Witnesses of Wealth: Development Workers, Intercultural Communication and Norwegian National Identity

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Abstract

In this article the broader topic of communication and identity is addressed through a discussion of intercultural involvement and national identity in the case of Norway. The main research question is how Norwegian expatriate development workers discursively sustain, challenge and (re)construct Norwegian national identity. Discussing this I draw on material from a recent study where I interviewed twenty-three development workers (). In the analysis I identify three main types of contributions development workers make to the construction of a Norwegian national identity and label them according to three priestly roles: the prophet who criticises the powerful, the counsellor who comforts and strengthens his flock, or the priest as a unifying symbol of the group.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, national identity, development aid, development workers, Norway

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Introduction

International involvement has been an important characteristic of Norwegian policy and trade for a long time. Shipping and fishing interests have sent Norwegians to countries and oceans far from their own shores, and in recent decades oil interests have had the same effect. This international involvement has not only been related to commerce. The number of missionaries who have been sent by Norwegian mission societies to Africa, Asia and Latin-America is remarkably high, and in more recent times international aid, peace and reconciliation efforts have become important elements of Norwegian foreign policy. Through this ongoing process of communication with other states, peoples and cultures, and in the encounters between individual oil workers, missionaries or development workers and their local counterparts, the understandings of oneself and 'the Other' are negotiated and constructed. A related consequence is that Norwegian national identity is also being constructed. Engaging internationally not only challenges our understanding of the Other, but also our understanding of ourselves.

In what follows I want to focus specifically on the contribution Norwegian development workers make to the construction of Norwegian national identity. Expatriate development workers represent the donor (the Norwegian state, Norwegian non-governmental organisations and/or individual donors) and they work in partnership with the recipients of development aid. Thus they hold an intermediate position and must communicate across the political, financial and cultural boundaries that divide the world into a North and South, into developed and developing countries. In other words, their role is one of communicating between people living in vastly different circumstances: not least in economic terms. Towards (the representatives of) the poor development workers will communicate the values, policies and ideology of the donor, and towards their home constituencies they must communicate the needs, challenges, hopes and frustrations of the recipients of aid. This also puts Norway and Norwegian living conditions in a new perspective. Accordingly, the expatriate development worker is involved in a human encounter where Norwegian national identity can be challenged by the Other's perspectives, viewpoints and living conditions. Thus Norwegian expatriate development workers not only confirm Norwegian national identity, but may also contribute to its re-construction.

More specifically, the question I want to explore in the following is *how Norwegian expatriate development workers discursively sustain, challenge and (re)construct Norwegian national identity*. I

will draw on material from a recent study where I interviewed twenty-three development workers () and in the analysis use perspectives from discourse theory and cultural and religious studies. I begin by addressing some terminological and methodological issues, and continue by giving a short presentation of the contemporary Norwegian national identity as this is discussed in recent scholarly literature. This leads to the main section of this paper where I present and analyse the material in question. I conclude by identifying some types of contributions Norwegian development workers give to the construction of Norwegian national identity.

Methodology and material

The following will rely on material from an interview study where the primary research question addressed characteristics of the moral discourse of Norwegian development aid (:23). The interviewees of this study were all staff members of Norwegian development aid organisations (the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA; Norwegian Church Aid, NCA; Save the Children Norway, SCN; Norwegian People's Aid, NPA), men and women working in Eastern or Southern Africa. As is often noted, the context for such interviews has an impact on both the questions posed by the researcher as well as the answers given by the interviewees.[2] In other words, had the interviews been done with the explicit purpose of exploring issues related to intercultural communication and national identity, this would have influenced the answers given. However, this is not to say that such issues are not touched upon when other research topics constitute the initial or main focus of a research interview. As development aid has a key position in Norwegian foreign policy, the moral discourse of such aid is closely linked to the construction of a Norwegian national identity.

In other words, what follows pursues new topics based on interview statements cited in the above mentioned study, and as such quotations are many and comprehensive, it becomes possible to pursue also other research questions. The character and related limitations of the material at hand, however, as well as the analytical approach adopted below, do not allow for an analysis about the strength of Norwegian development workers' impact on the construction of Norwegian national identity. The concern here is rather: the character of the discursive contributions expatriate development workers make to this constructive process.

'Nation' and 'identity' will be key terms in the following. I will use the term 'nation' here in a way similar to Benedict Anderson's use of the word: I regard the nation as an "imagined community". Although the 'nation' is not an actual community, it is constituted by a notion of "deep horizontal comradeship" that binds a group of individuals together (:7; see also). By 'identity' I mean a sense of self-understanding and a sense of belonging. When the individual or a group sees itself as part of a larger whole, there is a sense of belonging to this larger entity. Thus, identity can refer both to an individual and a collective identity, although it should be noted that these are dialectically linked. Individual identity is constructed in light of and in relation to collective identities, and collective identities are symbolic communities that several individuals identify with (:173-180). Thus, and as indicated above, identity is not seen as something given, but rather as something that is continuously constructed and re-constructed. This implies that national identity is constructed through an ongoing social process of defining and redefining symbols and criteria related to the notion of a national community. Accordingly, whatever Norwegian national identity once might have been, this might be different today. Similarly, Norwegian identity today might change into something else in a few years time. The fact that such processes often are slow and hard to notice, and in part rely on constructions of the historical past, does not imply they do not take place.

The research question posed also limits the scope of this paper to *discursive* contributions to the construction of a Norwegian national identity. The terms 'discourse' and 'discursive' are used in a wide range of different ways in scholarly literature – from the structurally oriented definitions to the more dynamic and process oriented ones. Some see discourses as systems, others as "ways of talking" (see). In the following it is the latter understanding that is applied. Discourse is understood as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (:1), or more specifically as interpretative repertoires, "clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech" (:90). Thus, the issue here is how the interviewed development workers articulate their experiences and understanding of development aid and their role and function in this context with respect to the explicit and implicit notions of Norwegian national identity. In other words, it is the active and creative construction of a

national identity that takes place when individual experiences, feelings etc. are verbally articulated, that I will focus on. In other words, my approach is different from that of Terje Tvedt, who in his study of Norwegian development, foreign policy and power assumes that the actors "will only be able to liberate themselves to a limited extent from the historicity of the language" (:323, my translation). While Tvedt assumes the power of language and given discourses limit development workers' (and others') way of talking about such issues, I assume a larger degree of freedom and space for creative language use.

The in-between position development workers hold invites the interpretative perspective adopted in the following namely viewing them as analogous to priests or pastors. There are of course different understandings of the role of the priest in various religions and denominations, but they often share a notion of the priest as a person with a special role or function, and some degree of authority. As the priest is perceived as standing between man and 'the Wholly Other' (:25-30) and/or to be an authoritative interpreter of God's message to man, similarly the development worker communicates between the donor and the recipient and interprets the world and the realities of life in light of this Otherness. She stands between the donor and the recipient, communicates the donor's wants and wishes to the Other and conversely interprets and communicates the Others' needs and expectations back to the donor community. Her assumed closeness to the Other provides her with some degree of authority when giving this interpretation.

In the following I will use the roles of the priest as a *prophet* who criticises the powerful, the *counsellor* who comforts and strengthens his flock, and the priest as a *unifying symbol* of the group, as interpretative categories. This terminology and categorization is inspired by liberation theology and its call for a 'prophetic' criticism of sinful structures in society (), the Christian notion of forgiveness and pastoral care () and the sociological, functionalist understanding of (civil) religion (). Note, however, that the individual development worker might make use of a number of interpretative repertoires and thus take on different subject positions at different times. In other words, the labels prophet, counsellor and unifying symbol refer to the subject position related to these repertoires, not any essentialist conception of the persons using them. I will argue that the counsellor and unifying symbol discourses reconfirm widely shared and popular notions of what Norway is and who Norwegians are. The prophetic discourse provides, however, a far more critical and challenging perspective.

Norwegian self-understanding

Topics such as Norwegian culture and Norwegian national identity have been explored by a number of scholars in a wide range of different disciplines (; ; ;). While historians have studied the development and construction of Norwegian national identity as an historical process (), anthropologists have discussed both the idea of what is considered "typical Norwegian" (), the "Norwegian way of being" () and how Norwegian culture is perceived by others (). Such studies often question and criticize the very concept of a distinct Norwegian culture and identity, but also contribute to reconfirming this notion. In addition to the obvious research interests in the structures, habits and values that characterise Norwegian society, scholars have also discussed Norwegian national identity in comparison to other countries. Sociologist Knud Knudsen concludes for example that compared to Swedes, "Norwegians [still] stand out as the more xenophobic" (:233). Anthropologist Arne Martin Klausen summarizes his review of such research and identifies four key elements of Norwegian culture and society: 1) Norway is a small-scale society with a large degree of informal social control; 2) the ideology of equality (egalitarianism) is strong; 3) the ideology of social justice (the welfare state) is also strong; and finally 4) Norwegian culture is characterized by its emphasis on regional representation (the relative strong presence of the periphery) in the political system (:219).

Another approach in the study of Norwegian national identity has been to study how Norwegian identity and self-understanding is constructed through communication and interaction with the so-called Others. Historian Terje Tvedt has, in a number of publications, discussed Norwegian "Pictures of 'the Other'" () and Norwegian "Worldviews and Self-understanding" (). Anthropologist Marianne Gullestad has, in a recent study, addressed related issues in an analysis of photographs taken by Norwegian missionaries in Cameroon (). Similarly, historians and political scientists have studied Norwegians in general and the Norwegian state in particular and how they have related to others and other countries (). An aspect of Norwegian foreign policy that is often highlighted is its "moralising tendency" (:25). Thus, historian Pharo remarks: "The belief in the necessity and possibility of a foreign policy infused by high ethical

standards has been a trademark of Norwegian aid policies" (:546). These findings seem to be confirmed if one considers, for example, the Norwegian government's white paper on development aid, *Fighting Poverty Together*, from 2004. Programmatically this document states that

> As one of the world's richest countries, Norway has a special responsibility (*særskilt ansvar*). We are faced with an ethical demand (*etisk krav*) to do something about injustice, and to influence the development in a positive direction... (:6)

This moralising tendency and explicitly moral discourse seems to have become a key element of the notion of a Norwegian national identity. Not least has it become common to refer to Norway as a 'humanitarian superpower'. The term goes back to Jan Egeland's theses *Impotent Superpower – Potent Small State* () where he points to the political capital available to Norway by positioning itself in the fields of emergency and development aid.[3] Of course, this notion of being a 'humanitarian superpower' relies on other notions, for example Norway as being rich, internationally committed, acting with a just cause etc.

These aspects of Norwegian national identity constitute the background against which I set out to explore the discursive contributions to the creation of this identity by Norwegian development workers. The analysis will be thematically ordered. I begin by exploring how the development workers interviewed articulate their understanding of Norway vis-à-vis developing countries in the South. This is followed by an analysis of their conception of Norway vis-à-vis other countries in the North, and finally I will discuss how domestic factors in Norway are perceived in this context.

Norway and the South

When the interviewees are asked to reflect on their role and function as development workers, the difference in living conditions that constitutes the background for international aid often becomes an important element of their answers. Discussing the rationale for providing development aid, one of the NCA interviewees says:

> […] We earn tons of money from the trade we do with both Africa and some of the countries in the South, and in part the resources in other countries are being exploited: Angola, for example. Where we have Norwegian interests, Norwegian companies, like companies in the international oil industry, are taking out huge resources. And we in Norway, also in the oil sector, we take huge resources back to Norway, from a world that is very, very unjust. That is where we have to plough something back (*pløye noe tilbake*).

This interviewee conceptualizes Norwegian wealth as a result of how "we earn tons of money" from trade with "countries in the South". She[4] seems to admit Norwegian business involvement implies that "other countries are being exploited", but this does not make her call for an end to such involvement. Rather, she points to a responsibility to "plough something back". Similarly, discussing the background to development aid, another NCA interviewee says:

> […] If you take the increase in the price of oil over the last couple of years and how Norway has earned tons of money (*tjent grovt*) from this development, and if you look at what the increase in the oil price means for this country, for example, it's incredibly distressing. There are businesses that have to close, just because the oil price increases too much in comparison with the general development.

In contrast to the previous statement, the commercial involvement of Norwegian industry is here not referred to as a matter of exploitation. However, and in line with the previous statement, Norway is seen to earn "tons of money". This expression seems to emphasise how Norway is a rich country and a country with a considerable income.

These references to considerable incomes and "tons of money" come across as important interpretative repertoires in the material in question. The significant differences in living conditions, and the increasing gap between rich and poor, are referred to by several of the interviewees, and thus financial strength seems to be made a key aspect of Norwegian national identity.

This descriptive analysis is followed in some of the interviews by more normative considerations. For example, when also asked to reflect on the background for development aid, one of the embassy interviewees says:

> […] It's a paradox when you still have a Western world with an ever increasing standard of living, and that… We are really becoming richer and richer, at least many people are anyway, and the standard of living and rights and everything has become very, very good. Since the fifties up to today, sort of… And then it's somewhat strange, it leaves kind of a foul taste in your mouth that you meet in the UN and are aware of the huge differences that exist… I don't know, between two seats in the General Assembly. Norway sits next to Nigeria.

This interviewee addresses the context for development aid and underlines the magnitude of this difference ("the huge differences that exist"). However, the level of wealth some enjoy as they become "richer and richer" makes her talk of a "foul taste in your mouth". Accordingly, she does not see international inequality as morally irrelevant, but rather challenges any indifference to it. Inequality, at least in such cases where one must speak of "huge differences", is regarded as morally charged.

This understanding of Norwegian development aid as something which is related to ethical standards or moral values is also articulated when one of the NCA interviewees is asked what she considers aid is really all about. She says:

> I suppose we want to feel that we do something good in the world. Ease (*lette*) the conscience a bit, the sort of uncomfortable conscience (*ubekveme samvittigheten*) with respect to us living in good conditions in Norway. And we are well off. […] But is it… what is the context for it? Do we want to feel a little better, or is it a genuine concern for those who are not as well off? I don't quite know. Because we think it's more convenient (*greiest*) to help them down there. And better that not too many of them come to Norway and receive help there.

This interviewee puts forward the hypothesis that Norwegians want to "feel a little better". She relates this closely to an "uncomfortable conscience" that follows from the "good conditions in Norway", echoing the comment made about the "foul taste in your mouth" in the previous statement. Norwegian wealth leads, it is assumed, to a kind of psychological discomfort. This interviewee suggests aid might be a product of such discomfort and contrasts this with what she calls a "genuine concern".

Only a socio-psychological enquiry could give an answer to which of these concerns motivate Norwegians more. For our purposes it suffices to note that this interviewee, by framing the issue with this dichotomy between wanting to feel good and being genuinely concerned, articulates a potential critique of Norway as a humanitarian superpower. This is further strengthened with her reference to what she sees as Norwegians' tendency to find it "more convenient to help them down there". Thus she interprets Norwegian development aid in light of Norwegian immigration policies (and practices) and accordingly finds reason to challenge a self-understanding of Norway as a country which is doing good. Rather Norwegian development aid is perceived as a matter of feeling good, while keeping the more challenging issues at a distance. To summarize, there seems to be an interpretative repertoire that links Norwegian aid to a psychological discomfort. Norway is seen as a wealthy country, but as such Norwegians are seen to be put in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis poor countries in the South. To compensate Norwegians seek ways that enable them to feel better.

A similar "feel good" discourse is articulated when one of the embassy interviewees is asked what she thinks development aid is all about. She says: "But I think that Norwegians want to feel good", and continues:

> […] I find there is sort of a Norwegian double standard… that one should… We are very generous when it's needed […] Putting money in a donation box or collecting money in different ways. Or giving to a bank account when there is… The so-called CNN-effect. Then we are prepared. But when it comes to being nice to the neighbour who cooks food that smells of spices or something like that… We don't want more immigrants and we don't want more refugees, but we can very well help them as long as they stay down there.[5]

Again Norwegian development aid is explained in terms of a "want to feel good", and here more explicitly coupled with a reference to xenophobic attitudes among Norwegians (see). Labelling this as a "double standard" this interviewee indicates how she finds the willingness to offer aid in emergency situations to be in strong contrast to the reluctance to welcome immigrants to Norway. Accordingly, this interviewee too challenges the notion of Norway as a truly humanitarian superpower. She finds that the willingness to provide foreign aid is restricted to emergency situations, and thus that foreign aid and immigration polices are inconsistent.

Comments such as these imply an expectation of consistency in relevant government policies, but also in the notion of Norwegian national identity and who Norwegians are. Most explicitly the discrepancy between aid and immigration policies is highlighted. This corresponds to a similar criticism raised when, for example, the policy of farming subsidies is compared to aid policies (see). In other words, the notion of Norway as a humanitarian superpower is criticized for relying on a limited focus on only one section of Norwegian policy. Further, these interviewees articulate an expectation of truthfulness through their call for having a "genuine concern" and rejection of a "double standard". Thus, also an Aristotelian virtue-ethics seems to be articulated. There is a call to be pure at heart, and a link between attitudes and acts is expected. Accordingly, a demand is made that Norwegian identity must not only relate to the implemented policies, but should include the attitudes of those shaping these policies, and an understanding of who 'we' consider 'us' to be.

In addition to the discomforts of social inequality and double standards there is also an emphasis among the interviewees on the results achieved. Several of the interviewees indicate a strong concern for communicating to the Norwegian public and donors in Norway the results they achieve in their work. One of the embassy interviewees contrasts Norwegian kindness with achieving results in the field. She says:

> […] The most important thing is not to show off Norwegian kindness (*den norske godheten*), but to leave behind a few results that might not be very visible to the Norwegian public, but which have a greater effect for the people concerned.

To this interviewee "the most important thing" is not to confirm "Norwegian kindness" but rather the actual results. Thus she constructs a tension between these two concerns and indicates implicitly that there has been, or is now (by some), too much emphasis on the self-serving psychological effects of development aid. Accordingly, here too Norway and Norwegians and their needs are contrasted with conditions in the South. Similarly, responding to critics of international aid, one of the NCA interviewees says:

> […] I believe we haven't been good enough at showing Norway and many, many others the results that are there. Perhaps we use too big headlines, like: "Help the poor!" But we don't say how many schools we have helped build, how many teachers we have helped train. We don't say how many clinics we have contributed to establishing.

This statement shares with the previous one an emphasis on results, although contrary to the previous interviewee, this interviewee does not emphasise the importance of leaving behind "a few results". The latter is more concerned about "showing Norway […] the results that are there". This emphasis on results and the contrast between results and kindness reflects a pattern that can be noticed in several development aid discussions. Often the goodness discourse is juxtaposed with results, arguing that good intentions are obstacles to achieving good results or that such a discourse limits an open, critical discussion about the actual effects of development aid (). Thus, when there is talk of goodness or kindness, this is seen to dismiss a sincere discussion about results (see). This is also reflected in these two latter statements as the goodness discourse is explicitly rejected and a discourse that stresses the importance of achieving results is strongly articulated. Further, the emphasis on results is combined with a strong claim that the expected results are actually achieved.

Summarizing the findings so far, the analysis has identified discourses that implicitly dismiss the notion of Norway as a "humanitarian superpower". By employing the interpretative repertoires of Norwegians earning "tons of money" and wanting to feel good, some of the development workers thus take on the priestly role of the prophet, criticising the rich and powerful for their excessive wealth, life style and hypocrisy. Still, this way of talking also reconfirms the notion of Norway as a wealthy country.

Norwegian national identity as a rich country becomes the very premise for Norwegian development aid, and Norwegian development workers become witnesses of this very wealth. On the other hand, the results discourse comes across as rather a comforting discourse. It confirms and reassures the donor when she is in doubt about the effectiveness of her charitable works. When employing this kind of repertoire the development worker thus becomes a counsellor who encourages the faithful donor when she is confronted with the suffering and death of the distant poor.

The special case

The interviewed development workers not only compare Norway with poverty ridden countries in the South. The notion of Norway is also constructed in comparison with countries in the North. In this context the role Norway is considered to have played in historical (or contemporary) colonialism and imperialism becomes an important element of the Norwegian self-understanding. This is illustrated when one of the SCN interviewees discusses arguments for Norwegian development aid. She says:

> Because, if you think historically about our part of the world compared to this part of the world, then the reason why Europe and North America is richer, is that they have exploited (*utnyttet seg av*) this part of the world. So I believe you have a responsibility.

This interviewee situates Norwegian development aid in a European and North American context. Norway is seen as part of a larger system and not fundamentally different from other Western countries, and Norwegian national identity must accordingly come to terms with issues such as colonialisation, slavery, imperialism and the implied exploitation (see :189ff). Similarly, commenting on the issue of historical exploitation, one of the NCA interviewees says:

> […] if you look more closely, it's clear that this is a story where we are not innocent either. Because, I assume that for example the Norwegian shipping industry didn't lose money from the kind of traffic that was going on at that time. So we shouldn't be too naïve with respect to that. And if we think collectively beyond our own limited perspective (*ut over våre egne nisseluer*), it's clear that there is a historical argument. And that is just as much an argument for radical political changes, or economical-political changes… because this was economic exploitation (*økonomisk utplyndring*).

This interviewee too sees Norway as being part of "a story where we are not innocent". The example of "Norwegian shipping industry" proves her point. Consequently, this interviewee retains a critical understanding of Norway's international involvement, and admits exploitation might be a fair description of it (in contrast to what was noted above).

These two statements can be said to articulate an implied understanding of Norwegian wrongdoing in the past. Put in ethical terms, Norwegian national identity is seen to be in need of coming to terms with its moral failures, and to compensate for its actions in the past. In other words, these development workers call for a change of ways – a conversion of the Norwegian people. Thus, also when employing this kind of discourse they take on a subject position parallel to the role of the prophets criticizing the rich and their way of life.

Responses from other interviewees indicate, however, that there is also another and different discourse at work. Commenting on Norway's wealth and the exploitation of others, another NCA interviewee says:

> I am not so sure that applies so much to Norway. It's clear that the colonial powers in their time, that they might have exploited (*utnyttet*)… the rich countries… that is probably a relevant discussion. But that Norway as a country, seen by itself, has been part of that. I cannot agree with that.

Reflecting on the same issue, one of the embassy interviewees says:

> With respect to Norway, I would say that I don't think it is… I don't think it's a correct description. True, Norway was a trading nation and a shipping nation, but we have only been a colonial power to a limited extent. So I don't think we have any old debt to pay in that connection.

Also asked to comment on the issue of exploitation, one of the NPA interviewees says:

> Well, I think that… Norway is on the edge of that discussion, since we haven't had, we haven't been colonisers. And we are not like France, England or Portugal which have been active in that way.

The expression: "We are not like France, England or Portugal" makes explicit what is implied in all of these statements. They all articulate a discourse that dismisses the notion that Norwegian wealth in any relevant sense is a product of exploiting others, and accordingly Norway is exempt from any moral failure or guilt. Thus, a totally different interpretation of the past is articulated in these latter statements, compared to the two previous ones. These latter statements imply no prophetic criticism. The notion that colonialism and imperialism does entail such wrong doings is not dismissed, but it is argued that Norway must be considered fundamentally different from other Western countries. Put in religious terms, the others have sinned but Norway has not.

Responding to the claim that Norway should compensate for historical exploitation, one of the SCN interviewee says:

> I mean… What has Norway taken out of [country] for example, the last thirty years we have been here? We've had close to no industry here; we haven't had business people (*forretningsfolk*) here. Business people are afraid to be involved in developing countries. They are afraid to lose their money. How much have we taken out of these countries? […] I don't think we have… We are starting to get Statoil and others dealing internationally, so you might say there is something to it… but I don't think that is the main argument in the Norwegian context.

Again Norway is considered a special case. In this case, however, this is linked not to the idea that Norway has not been part of colonialism, but rather to its limited contemporary commercial interests. Similarly, reflecting on the issue of self-interest in Norwegian development aid, one of the embassy interviewees says:

> […] When I compare this with other countries that I believe to a larger extent try to further their own interests. […] Norwegian businesses and Norway is actually involved only to a very limited extent in for example Africa.

Comparing Norwegian involvement with that of other countries, this interviewee too dismisses furthering Norway's "own interests" as part of Norwegian development aid. This is not explained, however, by claiming that Norwegian companies or political interests are fundamentally different compared to those of other countries. Rather the claim is that since Norwegian business companies are present in Africa "only to a very limited extent", the self-interest accusation does not apply. Thus Norway is seen as an exception to the rule. Although development aid is a matter of self-interest in the case of "other countries", this is not so in the unique case of Norway.

Two important frameworks for understanding modern development aid are, on the one hand, to regard aid as a tool for, and expression of, self-interest, or, on the other hand, to see it as an altruistic programme to help people in need. Both of these can be noted when focus is moved from historical wrongdoing to the implications of present day business activities. By employing the notion of Norway as a "special case", an interpretative repertoire that distances Norway and Norwegian national identity from the wrongdoing of others, is articulated. In this case Norway becomes the "Wholly Other" compared to other Western countries. The implied, though not necessarily explicitly stated, assumption is that Norwegian international involvement must rather be seen as an altruistic enterprise.

The priestly role assumed in these statements, is thus not one of offering absolution or forgiveness. Rather, the donor is morally praised. The subject position of the development worker becomes that of the missionary of the nation – the moral agent sent out by a country or people with praiseworthy moral concerns. As such the development worker becomes a symbol of the nation, reconfirming the notion of Norway being a "humanitarian superpower" and acting on behalf of 'us all'.

Domestic factors

In addition to the interpretations of Norway and Norwegians that are primarily based on a comparison with either developing countries in the South or other developed countries in the North, the development workers also articulate notions that explain international inequality by referring to factors within Norway. Reasons for socio-economic inequality and the motivation for providing development aid are not found abroad, but domestically.

Commenting on the issue of historical exploitation as an argument for aid, one of the NCA interviewees says:

> […] It's quite clear that the systems we have for interaction between countries, maybe especially economically, are unjust. But I find it hard to say that the prosperity we have in Norway has come at the expense of poor countries. That we are lucky enough to have our backyard full of oil is not at the expense of anyone else. We could have shared our oil billions in a better way, for sure. But it's difficult to make a direct connection between us being well off because they are worse off. I don't know if there is evidence for that.

While others (as noted above) see Norway as part of the Western world and its exploitation of other countries, this interviewee here dismisses this perspective as being relevant for the Norwegian case. Similarly, asked about the issue of historical exploitation, one of the NPA interviewees says: "… I don't think Norway should have a bad conscience. We have been lucky and have found oil, but we can't have a bad conscience for that for the rest of our lives, sort of".

In these statements the interviewees refer not to the exploitation of others. Rather they seem to perceive Norwegian resources as something given. Wealth is conceived of as a matter of luck or fortunate circumstances and consequently Norwegian wealth comes across as legitimate and rightfully acquired. Norway is not only considered a special case, but is also largely dissociated with other countries and global affairs.

A somewhat different example of the same kind of explanation is given by one of the embassy interviewees. She says:

> […] But I don't think Norway should have a bad conscience because we in a way have oil. We could have managed (*forvaltet*) the oil wealth very differently than what we have done. So in terms of that we should thank, I don't know who to thank with respect to that, but in this we found a model or a system that has worked. It could very well be that there are other models that would have been better, but of the systems known today, it's Norway that has succeeded the most in using and managing the oil resources. And…, I don't think that Norwegians should have a bad conscience about that. Norwegians work very hard and a lot, and they are clever and often sort of logical in many ways.

With the reference to oil Norwegian wealth seems again to be perceived as a result of resources "given" to Norwegians to be enjoyed. Reflecting further on the issue, however, it is the management of these resources that is emphasised. Successful "managing" and how "Norwegians work very hard" and are "clever" point to another way of conceptualizing Norwegian wealth: a result of human effort. Wealth is then seen as a matter of (domestic) effort, and poverty as a consequence of being lazy or not as clever.

The dismissal of "bad conscience" in these statements represents another interpretative repertoire that rejects any causal relationship between Norwegian wealth and other countries' poverty. The worldly blessings Norwegians enjoy are rather perceived as fruits of one's own effort, or as gifts bestowed upon us. However, this interpretation seems to imply a dismissal of the notion of natural resources as something to be managed for the benefit of others (outside the national community). Adopting this kind of interpretative repertoires the development workers thus contribute to the construction of a national identity based on the notion of legitimate wealth for domestic pleasure. The donor is not regarded as a steward, but as someone deserving of the blessings provided for her. Accordingly, by using this kind of discourse the development workers legitimize Norwegian wealth and reassure Norwegians of their moral standing and rightful access to wealth and prosperity.

The notion that Norwegians are lucky and/or hard working is, however, not the only domestic factor the interviewed development workers make relevant when they discuss development aid. The notion of "Norwegian values" also features in this context. Commenting on the issue of national and universal responsibilities, one of the SCN interviewees says: "Obviously, Norway has responsibility for its own citizens first of all, but we also have a global responsibility". Similarly, regarding the values of the Norwegian people, one of the embassy interviewees says: "I would say that our very basis is what I would call Christian and democratic values… or maybe rather value-neutral values, as it has been phrased in the UN conventions". Here this interviewee draws on a widely used distinction, namely between Christian and (social-)democratic values. Often these are taken to be represented in the Norwegian society by the Christian-democrats and various churches and Christian organisations on the one hand, and by the social democratic party and the labour union movement on the other. These terms refer to one of the main divisions in Norwegian society. This interviewee, however, highlights not the differences between the two, but rather that they constitute a shared basis for Norwegian development aid. Thus, unity in Norway is emphasised. As such, a Norwegian identity based on national agreement and unity is suggested. However, this interviewee seems not to stop there, but indicates through her reference to "value-neutral values" and the UN conventions that this value basis is something widely shared also globally. Norwegian values are as such not only a coherent concept; they are also in line with other people's values. In this way Norwegian uniqueness is actually downplayed, as "our Norwegian values" are defined as universal values. Norway might be a small country in the world, but its values encompass all peoples world wide. Thus Norwegian development workers can proudly be the missionaries of Norwegian values, representing the Norwegian nation and proclaiming its national and universal values.

Conclusion

Above I have analysed statements made by expatriate Norwegian development workers, looking at the interpretative repertoires they make use of when reflecting on the phenomenon of development aid in general and Norwegian aid and their own experiences in this context in particular. I have argued that their in-between position invites seeing their role as analogous to the role of the religious priest. I have identified three main types of contributions they make to the construction of a Norwegian national identity and labelled them according to three priestly roles: the prophet who criticises the powerful, the counsellor who comforts and strengthens his flock, or the priest as a unifying symbol of the group.

Firstly, when speaking of Norwegian development aid in terms of considerable incomes and comparably huge earnings, as well as a discourse that contrasts Norwegian wealth with living conditions of the poor, the interviewed development workers become analogous to prophets who criticize excess and indifference on the part of the rich and powerful. This is a kind of discourse that challenges important features of what is often described as key elements of the Norwegian national identity and official rhetoric in the field, for example the notion of Norway as a "humanitarian superpower". Secondly, the development workers make use of interpretative repertoires that underline the results they achieve in their work or Norwegian innocence with regard to historical and contemporary exploitation. Thus, the development workers act as counsellors who communicate progress and hope when the donor is confronted with the suffering and death of the distant poor. As the priest forgives those who confess their sins, the development workers absolve the rich of any perceived guilt or bad conscience. Thirdly, I have identified repertoires that praise "Norwegian values" and legitimize Norwegian wealth. When using these, the development workers come across more as unifying symbols of the nation, summing up the national identity and representing the larger whole.

Of these three contributions to the construction of a Norwegian national identity, the latter two reconfirm widely shared notions of what Norway is and who Norwegians are. The prophetic discourse provides, however, a far more critical and challenging perspective.

Notes

[1] This paper was presented for the Nordic Network for Intercultural Communication at the annual conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, December 2008. The author wants to thank participants at this conference and an anonymous referee for their feedback.

[2] For a more detailed description of the methodology applied in the original study, see :43-68.

[3] Jan Egeland is a former general secretary of the Norwegian Red Cross, under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator in the United Nations, and head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Presently he is head of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

[4] I use the feminine pronoun although both men and women are represented in the group of development workers interviewed in the original study.

[5] The metaphorical use of "down there" refers to the North as up and South as down.

[6] This way of talking parallels the health and wealth gospel, where wealth and prosperity are seen as deserved awards for one's faith and/or effort ().

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