something about broader tendencies or not. After establishing that the spearhead is not the only one of its sort—that there are common traits in the ways that Western MHM- and development organisations represent Global South Others—I need to reflect on the roles these findings have in the bigger context. Spears are weapons with a purpose, made by human beings with an agenda to bring food to the table or to win a battle. They are not deadly on their own, unless in the hands of their creators. Hence, I should not overestimate the power of representations alone but see them as a weapon, or a symptom, of the agendas of their creators.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, representations and motives are inextricably linked together. Here I have chosen to examine representations because I believe that by having a close look at the use and effect of these, we can get new insights in underlying motives. Official agendas and action plans of Western MHM- and development organisations may get legitimacy exactly because they are supported by the perceptions that purposely constructed, and sometimes unconsciously consumed, representations of Others have created. By establishing conventional pads as a universal necessity and a human right, and by representing distant Others as passive and weak—an organisations' mission to provide pads to low-income menstruators seems both legitimate and necessary. But what if these perceptions and representations are wrong, or promising to solve problems that are much deeper, structural and systemic than what is communicated? What if the focus on concrete (potentially constructed) issues takes attention away from the real problems of oppression and power inequality?

If there were something to these questions, why would philanthropic organisations want to act in ways that take attention away from the real problems? These are huge and complex dilemmas with many conflicting powers at play at the same time. The fact that wealthy countries increasingly use aid to promote national interests rather than reducing global poverty (*Principled Aid Index 2020*, n.d.), is an example of such complexity. Like Mbembe (2001), we can then ask whether we have really entered into a new period or whether "we find the same theatre, the same mimetic, acting, with different actors and spectators, but with the same convulsions and the same insult?" (p. 237). To get an increased focus and understanding of the consequences of Western development initiatives in the Global South, I would call for further research on the role such initiatives have—not on the level of progress the specific initiatives lead to directly—but on the possible impact such interference has on the general power-dynamic between the Global North and Global South.

As a spearhead can serve as evidence to prove acts of hunting or warfare, the representations I have examined can serve as evidence to prove inherited or learned perceptions, or to indicate both open and hidden agendas. I suspect that national and global political and economic interests are fundamental factors and driving forces in global relations, and that development initiatives also can be used as a tool to strengthen Western countries' position in the world. With this perspective it becomes clear that improvement or corrections of representations alone will not solve the issues of power inequality, unless we address deeply entrenched economic and political issues at the same time. I am, however, convinced that changing terminology and representations of Others––like we have done by burying the N-word and by collectively declaring that "Black Lives Matter" —can have an impact on those in power to affect policies and structural issues. Therefore, I believe that an increased awareness towards the Power, Privilege and Product of representations, although being just one of many factors of larger power relations, will have a significant impact on the pace and direction of the way forward.

The way forward

One way that we, as individuals, can actively challenge the power inequality of representations, is to consider which, of all the representations we have been provided with through a lifetime, has been taken for granted as truths. Our position in the world has

affected what we have seen, heard or read, and how we have understood the (carefully selected) information that we have been provided with. A good first move is therefore to start questioning and becoming more critical to what we see, hear and read, including our own thinking. The next step is to acknowledge that we might be part of the problem. This may feel unfair, since we did not decide where to be born and what society and worldview to be raised within. However, this should not stop us from admitting that our current privileges (depending on who you are) may have been achieved by the oppression of others in the past. A continuous utilisation of these privileges—whether to enjoy economic and educational advantages, or to be in the possession of a voice that has a higher chance of being heard—contributes to maintaining an unequal power-balance. Only by acknowledging and accounting for this imbalance, we can hope to become more informed and "less stupid" (*Rosenberg Quote*, n.d.) in our representations of Others, whose voices have been more difficult to hear through "our" noise and spectacle.

In order to move towards equality, there is a need to redistribute power, which means to give back and to take responsibility. Those who has been enjoying power and privilege needs to be willing to let go of influence and the status as the hero and protagonist. It may be uncomfortable to walk away from these privileges, whether it is voluntary or due to enforced policies. An example that may illustrate such discomfort is when Mergens in her speech calls the Kenyan girls "cops" merely for giving feedback (requested of them) on the provided pads. The bright side of this example is that even though it may feel uncomfortable to let go of some power and influence, one can still decide to do so based on the belief that it is the right thing to do.

If a journalist or researcher loses legitimacy for representing someone wrongfully, taking things out of its context, or failing to ask for consent or to provide the depicted individual with an opportunity to comment (*NSD*, n.d.; *SPJ Code of Ethics*, n.d.), this should—in my opinion—also apply to the development industry. Written rules and policies could potentially contribute to speed up both internal change and external accountability. UNICEF have, for instance, guidelines stating that "The best interests of each child are to be prioritized over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights", "Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image" and "The use of stereotypes in imagery, both negative and positive, should be avoided" (*Ethical Reporting Guidelines*, n.d.). I believe that implementation of

guidelines for representations can lead to more just, contextualised and diverse representations, which in the next instance can facilitate for more respectful, humble and context-driven approaches. However, it will require some insight and understanding from the person who is to follow such guidelines. It does not help to believe that one has covered an accurate context of a child if one is coloured by stereotypical expectations, and consciously or unconsciously chooses only to cover components that meets these expectations. Education on this, or rather a decolonisation of what we have been thought so far, would thus be an important step.

A returning issue when writing this master thesis has been the division between the Self and the Other. As much as I have criticised this division, I have also maintained it through my repeating use of the terms. It is an accepted truth that every individual sees and understands the world from the perspective of the Self in relation to Others (Schalk, 2011). However, this binary becomes problematic when we put a fixed divide between "imagined geographies" of peoples, communities and nations. In that regard, Schalk (2011) propose an approach to this Self/Other binary by including a third term, the "Other-Self" (p. 197), which facilitates for relations, instead of divisions, between individuals.

When encountering one another, people notice identifiers like race, gender, age and ability, making constant calculations of one's relatedness with Others, or the lack thereof. However, through conversation or interaction, someone who seemed to be an Other can emerge as an "Other-Self" (another self), someone one can identify with on levels first not noticed. If we start talking *with* each other more than *about* each other and *interacting* more than *acting*, I believe there is a possibility to challenge the existing stereotyping and homogenising of distant Others, and instead embrace the complexities, nuances and fluidity of every individual. Schalk (2011) notes that historical group experiences, like colonialism or slavery, can affect perceptions of Self and Others. One may therefore attempt to recognise and account for possible influences of historical experiences and current representations and consider their effect on both inter-personal and international relationships.

One way to break free from colonial-like representations with their simplistic binaries may be to open up for the opposite of binaries, like ambivalence, heterogeneity and hybridity (H. Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarti, 2012). Khalil (2004) describes hybridity as a state where

traditional and civilisational boundaries are disappearing, making it harder to divide people or nations into oppositional camps. This could possibly facilitate for a more genuine dialogue where the Self can come to a more sympathetic understanding of its Other instead of claiming to be superior and in position to tell a muted Other who he or she is. According to Bhabha (1994), "The white man's self-perception as moral, rational and civilized required the image of the negro as barbaric and uncivilized, and the notion of hybridity in this way helps to break down the essentialized, binary opposition between the colonized and the colonizer, between black and white, self and other." (p. 116). This extension of the horizon would not mean to abandon own identity, but to recognise that identities are not facts of nature but arise in relation to others. Instead of projecting all the negative traits that one does not want to identify with onto the Others (Said, 1978), one could start seeing this Other, no matter how different from the Self, as an equal co-inhabitant in the same world, which is neither North or South, East or West, but a dynamic mix of everything (Khalil, 2004).

A growing philosophy who values the differences of people and ways of life is called *pluriversality*, which promote a multiplicity of "ways of worlding" (A. Kothari et al., 2019). Drawing on non-patriarchal ways of *doing*, *being* and *knowing,* this philosophy invites participation, collaboration, respect, acceptance and horizontality, and resist domination, hierarchy, control, power, violence and war. Although advocates of this philosophy acknowledge that building synergies between a diversity of imaginative visions will be challenging, they argue that such tensions and contradictions can become basis for constructive exchange towards a constantly evolving pluriverse (A. Kothari et al., 2019).

As much as cultural relativism is an integrated part of current development discourse (Groenfeldt, 2003), I believe that a more active encouragement and facilitation of uniqueness and multiplicity could further shrink the gap between the Self and Others. One could perhaps define the implementation of the practice of "questinnairing", presented by Mergens, as an attempt of such, but because the actors in this example only ask questions on a product already established by them as necessary, the opportunity to learn about alternative solutions is lost. I would like to see more research on the effects of initiatives actively aiming to facilitate for non-patriarchal ways of doing, being and knowing.

So far, we have discussed the challenges and implications of representing Others, and different alternative approaches, including policies, accountability, education, new philosophies and passing on the microphone. However, a question still remains to be answered: Is it possible to say anything at all about distant Others without exercising unnecessary power, or should Western development organisations' representations of targets of intervention in the Global South be rejected altogether? Leela Gandhi (1998) offers a possibility for the continuance of representing Others, through knowledge:

> Knowledge is most like itself when it undertakes to counter and oppose the unequal distribution of power in the world … knowledge is least like itself when it becomes institutionalised and starts to collaborate with the interests of a dominant ruling elite. (Gandhi, 1998, p. 75)

Based on Gandhi's reflections I will argue that it is, in theory, possible to present legitimate and non-oppressive representations of distant Others. The challenge, however, is that representations, and rhetoric as a whole, are used as tools to promote the interests and agenda of the organisation or ideology that one represents or identifies with. The way to ensure legitimate representations of Others is then, based on Gandhi's reflection, when the knowledge that representations are based on is de-institutionalised and removed from the agendas of the organisation or ideology that the rhetor identifies with. With an active aim to search for, and present, knowledge that undertakes to counter and oppose the unequal distribution of power in the world, development organisations may succeed in providing more dignified, multifaceted and representative representations of Others. An even more promising future would be, however, to step aside and give way for Self-representation.

As the word suggest, Self-representation is to represent oneself, instead of being represented by someone else. One challenge within the development industry is that power inequality between the actor/giver/Western Self and the victim/receiver/Global South Other, gives the first part several advantages and facilities to represent the latter. When in possession of equipment (cameras, computers, cars and drones), an organisation (followers, money, influence and brand), language (rhetorical tools and English skills), strategy (education and work experience) and agenda (political, economic and developmental) the Western spectator is well positioned to take the word. This may be

acceptable, if ethical considerations are made, but such representations often construct Global South Others as "objects of knowledge" (Spivak, 1990) for the Global North, rather than subjects of their own story. Ella Shohat (1995) notes that denial of Self-representation "has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation. The struggle to 'speak for oneself' cannot be separated from a history of being spoken for, from the struggle to speak and be heard." (p. 173). Just like the discourse of Orientalism (Said, 1978) did not listen to the voices of those being represented, but to the Orientalists representing them, Western development organisations and media largely provide, and rely on, self-constructed representations of Others, instead of facilitating for people to represent themselves (Risam, 2018).

The difference of seeing an Other as an object of knowledge rather than a subject, could affect how the Western Self relates to, perceives and approach this Other. A goal for the future then, which would both enhance and enrich Western understanding of Global South Others and ensure increased agency for the depicted, could be to let people, to a much larger extent, represent themselves. With the power inequality in terms of means and communication channels, an active handover of both the microphone and the stage would be necessary. Enabled by his hybrid role as a Ugandan with the attained privileges from spending half of his life in North America, documentary filmmaker, Jordan Sekatawa, launched in April 2021 the documentary film *Uganda we Rise* as an act of passing on the microphone. He says: "We are often told the sad story, the pitiful story, of African children suffering without hope." (Sekatawa, 2021). His documentary, featuring young Ugandans forging their own futures, is meant to challenge this narrative and show the determination and strength of Ugandans. "We are not only telling stories, we are changing our image." (Sekatawa, 2021).

To jump out of this never-ending brainstorm, I will suggest that with increased awareness and inspiration from anti-oppressive movements like feminism, anti-racism, anti-fascism and decoloniality, we can decide to transform the ways that we see ourselves and others. If this happens collectively and from common interests, I believe that we can redefine who we want to become and what type of world we want to live in. Braidotti, cited in Andrés (2019) highlights the power of becoming:

> We need to open up the meaning of the identity concept towards relations with a multiplicity, with others. Through opposition to the idea of identity as something completely closed, already formed, and static. We are subjects under construction, we are always becoming something. (Andrés, 2019)

We can only hope that what the Western Self is *becoming,* through self-critical insight, policies and accountability, will look less like condescending self-proclaimed heroes, and more like true advocates for the equality that is so loudly promoted within the development industry. I will let this glimpse of hope, no matter how challenging to achieve in practice, be the last words of this thesis. They are however, by no means, the last words of this conversation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: TEDx talk transcript

So, my background is in part global sustainable development. And if you had told me five years ago that I would be doing what I do today, and that it would turn out to be one of the keys to reversing cycles of poverty, I don't think that I would have believed it. And yet, here I am, having learnt so much, and I have to admit that the question that I learned of that opened this whole process, was one so hidden in stigma that not many people have asked it at all until the last few years. So, I have to give myself that. But let me share with you the journey. So, I've been helping the K-foundation in Kenya provide more sustainable education opportunities for secondary school,

01:00 a gift that less than 8 % of the population ever got to achieve. And it makes such a profound difference. We were finding sustainable ways for the community to enable themselves to offer this. Well, there are dignitary access if you'd like to visit the slums of Kibera. The slums stretch on when you're on the top like a sieve of rusty corrugated metal. It's filled with resourceful people, millions packed in spaces so small. And they invited us to go see an orphanage there. And I was of course really worried that my heart would break. But I toughed it up because I believe in experiencing. And when we got there, instead they captured my heart. And since I couldn't adopt all 400 of them, instead I brought them my gift, sustainable options. So, one of them I have to share with you is a rocket burning stove, do you know these? So, they're… they enabled them to

02:00 instead of using scarce wood, that was very expensive in the slums, they could use sawdust in these simple metal stoves. That could then save them hundreds of dollars a week that could then be used for food. So, I was really excited about this, and frankly very proud of myself. I… I'm sorry to say. And I thought I've found my passion in life. This was it! I was gonna help orphanages be more sustainable, liveable, and a little less crowded. But that was before the election violence of 2008, do you remember this? Right after the first election. Machetes and fires and people displaced and killed. And suddenly that way too big orphanage that had 400 children turned into an unimaginable 1400, and I have to say

reported because I still can't imagine how they could possibly fit that many people in that space. This is one of the rooms there (shows picture).

03:00 So, I went to bed trying to think of ways to feed them better, because after all, this was friends of friends, gathering together and passing hat to find ways to help. This wasn't my orphanage, but I wanted to help. So, we were looking for ways to feed them better. And one night I went to bed with that inside me, worried about their hunger. So, imagine my surprize when I woke up at 2.30 in the morning, not with questions of solar lighting and solar solutions and food, but this question: Have you asked what the girls are doing for feminine hygiene? I hadn't even thought of that question. It had never occurred to me. It was on none of the lists of any of the solutions I saw for it enabled. I was stunned and I flew from my bed and ran as fast as I could to the computer to email this question, and to my surprise got an immediate answer.

04:00 And the answer: Nothing. They wait in their rooms. How do you wait in your room, when there are 50 people in the room with you and these are stacked in the end and they keep going on, how do you do that? The answer was: they sit on a piece of cardboard. And it turns out that, all over the world, if women and girls want the dignity of being freed from their room, if they want to participate in education or supporting their family, and not being without hygiene, they have to resort to things like leaves and newspaper and trash, or unsecured... cloth, or leaves… I said that already (laughs), corncobs, cornhusks, bark, stones. Anything to not have to stay in their room, because they are not there by choice.

05:00 I knew I had to do something. And I wish I could tell you that my first response was something innovative, but it wasn't. It was to provide disposable pads. After all that's what I'm familiar with. So, I found a non-profit that provided them for just 200 dollars for 500 girls that needed them. But I also knew something. I knew that if I even found a way to find somebody every month to donate something that was disposable, and they needed food, they were going to choose food every time. And that too turns out to be true all over our planet. (Becomes emotional) Days for Girls started, not that moment, but in one to come. You see, amazing volunteers joined together and sowed pads, and sowed bags for those pads and made thousands of components for those 500 girls. All stitched with love. In fact, three of them sowed so fast and furious that their fingertips bled.

06:00 But we made it, and we took eight huge duffel-bags to Kenya. And they were so grateful when we got there. I'm the one with the teethy grin (laughs and shows a picture of herself and some Kenyan girls). But they have more to teach us. I'm embarrassed to say that it didn't occur to me that there was no place to dispose of these disposable things I'd sent, right? So, the consequences were that their every trink in the chainlike fence along with latrines was filled with soiled pads and they were packed against post and they were filling the pit latrine that had to be shovelled with… by hand. And that of course adds to health issues and stigma against women and girls, the very thing we were trying to avoid. There is no place to dispose of them. But they have more to teach us besides their love and gratitude.

07:00 As some of these girls left, they said thank you so much. Before you came, we had to let the teachers and principle use us if we wanted to stay in class. I hoped that didn't mean what I thought it meant. And yet there were another 250 girls waiting to come through, and so I couldn't stop. But it turned out later that evening, I learnt that was exactly what I feared. In order to not be bound to their rooms on a piece of cardboard going without even food and water, unless someone remembered to bring it to them, they had to be exploited. It was a choice they made because if you've dropped out of school and you're an orphan, your consequences and opportunities almost all include being exploited. If there were only ten girls who could say that changed for them, everything we've done would have been worth it.

08:00 Instead, because of amazing grassroot of thousands of volunteers, that stretch from New Zealand to Australia to Europe, all over Canada and all over the USA, a magnitude of more than 100.000 girls have been reached in five years. (Applaud). So, that applaud should go to all of these amazing people. But they did something else that is equally as astonishing to me. You see, we started asking questions. We started asking: How does this work for you? And they would explain things like, that, uh, we made our original style—in fact you have to be with us six months before you can see them—so, if you want to see the original style you have to come volunteer. We made them with ribbons at the end, and a pad that look like a pad and of course we made them white because that's what pads are, right?

09:00 Well, it turned out that the girls told us: Do you know what? When I walk the pad shifts forward and then it sticks out and I look like a maan, like a mæn. Okay cops, we'll put

pockets at each chin we've got this. And they explained that they had to hide their pads underneath their bed, because they wouldn't … they would be embarrassed taking them out. Or in other communities it was taboo to have them hanging out. Anything menstrual related is completely taboo. So, they, what do you do about that? And the white, same problem, stains would be a problem, and there's no bleach. So amazing volunteers got together, and we said: What do we do? And this is what they did. (Shows picture). They've made this innovative solution. It's a trifold pad that looks like a handkerchief when its flat, dries quickly, and when folded in three is a colourful absorbent, six layered miracle.

10:00 And what's equally amazing about it is listening to their input and gathering the genius of those we work with and those we serve, ended up meaning that these washed with one quarter of the amount of water, one quarter. And that's huge in almost all the areas we are… we are in. And then the volunteers were willing to change and change and change to whatever the thousands of women gave feedback that their need was. It's a miracle in what I like to call questionnairing. Because after all, how can we be relevant, how can we be culturally, physically and environmentally responsive if we don't ask those we serve what works for them? Their wisdom is as great, or greater, than ours. So, these volunteer networks have taken it all across the globe. From, this is a group from Australia, who took them to Madagascar.

11:00 And they help in another way too. They teach people to make their own. Girls and women all over the globe are learning to make their own. A dear friend of mine, Diana in Uganda, now makes a living, making pads and teaching others to make pads. I want to introduce you to another amazing hero. Her name is Gotsu, and she's the second from the right. (Shows picture). Gotsu is 12 years old. Or was, when she learned about Days for Girls. We train something amazing called Ambassadors of Women's Health, who go into the world and are taught how to talk about our period, because let's be honest, we don't even feel comfortable talking about that here. And what are we afraid of? Because after all, without periods, there would be no people (laughter from the audience). It's an amazing, amazing phenomena that humans share.

12:00 Not just the women, all of us share. So, this girl got to hear an ambassador in her own language in Zimbabwe come to her and talk to her about this. And teach her how to make pads and leave resources. And see who it was that picked up the ball. It was 12-year-old

Gotsu. And when they returned in six months, they found she had taught 200 fellow students how to make their own pads. And when they asked her: How did you do that? Her response: I'm no longer an orphan, I am a leader of women. (Gets emotional). That is the power of respecting and honouring those we serve. Here is the amazing thing. We know that the poverty cycle can be broken when girls stay in school.

13:00 And they don't always get that opportunity. A lot of them drop out. And guess what one of the big reasons is. In Uganda we questioned a school that had had [DfG-] kits for just one year. And they, before it got there, had a pattern of 25 % of the girls dropping out when they reached the age of menstruation. One year after having their kits, and guess how many dropped out! (Shows with fingers). Three percent. It has a major impact and yet we know if a girl stays in school even one more year of primary school, according to several studies, that she will, her whole nation will have a flier growth in national product, she will have less… be less likely to marry early, she will be less likely to die at childbirth and she will be more likely to teach her children and lift her community with her voice and talents. We can literally help reverse the cycle of poverty.

14:00 And I'm not saying this is the only solution. Because all good solutions weave together, in this magical tapestry that humanity can create together if we don't tie down those within our circle. And the amazing thing is we've left 50 % of them, entire communities and nations, locked behind doors. And that, affects all of us. The more amazing thing is we can change this. We can do this. This is one of the things we can really do. You know, questionnairing isn't alone to Days for Girls. In fact, two of my heroes in the whole world, are Dr. Pedro Sanchez, who is a leading soil scientist, and he is a master of questionnairing. He goes into communities and ask them: How it's going, why the…how its…they're dressing the road in soils and failing crops. And, in one community in Kenya, they answered: Well, we have to cut down the indigenous trees.

15:00 If we don't then our family won't live, and then we can't take care of them into the future. There is no future. So, we created, taught them how to grow fast-growing trees that in the first year provided shade and in the second year could be cut to provide firewood. He found little, diminutive sunflowers that could be ground up and mended into the soil right where they were, and increased productivity of the crops by an enormous amount. Or Dr. Catherine Burtini, is one of the World Food Programs former directors. This amazing

woman asks questions of an Afghan community. And she asked them to list the ten things they would do if they had more financial resources. And they noticed a pattern. The women, if asked ten things, would list nine to ten things that they would be…involving getting to their community and giving to their families. Very little for themselves.

16:00 So, they took the novel approach of taking the funds or/and food and giving it to the military, and instead giving that to the women in the community. The women in the community were encouraged to make these brick or clay ovens, and they would bake the grains into bread, which would feed the community and trickle down to everyone, benefit financially as well. It was so successful that the Taliban tried to stop the program and not allow the women to do any more baking. She stood them toe to toe, in one, but that's another story. What's interesting is both of these people won the World Food Prize, it's the Nobel Prize equivalent (whispers sorry) of, for those who change world hunger. Dr. Sanchez and Catherine Burtini put their money from their prize towards secondary education for girls.

17:00 Dr. Sanchez said: That might surprize you that a soil scientist would do that. But here is the quote he gave: "An educated girl can have a profound impact on the development of a community". All of them come back. Do you feel the thread? Do you see the thread? We can do this. What's important is, not just this issue, but all of us. This makes the question: What other questions are we not asking? If this single issue can have such an enormous impact with so many layers, what other questions have we not asked yet? Is that as exciting to you as it is to me? Our goal is at have it done, by 2022, every girl, everywhere has access to whatever solution works for her. We'll see what we take on next, cause we're gonna make it.

18:00 But not without the tenaciously flexible, and fearlessly partner in. You're invited. (Pause). We can. We must. Reach every girl. Everywhere. Period. (Laughter and applaud). Thank you. (18:33)

Appendix 2: Founder's story (from webpage)

Weekends were filled with jubilation and dancing. Drums sounded loudly and it was always a customized beat meant for marriage ceremonies. There was a certain jubilation mood that covered the village and got everyone excited. The only question I remember people asking was "whose daughter is getting married?"

One long line mainly of older women dressed up in traditional wear, carrying baskets of cereals freshly harvested or specially kept in the granary for this occasion, walked through a small walk path. From one hill, through the valley singing, clapping and making celebration sounds, they peacefully walked. If you saw these lines of people from a distance, you would think it was a line of white egrets. On this weekend, I decided to go stand on the roadside simply because I had not seen this kind of occasion for some time since I was in boarding school. Making our necks longer, standing on our toes and clearly being impatient of peeping, me and my cousins couldn't wait for the crew to reach us. The yellow umbrella was always the only outstanding indicator of who the bride was.

Closer to the group we came and when the bride passed us we could all tell that my best friend Kyomu was the bride. Shocked and scared I run home. Engulfed in fear of who could be next. Kyomu was barely fifteen and last year her friend Alice who was fourteen was married off to the Sheikh of our village mosque.

One at a time, the girls who I grew up with became young mothers. When I got time to have a chat, I finally realized why they were harassed to become wives so early. Actually, they stayed home for close to a week when everybody else was at school and the stay at home happened every month. Their stay behind when everyone else was at school was a constant reminder to their fathers that they were menstruating thus being grown up women according to our culture.

I couldn't let this happen to my friend's children. I believe that I am placed in a position where I can help advocate against child marriages. I can possibly do something to help the girls stay in school even when they are menstruating. I could possibly speak to them and encourage the girls to take their education seriously and refuse to have their future messed.

Appendix 3: Video speech transcript

Hello everybody. My name is Barbara Itungu Kyagulanyi. I am the executive director of Caring Hearts Uganda. Caring Hearts Uganda is an NGO that has been in existence since 2013, and we have been working with the girl child, especially about their health and wellbeing. Today is Menstrual Hygiene Day and it is a day that is celebrated all over the world. Caring Hearts Uganda has chosen to be part of this celebration, just to promote menstrual health and also create awareness. Menstruation has been seen as a taboo. It is a secret in plain sight. Most people don't discuss it, but it's something that should be talked about more often, and it should be talked about by everybody, male or female. The discussion about menstrual hygiene is not for women alone, it is for all of us, irrespective of gender. I call upon you men especially, our brothers, husbands, to get involved,

01:00 to uplift the women around you, and to also spread the word about menstrual hygiene management. Menstruation has been seen as a taboo by most people, most cultures, and it is not widely discussed. Well, I can say it is a secret in plain sight. Half the globe has menstruated, is menstruating, and will menstruate eventually. This is a topic we should be in open discussion. If we leave access of knowledge to the mothers, just like it is in most cultures, we will have several problems. It is problematic especially if you link the level of education of your mother to the knowledge they access, or they have about menstruation. What happens if a child doesn't have a mother? What if they have no mother figure in their lives? Who takes care of the knowledge access? Who gives them the understanding about menstruation? I think it is our duty, my duty, your duty, everybody's duty

02:00 to make sure that they can take responsibility of accessing knowledge to the girl child, especially about menstruation health. Caring Hearts Uganda has had the chance to go to different schools, especially primary schools and we have had to interact with young girls who are experiencing their first or second menstrual period. Sometimes we get to talk to them and we know what their problems are. Some of them don't have any menstrual products to use. They're not hygienic. Some of them have blankets that they use because they can't access sanitary pads. A sanitary pad is very expensive. You could say it's about 5000 shillings. A parent cannot afford that. You see a parent who cannot provide porridge for the child and you wonder if they can afford a sanitary pad. The girl child in the rural

places, especially in primary schools, have a challenge of limited access to restrooms. Restrooms where they can go to clean themselves, change their sanitary pad

03:00 or even have the privacy to conduct the business that they have to conduct when they are in their periods. It is also very hard to find a girl child going to school when they are in their period in rural places. They don't go to school because they're ridiculed. Their friends laugh at them. Their friends make them feel like they have overgrown. They make them feel like they are not supposed to be at school at that time. It has affected her education. The girl child misses at least five days a month in school and that affects their performance. And definitely poor results. These girls end up losing interest in school and this brings about an increasing number of dropouts. We end up having teen-mothers out here. Uneducated mothers of the nation. If we want to have women empowerment, which we can call women economic empowerment, we will definitely not have to do one thing. That one alone is not enough. That one seminar that you bring about is not enough.

04:00 I think personal empowerment of these girls is very important. So, we will need to equip them, empower them and give them the confidence that everything they are doing is for themselves, and for their children, and for the nation. We thank you all for your involvement and for all the energy you put in to uplift the girl child. And we pray that God blesses you. We wish you a happy menstrual hygiene day 2019. (4:32)