

The Maldives as a Culturally Hybrid Tourism Destination

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis on the
Branding of the Maldives for Western
Backpackers and Luxury Tourists

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“Oh, East is East,

And West is West,

And never the twain shall meet”

– Rudyard Kipling , 1889

Abstract

The aim of this thesis, is to present how the Maldives is branded for Western tourist audiences, in this case backpackers and luxury tourists. Attracting two opposite audiences makes the Maldives a unique case, since branding theory stipulates that the target audience should be specific. By means of a multimodal discourse analysis, different actors in the tourism industry are selected that all brand the country in their own manner. National tourism corporations, travel guides and travel agencies are chosen, whereby connotations attached to the discursive constructions regarding five recurring categories, are analysed. These are: the beach and ocean, accommodations, leisure activities, locality, and transportation in the Maldives.

The analysis is conducted from a postcolonial perspective, using primarily theories that present postcolonial structures and developments in culture that can be linked to tourism. When analysing the primary sources, many differences stand out. It is noticeable that both tourist audiences often share similar interests, however they manifest differently in the communication. Besides differences, the similarities are also brought to light. The most remarkable similarity, is the interest both audiences have in the 'other'.

The Maldives is a complicated destination that functions as a crossroad for not only luxury tourists and backpackers, but also for the West meeting the East. Through this mixing, new cultural identities are being formed, creating subgroups that each have their own travel motivations. This process creates difficulties in the branding of the country, where actors seem to be stuck with the choice of either presenting the hybridisation process, or keep discriminating these cultures from each other. It is concluded that the discourses for both audiences are interwoven and therefore not opposites. The Maldives present that hybrid cultures are being fused, which creates overlap and displacement of domains of differences. Therefore, it could be said that the Maldives in its entirety could be perceived as a third space.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Motivation

Recently I have been seeing pictures on Facebook from friends visiting the Maldives, which made me wonder if this place became accessible for the mass. However, it was not until my backpacking sister told me she booked a trip to the Maldives, that I was surprised. The Maldives was not exactly a destination that popped up in my head when thinking about backpacking. She showed me her booking on a so-called 'backpacker island' which was far less expensive than I had imagined. But how? Is the Maldives not a destination for the luxury segment anymore?

The Maldives, an array of 1200 islands that are mainly dedicated to private resorts, is well-known for its attraction of luxury tourists since the opening of its first resort in 1972. Luxury tourism is a form of tourism that is created for high-end tourists with a high purchase power for their travels. The geography of the islands helped stimulating luxury tourism, since resorts are often housed on their own islands which offers the private all-inclusive getaway. Tourism is vital in the development of the country that is one of the economically poorest nations in the world. Therefore, since the opening of the first guesthouse in 2010, the tourism industry in the Maldives opened up to budget travellers, which led to competition with the resorts that traditionally dominated the accommodation scene. The Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation (MMPRC) mentions that the introduction of the guesthouses in 2010 has become one of the most popular products from the Maldives. Its main mission in 2018 was to promote the Maldives in different market segments, which led to an increase of 15 percent in the attraction of tourists. The MMPRC is also working to market cultural and experience tourism nowadays, which has not been part of the tourism promotion before. The 'new' visitors mostly consist of solo travellers, which are predominantly backpackers that visit the Maldives as a stopover from Sri Lanka, Thailand or other nearby countries.

What makes this case so unique, is that these two tourist audiences are extremes that are both being attracted to one relatively small country. This is very remarkable, since corporate branding theories stipulate that the target audience should be specific. The backpackers and the luxury tourists namely have different interests and purposes when travelling. However, the growing attraction of both these tourist audiences is a result of successful destination branding. This leads to questions as: how are the Maldives nowadays branded? How are the backpackers and luxury tourists attracted? And how do individual organisations interweave the branding of the Maldives for both these extremes? Therefore, this research will focus on the branding of the archipelagic nation by different actors that are active in the tourism branch.

1.2. Status Quaestionis

Since the new branding strategy of the Maldives is a recent development, there is not much specific research conducted yet on backpacker tourism to the Maldives or on the combination of backpacker tourism and luxury tourism. However, existing scholarly work presents literature on tourism in the Maldives, destination branding, backpacker tourism and luxury tourism that overviews the current state of the topic.

1.2.1. Tourism in the Maldives

Like most island countries, the archipelagic nation of the Republic of Maldives has a narrow resource base that mostly consists of fishery and marine activities. Therefore, the tourism sector plays an important role in the economic development of the nation. The Maldivian tourist industry gained international popularity since the early 1970's, after their independency from the British in 1965, when the first tourist resort opened. Already by the late 70's, tourism had become an important source of income. Professor of Economics Rajasundram Sathiendrakumar states that the expansion of air travel, together with the rapid growth of charters and the investments in the international airport, has helped the Maldives to grow over time as a tourist destination (259). Hereby, Europe is the major supplier of tourists with over 60% of the arrivals (Sathiendrakumar 257). Sathiendrakumar adds that since the country consists of many islands, tourism development in the Maldives was for a long time based on isolating tourists from the local population. This was practically possible because the large number of uninhabited and environmentally similar islands were developed into resort islands (259). For the promotion of the country as a holiday destination, the government of the Maldives established the Department of Tourism in the 70's. This organ is responsible for supervision, coordination and maintaining standards of tourist services in the Maldives. Sathiendrakumar mentions that a considerable part of the Maldivian tourism industry, especially the package-deal tour operations that are a central element in foreign tourism, are organised by transnational operators (257). The Maldives as a less-developed country was for a great part dependent on these mass tourist operators, since these had the power to direct the tourist flow to particular destinations (257). Nowadays the tourism industry has opened up to the online world, which broadens the promotion opportunities. Sathiendrakumar states that the Maldivian resorts have direct links with international tour operators, which therefore determines the predominant nationalities of the tourists on different resort islands (257).

1.2.2. Tourism in the Islamic Maldives

International tourism does not only affect the country economically, but also in socio-cultural ways. The Maldives, as an Islamic country in the Indian Ocean, is officially a nation that is "a unitary, sovereign, independent, democratic republic based on the principles of the Islam" (Scott 63). Professor of Tourism Management Noel Scott states that the Islam does not have a significant influence on the operation of tourism-related activities in the resorts, but the "non-Islamic behaviour" such as gambling, prostitution, nudism and the consumption of pork and alcohol, clash with traditional values

(66). In the early stages of tourism development, the government did not have an active role, meaning that private entrepreneurs had full control. As the increasing global interconnectedness started to pose a risk to the viability of local traditional livelihoods and culture, the government started to intervene and enacted laws that prohibited tourists from staying on local islands other than Malé (Scott 69). Nowadays the Maldivian government has the role of “planner, promoter, regulator, controller, facilitator and educator in tourism” (Scott 68). Because of the separated resort islands, the Maldivian Department of Tourism has been able to reduce the social cost of tourism by practicing ‘enclave tourism’. Scott explains that this concept means that islands that are developed for tourism purposes, are off-limits to the local population (63). Scott adds to this that from the 996 islands, only 194 are inhabited by local people and 94 have been developed as self-contained resort islands that are part of the country’s one island-one resort policy (64). Because of the smallness of the islands, the enclave tourism strategy is practical, whereby the government tries to ensure that tourism, which is economically beneficial, does not impact the culture and environment of the country (Scott 64). However as an effect of enclave tourism that separated tourists and locals, the negative perception among the local population regarding tourists, impacting local culture and beliefs, grew (Scott 69). These days, the contemporary government walks a fine line in balancing the needs of the tourists and the local population (Scott 66). Professor Phu Lama, expert in risk management, states that the conflicts between the two groups can be framed in terms of contradictory goals that involve socially constructed rules and deserve distinction (310). The example Lama takes, is the controversial land use of Bikini Beach at one of the inhabited islands *Maafushi*. This site presents the contemporary conflicts, whereby the beach is turned into a place where tourists can enjoy their holiday in their swimwear, which is opposed by the local population that prefer to maintain traditional customs (Lama 310). Lama adds to this that viewing this issue as solely a goal conflict, underestimates the depth and complexity of the paradoxical case that involves different actors where “threatened traditional norms co-exist with pro-tourism benefits” (310). Conflicts concerning customs, traditions, religion and culture have deeper roots and reflect conflicting norms (Lama 313).

1.2.3. Destination branding

The adaptation of the country to the tourism industry has also influenced the branding of the destination. Professor in Tourism Development Hugues Séraphin writes that the branding of a destination is successful when there is a strong congruence between the perception of a destination by tourists and the brand identity intended by the Destination Marketing Organisation (1). However nowadays, more destinations have moved away from an individual identity-based strategy that differentiates the country, to a more universal strategy that generalises (Séraphin 1). This can also be seen in the branding of the white-sand-blue-sea Maldives. In the intense competitive tourism industry around the globe, professor in Economy, Business and Management Ahasanul Haque states that it is vital for destinations to create a destination brand that can be identified by tourists as unique (238). He

mentions that especially for the Maldives it is highly important to have a good branding strategy, since their main source of income depends on tourism. Yet, having a vast range of tourists from different backgrounds, like the Maldives nowadays, makes it harder to brand a destination (238). Hence, Haque mentions that identifying the main reasons or brand related factors that attract the tourists to the Maldives, knowing the image that the tourists create in their minds based on the perception of the destination, helps to appeal to the target market and to promote the destination successfully (238). Professor of Tourism Studies Metin Kozak mentions that nowadays the internet, including social media, is a very important area of commerce that shapes the perceptions of the places being marketed (347). Purchase decisions are largely based on information found on the internet, meaning that images and texts on travel destinations need to be seductive as a part of the branding (347).

1.2.4. Backpacker tourism in the Maldives

Since the arrival of the first tourists, Maldivian tourism has been focussing on the exclusive island resorts. Yet beyond these resorts, contemporary Maldives also consists of hotels, guesthouses and safari vessels. The resorts started off with a minimum of 3-stars and are nowadays even grown into 6-star accommodations that cater the high-end market. In the last fifteen years, the Maldives has become known as one of the most expensive destinations in the world. Professor of Development Studies Regina Scheyvens mentions that for developing countries budget tourists are not that important, since governments assume that wealthy tourists contribute more to the economy (151). Furthermore as economist Fathimath Zubair states, it seems unlikely that conventional backpacking can take place in the Maldives since there is not enough to do (257). Still, since backpacking has become a mass phenomenon that has been identified in tourism research as non-mainstream and postmodern, in 2010 the Maldives opened several guesthouses on inhabited islands. This also includes the organisation of middle-ranged-price activities, making the Maldives accessible for “budget travellers” (Zubair 257). It has been argued by Zubair that in the long-term, backpackers have a greater economic potential than luxury tourists (257), which is in contrast with the initial governmental thoughts. Backpackers’ travel habits include travelling for longer periods, flexible schedules, interacting with local establishments, and staying in locally owned accommodations (Zubair 257). Zubair mentions that the arrival of backpackers realises a wider array of economic benefits within the local community, since more community members can participate in the tourism industry, mostly because backpackers do not demand luxury services (257). Séraphin adds that repositioning, in this case creating a new image, becomes important (2). However, tourism in the Maldives for backpackers is constrained. The geographically scattered distribution of the islands and the transport between them make the destination difficult for independent travellers, since this is time consuming and expensive. This explains that the current infrastructure of the guesthouses is limited to the islands close to Malé, namely *Maafushi*, *Himmafushi*, *Huraa*, *Thulusdhoo* and *Dhiffushi* (Zubair 258). Furthermore, as mentioned the government strategically separated the tourists from the locals, which explains the slow

and confidential development of budget tourism (Zubair 258). Zubair states that since backpackers desire authentic and local experiences, evolving tourism practices and the development of community-based entrepreneurship timidly erodes barriers between the tourists and the locals (259). In order to avoid conflicts, the community keeps the tourists well informed so that there will be respect for the local culture (Zubair 260). Zubair therefore mentions that the development of backpacker and community-based tourism is “at the centre of socio-economic and cultural dynamics transforming destinations such as the Maldives” (263). Séraphin adds to this that destination branding is an evolving process, whereby rebranding and repositioning are necessary (3).

Although backpackers are often described as a homogenous group, anthropologist Anders Sorensen writes that this mode of tourism seems more composite and varied than other traveller groups (848). Yet what the backpackers agree on, is that they are dissociating themselves from the tourist stereotype (Sorensen 848). Backpackers often position themselves as the better mode of tourism, whereby the tourist is ‘the other’ (Sorensen 858). They “arrange things themselves, are able to get off the beaten track, find undiscovered sites, and get a down-to-earth feel for the destination” (Sorensen 858), making road status an important aspect of backpacking (Sorensen 855). Psychosocial scientist Svein Larsen goes one step further by stating that backpackers have been conceived as anti-tourists (691). Backpackers are less concerned with luxury and relaxation, and more concerned with authenticity and representing something qualitatively different and better than ‘mainstreamers’, which “brings a sense of elitism with it” (Larsen 691). Sorensen states that “with varying degree and intensity, these backpackers connect to a shared frame of reference... that produces meaning, which influences norms, values, conduct, and other elements of the social being” (848). Professor of Tourism Philip Pearce defined the term backpacker using five criteria: “shoestring-based budget perceived as a core element of the experience, independently organised, a quest to meet and share with similar travellers, flexibility in itinerary and extensive time, and adventure and adrenaline risk-taking that will establish their socio-economic status among their peers” (90). He adds to this that their recreational activities focus around culture, nature, or adventure. Since backpackers want to spend less and consume fewer resources, they are also considered to be environmentally friendly (Scheyvens 157). Larsen notes that backpackers have two basic motives: anomie, which represents a desire to get away from everyday life, and ego enhancement, which represents a need for recognition (692). Yet, these descriptions only serve as a guideline that is open to interpretation, which means that backpackers cannot be defined by unambiguous criteria (Sorensen 852). It is argued that backpackers are best defined in social rather than in economic or demographic terms, since the ‘backpacker’ is more a socially constructed identity than a definition (Sorensen 852). Thus, the backpacker produces culture and does not only represent it (Sorensen 855). Even though more nationalities are nowadays represented as backpackers, most of them are still predominantly of Western origin that are at a crossroad in life (Sorensen 852). There is an even split in male and female backpackers, and most of them are between 18 and 33 years old. The average educational level of the backpacker is above the

general level, whereby a large share holds an academic degree or is studying for it (Sorensen 855). Most of the backpackers travel alone or together with one person, yet in reality a majority of them spend most time with other backpackers since friendships are rapidly created and dissolved (Sorensen 854). Human geographer Ludger Brenner indicated that the first generation of backpackers were negatively referred to as “anti-consumerist drifters” until backpacking became increasingly commercialised (218). Scheyvens even mentions that the stereotype of this generation backpackers was that they were unkempt, immoral and drug-taking individuals (145). Sorensen adds to this by saying that contemporary backpackers do not fit this stereotype anymore. Rather, they are pillars of society on temporary leave, but with clear intentions to return to their normal lives (852).

1.2.5. Luxury tourism in the Maldives

Even with the arrival of backpackers on Maldivian soil, the country is still well-known for its luxury tourism, which evidently attracts luxury tourists. Luxury consumers are characteristically a nation’s most elite and wealthiest individuals. Marketer Navdeep Athwal states that “luxury compared with non-luxury, is synonymous with superior quality, uniqueness and going beyond need” (405). Athwal adds that skill, quality and endurance are important terms in the luxury industry, which are easily aligned with sustainability (406). However, the luxury industry is often associated with “ostentation, overconsumption, overproduction, indulgence and personal pleasure”, which immediately presents conflicts between luxury and sustainability (Athwal 407). Professor in Ecotourism Ralf Buckley states that resorts (attracting luxury tourists) create physical damage on the islands by means of littering pollution and reef damage (270). Furthermore, Buckley adds that the luxury tourists biologically and aesthetically modify the islands and have an impact on the Maldivian cultures and traditions (270). Being a luxury consumer brings several psychological benefits: creating a brand identity, feeling good about themselves which is called self-identity, or impressing others which is called peer-identity (Athwal 410). Athwal mentions that hedonism and prestige are also important terms within the luxury experience (411). This corresponds with a study by international consultant and hotel analysis specialist Cailein Gillespie, which showed that the luxury group of hoteliers have recognised the value of creating “an aura of elitism” inside and around their hotels (315). Gillespie states that through the combination of product design and style elements, semiotic carriers are sent out in the form of symbols, icon and index to attract a specific niche market (315). These luxury hotels can be described as elite lifestyle products that interweave fantasy and reality in a sheltered existence (Gillespie 316), creating an escapist environment (Gillespie 319). The words ‘elite’ and ‘modern classic’ have become recognised as a social badge that is associated with a certain luxury lifestyle that provides guests new worlds of experiences (Gillespie 319). However on the other side, Gillespie notes that the experience should also be easily translatable, familiar and engaging in a way that the luxury tourists can emotionally connect with the place (220). Professor of Decision Sciences Ioana Popescu, argues that luxury tourism packages are relatively constant. There is a constant desire of tourists that want to

spend their exclusive holidays in places that are usually visited by celebrities, or places that are untouched by humans (320). Luxury tourism, even though economic conditions have been difficult in past years, has even seen a rise in volume and value (Popescu 320). The luxury tourists are mainly characterised by a high income, often between the 25 and 55 years old, have a medium or superior level of education, have a high standard of living and spend most of their time working (Popescu 320). Moreover, luxury tourists often go on vacation with more generations of the family. These tourists believe that their efforts should be rewarded through this type of vacations, whereby their hard-earned money can be spend on relaxation, pampering and receiving high quality services in order to outshine the people in their inner circle and prove that they are successful (Popescu 320). Over the years, luxury tourism has evolved and the concept of luxury has become more blurred due to the developments of new products and services that are based on market trends and the tourist's demands. The concept of luxury has shifted from traditional luxury products, to exclusive experiences that stand out in their uniqueness (Popescu 320). This means that luxury accommodations responded to this by not only focussing on materiality, but on "realising a mix of different components and concepts based on experience and authenticity", whereby the intangible factor became an important component for satisfying the luxury tourist (Popescu 320). Popescu says that this has led to more active vacations, whereby sports play an important role, and to vacations that focus on originality, innovation and the undiscovered (322). What is remarkable, is that these newly developed aspects that luxury tourists desire, do have interfaces with the travel components for backpackers. Furthermore, the luxury tourists nowadays expect personalised service packages and have a desire to gain knowledge about the destination in order to identify themselves with it (Popescu 322). For example, cooking and culinary programs are interesting for luxury tourists nowadays, since gastronomy is viewed as a way of getting to know other cultures (Popescu 322). Professor in Tourism Studies Riina Iloranta adds to this 'shift' that experiences are more closely related to the self and not transferable to other persons (1). Besides this, Iloranta says that experiences improve well-being and create longer-lasting memories. Therefore, nowadays luxury tourism includes enrichment, personal development and self-actualisation (Iloranta 2). The aspect of privacy is also essential for the facilitation of ultimate luxury (Iloranta 7). Iloranta says that the luxury segment is an essential segment in the tourism industry, since the luxury tourist spend eight times more than regular tourists per day (1).

Finally, this thesis will add new insights to the existing scholarly literature since there is almost no research done regarding tourism in the Maldives or its branding. Several scholars have confirmed this, among others Zubair who states that little research has been done in this field with the Maldives in mind, as well as other tourism related research in the country that is other than those constructed by the government for statistical and planning purposes (258). Moreover, Haque mentions that there is a scarcity research in issues pertaining directly to the Maldives (238). Therefore, this thesis will fill a gap in the scholarly literature. Yet, what is more unique in this research field, is the analysis of the two

extreme modes of tourism, or even ‘classes’, that are being conjoined in one country: the backpackers and the luxury tourists. There has been no research conducted yet on the branding of these two forms of tourism together, which makes it that this thesis not only has academic, but also socio-economic value. Similar luxury destinations like the Bahamas or Seychelles have not been studied extensively as well, which means that this research will also be useful for these similar destinations if they would like to expand their tourism industry and follow the footsteps of the Maldives.

1.3. Research questions

Because the Maldives is well-known for its luxury image, it is interesting to find out how this holiday destination is (successfully) branded to fit the backpackers’ desires and what is different from the branding for the luxury tourists. This makes it important to analyse how actors in the tourism industry respond to this new phenomenon of attracting both extremes in their branding. For this research, there will be a focus on the Western tourist audiences. Obviously, there are also tourists visiting the Maldives that are not Western, such as Chinese, Korean, Indian or even domestic tourists. Yet in order to focus, a selection needs to be made. Since the major part of tourists visiting the Maldives are mentioned to be from Western origin and due to language barriers, it is chosen to focus on this group, which in this research is defined as tourists from Europe and North-America. This had led to the formulation of the research question and sub questions.

1.3.1. Research question

In what ways do national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies in the tourism industry brand contemporary Maldives as a holiday destination for different Western tourist audiences?

1.3.2. Sub questions

- How do national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies in the tourism industry brand contemporary Maldives for Western backpackers?
- How do national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies in the tourism industry brand contemporary Maldives for Western luxury tourists?
- How are the Western backpackers and luxury tourists conjoined in the branding of contemporary Maldives by national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies?
- What are the similarities and differences in the branding of contemporary Maldives for backpackers and luxury tourists by the national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies?

1.4. Theoretical framework

City branding specialist Teemu Moilanen wrote in his book *How To Brand Nations, Cities and Destinations: A Planning Book for Place Branding* how in different parts of the world branding models are applied, in order to brand countries, cities and other tourist resorts. A brand “is an

impression perceived in the client's mind of a product or service, the sum of all tangible and intangible elements which makes the selection unique" (Moilanen 6). However, Moilanen adds that the branding for destinations is more complex since these are multidimensional entities that differ significantly from a traditional brand. A consistent and professional development of the place brand results in positive returns, the attraction of more tourists and therefore tourism income to the place. In this case, the image of the place is communicated with the right messages in the right way, which is very important since countries, cities, regions and tourist resorts face heavy competition nowadays when trying to attract tourists to their region (Moilanen 3). Therefore, places have to develop their self-promotion in order to reach the marketing level of companies. When developing and strategically implement a brand, it can become the most central competitive element. This leads to the need of differentiating destinations and find its uniqueness (Moilanen 3), whereby the brand is transformed into a commodity in order to attract tourists. In branding theory there are three essential concepts, which are identity, image and communication. Moilanen states that the identity of the brand is formed by the sender and refers to how the owner of the brand wants it to be experienced (7). The brand image is the image that is developed in the receiver's mind and refers to how the brand is being experienced in reality (Moilanen 7). The message that is created, which relates to the identity, needs to be communicated to the target audiences as attractive factors (Moilanen 7). Moilanen adds that "important factors for attractiveness include culture, environment, social development, the place's atmosphere, and the images related to its brand" (10). A brand is successful when it has been developed with the target groups clear in mind and with a clear statement of the destination's utility (Moilanen 13). The brand is only created when a customer feels that the product or service has an added value compared to others (Moilanen 13). This is however a long process of brand building.

As mentioned, this research will revolve around how the country is branded for different Western tourist audiences. This leads the branding process to ethical aspects that arise when branding a less-developed Eastern country for a Western audience. Important theories linked to this are postcolonial theories, which professor of Management, Marketing & Entrepreneurship Michael Hall explains in his book *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations*. According to him, this only more recently has begun to garner interest in the terrain of tourism studies. Hall states that studies of tourism in the less developed countries, concepts such as identity and representation, and theories whereby the cultural, political and economic nature of tourism encounters, are often referring to postcolonial discourses (1). Although being an area of great intellectual richness, postcolonialism is also an area of contestation and confusion that plays a significant role in contemporary tourism (1).

Literary scientist Edward Saïd, often considered as the originator of the colonial discourse theory, discusses in his book *Orientalism* from 1978 the way the Orient is understood and pictured by the West. The Orient is "a stereotypical denomination of a multitude of different cultures and civilisations" (Saïd 3). Saïd argues that the oriental fantasy has been treated by the West as a true

representation of oriental cultures, which is transited into what he calls ‘the orientalist discourse’, whereby representation is a crucial concept in the construction of it. Saïd states that orientalism is expressed and represented as “a mode of discourse through vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial style” (2). The social construction of the Orient is not associated with a certain pictorial style, but rather a perceived superiority of the West over its former colonies defined in cliché themes such as exoticism, romance, sensuality and fantasy (4). Saïd bases his theory on these artistic and historical grounds, which he transforms in a post-colonial discourse of domination and oppression, since this still has effect on the way the modern West perceives and treats the oriental ‘other’. He argues that the orientalist discourse embraces the notion of power and cultural domination of the West over the East, whereby this relies on the idea that the non-Europeans, as the ‘inferior’, were the contrast of the Europeans (Saïd 7). This made them the perfect ‘others’. Not only because the Orient opposed the Western ideals, but also because the Western ideals were constructed in opposition with this otherness.

Homi Bhabha, who is a literary and cultural critic and an influential theorist of postcolonial culture, continues on Saïd’s theory in his book *The Location of Culture*, which he has written in 1994. His work remains an essential reference for anyone interested in the hybrid cultural perspectives associated with colonialism and globalisation. In this book he explains several concepts that support him in trying to disclose the contradictions in colonial discourses in order to highlight the coloniser’s ambivalence regarding his position towards the colonised ‘other’.

One of the main returning concepts that Bhabha discusses, is the term postcolonial *hybridity*, which is often used in postcolonial discourses since it generally refers to any mixing of Eastern and Western culture (Bhabha 159). This idea describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Hybridisation is often perceived as a result of globalisation, of which the results can be seen in the Maldives as well. Within postcolonial literature, hybridity most commonly refers to colonial subjects from Asia or Africa that have found a balance between Eastern and Western cultural attributes. However, Bhabha mentions that “hybridity can also be a subversive tool whereby the colonised might challenge various forms of oppression” (162). There can namely be very different registers of hybridity, from slight mixing to aggressive instances of culture-clash. Defining the term hybridity as cultural mixing makes it very broad, which therefore makes it easier to divide hybridity in five sub-categories: racial, linguistic, literary, cultural and religious hybridity. The use of the term has been widely criticised, since it often presents the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on the coloniser and the colonised, it has been regarded as ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences. Bhabha states that the hybridisation of any culture creates an ambivalent condition - a condition in which people feel their culture and habits belongs to ‘no one’s land’ (163).

Then there is *mimicry*, a metonym of presence, which is another concept Bhabha extensively uses. Mimicry in postcolonial literature appears when members of a colonised society imitate and take

on the culture, such as language, dress, politics or cultural attitude of the colonisers (Bhabha 129). Mimicry in the context of colonialism and immigration is seen as an “opportunistic pattern of behaviour whereby the person in power is copied”, because one hopes to have access to that same power (122). However, when copying the coloniser, one has to suppress one’s own cultural identity. Therefore, mimicry is often seen as something shameful. However, sometimes mimicry is perceived as subversive or empowering, for example when it involves the copying of ‘Western’ concepts of justice, freedom and the rule of law. Yet, this is again a discussion in itself since many anti-colonial movements emerged out of what might be thought of as mimicry of Western political ideas. Over time, derivative ideas namely also tend to get adapted to a local culture. Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist’s desire for a reformed and recognisable ‘other’. Thus, mimicry is “a sign of double articulation, a strategy which appropriates the ‘other’ as it visualises power” (Bhabha 122). Bhabha adds that he sees that the process of mimicry is both a product of and produces ambivalence and hybridity. Bhabha sees the coloniser as producing a mimetic representation that “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (85), which he mentions that establishes sophisticated strategies of control and dominance. On the other hand, Bhabha does not interpret mimicry as a narcissistic identification of the coloniser in which the colonised stops being a person without the coloniser (126).

Bhabha studies the metaphoric space where hybrid cultures are constructed as a fusion of the two, which he calls the *third space*. He writes “it is in the emergence of the *interstices* - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nation-ness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (3). Bhabha mentions that the third space is a *liminal* space, which he states is the “cutting edge of translation and negotiation” between the coloniser and the colonised (56). He argues that cultures are never unitary or dualistic where there is just you and the other, but that the third space creates new cultural identities (53). Bhabha adds that cultural statements and systems are constructed in this ambivalent and contradictory space of enunciation, whereby enunciation means that culture has no fixity (55). This unknown territory may open the way to conceptualising an international culture, not based on the “exoticism of multiculturalism” or the diversity of cultures, but based on the inscription and articulation of cultures’ hybridity (Bhabha 56). The concept of the third space has been applied in other disciplines as well, whereby this functions as the in-between or hybrid spaces where the oppositional first and second spaces work together to generate new third space knowledge. Therefore these concepts of Bhabha do not only apply to the Easterners and Westerners in the Maldives, but can also be applied to the two opposite travel audiences, the backpackers and the luxury tourists.

John Urry namely argues in his book *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* that there has been a dissolving in boundaries between high and low cultures in tourism (97), which can create third spaces. People from different social groups are nowadays more exposed to information about each other, whereby each group can see representations of the private spaces of other groups (105). Media plays an important

role in this by circulating other people's lives, including those of elite groups and celebrities. According to Urry this "institutionalised voyeurism" makes it that many adopt the styles of these 'others' through transgressing boundaries between the different social groups that embody values as high/low culture (105).

1.5. Methodology

The primary sources that will be analysed, are the branding products from different actors on the production side of the branding of the Maldivian tourism industry. These different actors are the Maldivian national tourism corporations, travel guides and travel agencies that focus on the branding in English or Dutch for a mainly Western audience. Firstly, as the literature review presents, governmental tourism organisations have an important role in the branding of the destination. The government already started with the branding of the Maldives for a wider (mainly Western) audience, which makes it important to analyse the governmental products wherein they communicate the national brand Maldives towards the international tourism industry. Nowadays, the Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation and the Maldives Integrated Tourism Development Corporation are the governmental corporations that are involved in the branding of the island group. The official governmental website that will be analysed is the *Visit Maldives* website that communicates the official country branding, which is initially created by the MMPRC. Even though the MITDC supports the branding process, the website of the MITDC is not used for the branding of the country and is therefore not fruitful for analysis purposes for this research. Secondly, the *Lonely Planet's* 10th edition on the Maldives will be analysed. Since the 19th century, modern travel guides started to become popular. Even though nowadays modern technologies might seem to replace travel guides, this is not the case since travel guide sales are still increasing every year. The *Lonely Planet* is the only (English) travel guide that discusses the Maldives as a destination alone, not in combination with other surrounding countries, which makes this travel guide suitable for analysis purposes for this research. Then there are the travel agencies that, even though they became less popular for travellers over the years, still have an important role in the branding of holiday destinations. In the literature review it is namely mentioned that travel agencies organising holidays to the Maldives are influential, since most of them are directly connected to Maldivian resorts. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the websites of Western travel agencies on the branding of the Maldives. When it comes to the selection of these, the website of TUI (Netherlands) is selected because this is the largest European travel agency. However, since TUI solely focusses on luxury holidays, the Canadian travel agency *BeachLife Tours* will also be analysed, since this is one of the few agencies that organises backpacker trips to the Maldives without combining it with surrounding countries. All primary sources mentioned, are easily accessible through the internet, which makes it possible that the discourses on the Maldives can be studied without travel. This makes the research feasible within the place and amount of time.

The sources will be analysed by means of a multimodal discourse analysis, which analyses

images and texts that are being used for the branding of the destination. For this research, a method from Andrew Smith, specialist in urban research, tourism and urban regeneration, will be used in order to analyse the three different primary sources. This method is presented in the article *Conceptualizing City Image Change: The 'Re-Imaging' of Barcelona*. However, only the second part of the method, which revolves around connotations, is used. This method is extended in order to structure and make it more applicable for this dissertation.

The first step in the analysis phase, is a short description on the layout in order to create an overview on how the primary sources are presented and where the information for the analysis will be retracted from. This step will shortly analyse the main content, images, categorisation and design. Then the method of Smith will be used for the second step of the analysis, which are the connotations that become attached to a place. According to Smith, connotations are wider meanings that are dependent on certain cultural associations (405). A connotation is thought to be the “production of meanings that are generated through the interaction of messages with the feelings or emotions of the user and the values of their culture” (Smith 405). This definition implies that connotations are the results of individual information processing and also of wider cultural influences (Smith 405). Connotations that are produced by organisations can influence destination images according to Smith, since there is a link between connotations and affective images (Smith 405). By using synecdochical images and text that are often accompanied by wider connotations, these mechanisms could maximise the efficiency of re-imaging (Smith 405). This method from Smith leads back to cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall’s influential essay *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse*, wherein Hall writes that the connotation is divided into two categories: what the producer wants us to think, and what we think we realistically perceive. Hall argues that meaning is created at the moment of consumption, whereby the representation is placed in the context of the perceiver’s own values, opinions and experiences (4). If these are similar to the producer’s, the meaning will likely be read in the intended manner. Therefore, Hall constructed a model on the creation of meaning in the communication process that includes ‘moments’ (Hall 2) This starts with a moment of encoding, which is about the construction of a text with an intended meaning through forms, structures and codes (Hall 2). Then, there is a moment of decoding, where an individual encounters the text with its own view based on social positioning, which is the part where meaning is created (Hall 2). The method is extended by selecting five frequently occurring aspects in the branding of the Maldives that will be analysed: the beach and ocean, accommodations, leisure activities, locality, and transportation.

The research is structured in five parts. After this chapter discussing the state of art, theories and methodology, the second chapter will be an analysis on the discourse by national tourism corporations, followed by the third chapter on the discourse by travel guides. The fourth chapter will focus on the discourse by travel agencies, which makes the fifth part the conclusion that sums up the most important outcomes, presents the similarities and differences in the branding of the Maldives for the two target audiences, and determines whether my initial hypothesis is confirmed or not.

Chapter 2: Governmental tourism corporations

2.1. The Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation

The Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation (MMPRC) is a Maldivian state owned corporation established in 2010, which is registered under the Ministry of Economic Development. The MMPRC is responsible for the branding of the Maldives. The *Visit Maldives* website is the official tourism website of the country and therefore has an important role when analysing the branding of the destination, since it reflects the governmental ideas. The mission of the MMPRC is to “promote quality and sustainable growth in the tourism industry of the Maldives to foster a well utilised and financially healthy private sector industry, enabling the industry to deliver long term economic, social and cultural benefits to the people of the Maldives, while at the same time contributing to enhancements in the marine environment to the benefit of the visitors and the people of the Maldives”.

2.2. Layout website MMPRC

At first glance, the main content of the *Visit Maldives* website seems to be focussing on the ocean through the highly visual elements of the landscape that are being presented. When visiting the website, a large-sized image is presented on the homepage that completely consists of the blue ocean. The website’s header consists of the following categories: home, plan, stay, places, experiences, Maldives, map, and contact. There is also a language button added, however there is only an option to choose English. This is remarkable, since the national governmental website has no option to choose Divehi, the Maldivian language. Below the image, there is an option to choose between six categories that show the variety that the Maldives offer tourists, which are the ‘thrilling, fun, colourful, spiritual, Maldivian, and the romantic side of life’. These categories are presenting pictures that all contain the ocean in it, however the ocean has a different role on each. For the ‘thrilling side of life’ the ocean is for example portrayed as dark and rough, while for the ‘spiritual side of life’ the light blue ocean functions as calming and breezy. The presentation of the ocean on the foreground could give the idea that all separated islands are connected by the ocean, which presents a unitary whole. With the literature in mind, it is possible to select which categories would fit either the backpackers’ or luxury tourists’ discourse. As mentioned, there is a separate category on the website regarding the ‘stay’. When clicking on this, the accommodation types are presented, whereby the descriptions of the resorts address luxury tourists and the guesthouses the backpackers. Within these descriptions, there is much written on the five aspects for the analysis. When scrolling down, there is general information presented on the Maldives, categorised in geography, people, culture and the environment. Furthermore, the design of the website is very clear, since all different categories on the main page are separated into ‘blocks’. The website focusses mainly on aesthetically attractive visual elements that

are very colourful, and does not present a lot of text on the homepage. Furthermore, everything on the website is aligned and the text font is simple and clear, which creates a professional impression.

2.3. Connotations MMPRC

2.3.1. Discourse luxury tourists

Beach and ocean

In one of the resort descriptions it is stated that the ocean is ‘cobalt blue’ and ‘crystal clear’. Cobalt blue pigment and crystal are both expensive elements, which can connote luxury. Furthermore, cobalt blue is one of the most expensive pigments that is used in painting technique, which can imply that the ocean in the Maldives can be compared with a painting. It is known that imitations of this colour will always result in different outcomes than the authentic pigment, creating the idea that the ocean in the Maldives is exclusive and there is no ocean similar to this one. Furthermore, many of the pictures on the website that present the beach, do include resorts in the background, which links the beach with luxury tourism. What is noticeable in descriptions of the beach in the luxury tourists’ discourse, is that the beach is presented with a romantic undertone combined with words that connote luxury. Sentences as ‘elegant overwater villas on columns above the lagoon’, ‘jewel-like islands surrounded by the clearest shallow waters’, and ‘private plunge pools and steps directly into the lagoon... as the moon bathes you in its seductive glow’ are examples of this. This corresponds with the social construction of the Orient that includes ideas as romance and sensuality (Saïd 4). What is remarkable, is that on the website the words ocean, sea or waters are mentioned, but when directing the text specifically to luxury tourists in the resort descriptions, the word lagoon is used. A lagoon is a body of water that is cut off from a larger body, which can connote privacy and the escape from the mass. The ‘blue lagoon’ can also refer to the film *Blue Lagoon* (1980), which is a sensual story about people that strand on a tropical island. Furthermore, the beach images that are presented on the website do not contain people on it, which gives the impression that those are private beaches and therefore not accessible for everyone. Some pictures do show a small plane on the beach. Travelling by planes that are for private use can connote the idea of privacy and exclusivity, but in this case also accessibility. The presence of planes indicates that the beaches are not easily accessible for everyone, however they are accessible for luxury tourists that have the resources to pay for these planes that can go wherever the tourists want to travel to. This also connotes ideas as personalised travel. The picture of the ‘modern’ plane on the deserted island does also present a form of hybridity, whereby the ‘developed’ is mixed with the ‘underdeveloped’. This can be perceived as a reflection of Western tourists visiting Eastern Maldives.

Accommodations

When going to the section ‘stay’, the first accommodation form that is promoted, are the thirteen page resort options on the private islands. It is immediately visible that the beach plays an important role in the branding of the resorts. In the description of the resorts, it is mentioned that the options vary from ‘clublike resorts’ to ‘chic boutique resorts’. In the luxury tourists’ discourse the word ‘clublike’ could connote fanciness, entertainment and a social environment. However, for local Maldivians the same word could have negative connotations, such as night parties, the consumption of alcohol, sex and misbehaviour, which is in contrast with the local Islamic culture and can lead to clashes.

Furthermore the word ‘boutique’ comes from French, which could connote a European image, but also specialism and ‘high class’. The descriptions mention that the resorts are ideal for couples, honeymooners and families, which can be linked to luxury tourists often going on vacation with more generations of the family (Popescu 320). Moreover, what is noticeable is that there are different words re-used multiple times for the individual promotion of the Maldivian resorts for luxury tourists. Words that often recur are mostly referring to the material interior and exterior of the resorts, which are for example the words stylish, luxurious, inviting, elegant, and spacious, which connotes large and well-designed rooms. This can be connected to the fact that style elements and design are very important in the luxury market (Gillespie 315). However these elements are also ‘normal’ for luxury tourists.

Tourists experience in this sense a “home while away”, since the accommodations consist of the familiar, the expected comforts, and the interactions with people like oneself (Bruner 17). Then, there are several words used in order to create the image of being pampered and taken care of in a convenient environment, which are the words easy, relaxed, hospitality and even ‘unbridled pampering’. The words exclusive, private and unique focus on the escapist environment and the idea that something is especially created for the experience of the luxury tourists. The privacy aspect can also be noticed in the picture presented at the resort section, which shows spaced accommodations that are each surrounded by the ocean. This indicates that there is no direct contact with others.

Furthermore, the words golden, shimmering and rich often recur, which connote expensiveness. The word famous is also highlighted in the descriptions, which in the luxury tourists’ discourse could connote a celebrity lifestyle, since some luxury tourists desire to visit places for celebrities (Popescu 320). Yet, for other tourists the word ‘famous’ could connote ideas as mass tourism. Besides this, there are several outstanding aspects in the branding. One of them is the use of the word ‘colonial’, which is used in the context of ‘colonial style buildings’. This is remarkable, since coloniality often creates negative connotations such as Western superiority, oppression and exploitation. However in the discourse of the luxury tourists, ‘colonial style buildings’ could connote Western buildings that are perceived as more familiar and modern. Adding to this, it is mentioned that some of the resorts present ‘evolving modern Asia’, which can be linked to Western dominance, since it implies that the benchmark of modernity is the Western society and that Asia is taking steps in order to eventually

become just as modern. This connects well with Saïd's theory in which he states that the orientalist discourse embraces the cultural domination of the West over the East (7). Moreover, what is noticeable in the branding of the accommodations for luxury tourists, is that several resorts include elements from local island culture. However when doing that, it is immediately complemented with text that fits with the luxury lifestyle. An example of this, is the 'over-sized outdoor shower', which initiates ideas as locality by the outdoor and open shower, but the word over-sized represents luxury. Also, it is mentioned that the villas, connoting luxury, are depicted with 'subtle elements from local island culture'. It is remarkable that the word subtle is used in this context, since it creates an idea that it is not 'too much'. Furthermore, the famous Maldivian 'huts' in the resorts represent local housing turned into very luxurious spaces for tourists. This is an example of hybridity, whereby the Eastern and Western culture is mixed. In this case a local escapist environment is created, interweaved with the familiar of the West, so luxury tourists can emotionally connect with the place (Gillespie 220). A selection of other outstanding words that are used several times in the resort descriptions are exotic, barefoot and timbered walkways, which connote local island life rather than luxury. Using the word 'barefoot' can also elicit the safe 'untouched' environment in this discourse, emphasising the 'sand between the toes' feeling, but definitely not the hippie lifestyle. The mentioning of local elements and the paradise-like environment in combination with ultimate luxury, presents the interweaving of fantasy and reality in a sheltered existence (Gillespie 316).

Leisure activities

Activities as a champagne cruise or pampering in 'the glamorous spas' do directly fit within the luxury tourists' discourse. A resort spa, which is obviously for people who stay in resorts, is mentioned not to only be there to match the 'luxurious environs and classy touches of the cosy bungalows and sexy villas', but they are an experience themselves. Using the word 'sexy' eroticises the context again and connects with the oriental fantasy. Furthermore, it is emphasised that the spa is an activity for yourself, whereby 'it is for you to choose' how you want to spend your day. It is said that you can 'immerse yourself in meditation... just you and the boundless blue horizon', with nothing that distracts you from your mind. Many people nowadays crave for a kind of solitude, however in the contemporary (online) world this is a rare commodity. This makes loneliness a luxury. Iloranta states that these experiences are interesting for luxury tourists since it improves the well-being and are more closely related to the self (2), connoting a healthy mind, personal development and enrichment. It is also mentioned that in order to stay healthy, you can 'start the day with a concise burst of beachside exercise at *Club Med Kani*...which guides viewers through an energetic full-body routine'. Using the word burst connotes a sudden explosion, where after the body is reloaded again. These activities present that the focus on mental and physical health is an important aspect in luxury tourism. Moreover, it is mentioned that there are possibilities to do 'something really extraordinary like an underwater ride in the whale submarine or take a seaplane photo flight', which opens up new worlds of experiences (Gillespie 319).

By saying that it is really extraordinary, it connotes uniqueness by standing out from the rest. However, there is a special note that some resorts do offer their guests complete tranquillity and therefore do not make use of motorised engines for activities. This tranquillity can be linked to the importance of calmness on the resorts and the relaxed environment. Yet, it is added that these resorts still offer ‘relaxing canoe rides, wind surfing, snorkelling and diving’. Adding these substitute activities point out the importance of entertaining experiences nowadays in the luxury sector. As Athwal states, luxury values are mostly linked to personal pleasure (407). There is also an activity to swim with mantas, which are unique animals to swim with. On the picture accompanying the activity, the ocean is presented with three people in it: a brown man in the front and behind a white man and woman surrounded by multiple Mantas. What can be retrieved from this image, is that the person in front is in all probability a local guide and the two white persons are a couple from Western origin visiting the Maldives as tourists. There is no group, which connotes that the activity is private. This corresponds with privacy being an essential aspect in luxury holidays (Iloranta 7). The text does not mention anything on animal rights or the effects snorkelling with mantas can have on the environment. Furthermore, wedding ceremonies are promoted as an activity. This primarily addresses luxury tourists, since it is said these can be held everywhere in resorts. It is mentioned that ‘the occasion can be a fusion of local tradition with the couple dressed in Maldivian costumes with local *Bodu Beru* drummers providing the music, or it can follow a more conventional style’. This presents the contemporary trend in luxury holidays that focusses more on local aspects that connote authenticity, yet still in a luxury environment that the tourists can identify with. It is also mentioned that ‘a Maldives wedding is not only an occasion for newlyweds, but can also be a renewal of vows or a second wedding’. This presents Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, whereby the Western culture is imitated for tourism purposes, even though in the local Maldivian culture these are no customary happenings.

Locality

It is mentioned on the website that ‘any of the two hundred inhabited islands can be visited, where the tourists can observe the unique lifestyle that is shaped over millennia’. The fact that it is mentioned that all the two hundred inhabited islands can be visited, can be linked to the statement that space stopped being an obstacle in this postmodern world and that there are no natural borders anymore (Bauman 77). Moreover, ‘observing the local lifestyle’ does fit the luxury tourists’ desire to gain knowledge about the holiday destination they visit (Popescu 322). Yet, the word ‘observe’ connotes that there is a distance between the tourists and locals, and that they are not being mixed. In the local discourse this can create negative connotations, since observing lifestyles can connote that tourists watch locals from a distance, peeking into their lives. What also stands out, is the text: ‘if you want a honeymoon that is exclusively yours, the Maldives is ideal. Each resort on its own island; there are no strangers, only caring staff and other guests, who value your privacy too’. This connotes familiarity with other guests and the staff, but unfamiliarity with the local population. The people outside the

resorts are presented as ‘strangers’ that do not respect the privacy of the tourists, while it is elicited that people within the resorts do respect this. In this way, negative connotations arise regarding the local population. Meanwhile, in the luxury tourists’ discourse this sentence could connote opposite ideas, such as guaranteed safety on the resorts and a comfortable environment. Since cooking and culinary programs are interesting for the luxury tourists nowadays (Popescu 322), the website highlights several Maldivian dishes that one should try when visiting the islands, including the recipes of these meals. Although most recipes consist of local products that are relatively cheap and easy to get your hands on, there is one recipe that stands out addressing the luxury tourists, which is the ‘biosphere mocktail’. This drink is only served at one specific five-star resort and refers to the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the Maldives. It is made using ‘fresh ingredients from the island’s on-site organic farm... combined with nutritious ingredients and superfoods which is a great source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants’. This connotes expensive ingredients, but also quality and sustainability. Even though the literature mentions that the luxury industry often presents conflicts between the luxury lifestyle and sustainability, skill, quality and endurance are important terms in the luxury experience (Athwal 406). The ingredients also connote healthiness, whereby it is emphasised that it helps to ‘strengthen the immune system’. As mentioned, the focus on mental and physical health are important in luxury tourism.

Transportation

For many resort islands, it is mentioned that these can be reached by seaplane or a domestic flight ride. Travelling by plane in the Maldives is relatively expensive, since most of the locals travel by boat. It is added that when taking a domestic flight ride, this is often followed by a 15-minute transfer via speedboats or traditional *dhonis*. This combination of a luxury experience with a local one, is a result of hybridisation. Since the trend in luxury tourism is to ‘realise a mix of different components and concepts based on experience and authenticity’ (Popescu 320), this is a perfect example that illustrates the mixing of the two worlds. The website also romanticises the transportation via airplane, saying ‘imagine arriving in a seaplane on a speck of land that emerges from miles and miles of cobalt blue water’. This connotes fantasy and also discovery, which can be linked to postcolonial studies that mention tourism being a new form of colonialism on friendly terms. Furthermore, it is mentioned that if you are travelling to a resort, ‘your transfer will most likely be prearranged at the time of booking your accommodation’. This means that the tourists do not have to arrange their transportation themselves, which connotes relaxation and high service.

2.3.2. Discourse backpackers

Beach and ocean

In the backpackers’ discourse, the ocean is presented differently. By saying that ‘the thrills of the Maldives lie on, under or over the surface of the water’, it connotes that the ocean is very versatile.

The word ‘thrills’ creates ideas of adventure and adrenaline. Furthermore, it is noticeable that there is a focus on the rich biodiversity. It is said that the ocean has ‘vibrant, untouched coral reefs’ and the Maldives is the ‘7th richest biodiversity region in the world’, which connotes the idea of experiencing something unique and extraordinary. This can be linked to the backpackers’ desire of representing something qualitatively different, bringing a sense of elitism with it (Larsen 691). It is also mentioned that the whale sharks annually gather to breed, solely ‘2 km from your hotel room’ and that ‘turtles and manta rays are no strangers to our shores’. This indicates that there is close interaction with the environment and animals. Whale sharks are exclusive to be ‘observed’, so the fact that this is happening close to the accommodation connotes uniqueness, authenticity and is especially not mainstream, which is disliked by backpackers (Larsen 691). Also here, the word ‘observe’ does connote a distance between the tourists and the animals, yet in this case it creates positive connotations that can be connected with the environmentally friendly character of backpackers (Scheyvens 157). Moreover, for backpackers the physical distance towards the beach seems important. In the backpackers’ discourse it seems that the beach is perceived as an experience rather than solely a landscape or scenery. The beach is namely mentioned to be an important place for ‘all the relaxation’, ‘enjoyment’ or for ‘morning walks on the tropical beach just a few steps from the hotel’. Also in the case of the backpackers, the beach is romanticised by mentioning sentences as ‘the sensational sandy beach’. This representation could clash with the ideas of the conservative locals, which also affects the backpackers since they accommodate on the inhabited islands.

Accommodations

Compared to the thirteen pages of resorts, there are solely two pages of guesthouses on the website. There are also four hotels mentioned, but these will not be included in the analysis since these are specifically focussed on business travellers. What stands out in the branding of the backpacker accommodations, is that the guesthouses are branded as luxurious as well. This is different from guesthouses in other backpacker destinations and therefore not expected. The descriptions mention that the guest rooms are ‘modern’, ‘superior’, and ‘deluxe’, which transcends the simplicity that guesthouses are well-known for. This presents the transgressing boundaries between the different social classes that Urry mentions (105). The guesthouse facilities seem to compare to Western standards, since it is mentioned that it ‘provides the standard and comforts that guests are used to on an international scale’. Furthermore, it is noticed that the word ‘modern’ often recurs, such as in ‘it is a three-star luxury and stylish beach hotel with all modern conveniences’. The accommodations for backpackers try to convey the message that they want to offer the same luxury as the resorts, however they distinguish themselves for the backpackers by saying that they are more price-oriented, which is called ‘affordable luxury’. The word choice ‘affordable’ instead of ‘cheap’ is chosen in this context because cheap has a connotation of being low-priced but also of a lower quality, while affordable connotes something of quality that happens to be low-priced. The guesthouses are even directly

compared with the luxury resorts by saying that affordable accommodations are offered ‘with almost all the facilities and services you can enjoy in luxury resorts’. Besides this, there are also several contrasts visible in the branding of the accommodations for the backpackers. An example of this, is the sentence ‘designed for maximum privacy, the hotel is located a little bit away from the village, yet close enough to walk and enjoy the island lifestyle of the Maldives’. On one hand the privacy aspect is emphasised, even though this does not directly fit within the sociable image of backpackers, while on the other hand they present the accommodation to be close enough to the village and the local population. The same accounts for the sentence ‘*Kiha Beach* is your luxury hotel where you discover the true meaning of island life’, whereby staying in a luxury hotel and discovering true island life seems to be contrasting. The word ‘true’ connotes in this context authenticity and non-staged experiences, which fits with the backpackers’ desires (Zubair 258). Furthermore, it is noticeable that in the descriptions of the guesthouse accommodations the word ‘hotel’ is often used instead of guesthouse. The word hotel connotes more luxury, hospitality but also centrality, while the word guesthouse connotes rather simplicity, inexpensiveness and locality, which according to the literature would generally fit more with the travel intentions of backpackers. Then, the environment is highlighted by saying for example that the accommodation is ‘surrounded by amazing coral reefs’ or ‘in the heart of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve’, which connotes environmental friendliness. This corresponds with the recreational activities of backpackers mostly focussing around nature (Pearce 90). At the guesthouse section, the Maldives is mentioned as ‘the tropical escape’, whereby the word ‘escape’ connotes breaking out and freedom. Also the word ‘the’ in this sentence raise connotations as the Maldives being ‘the best’ in tropical escapes. The Maldives can be seen as ‘the tropical escape’ because it presents the ‘other’, the opposite of ordinary life in the “modern West” (Saïd 7).

Leisure activities

Besides the adventurous image of the ocean, other aspects of local culture have been ‘adventurised’ in order to attract backpackers. For example, the local cuisine is a ‘culinary adventure, be it a local dish or comfort food’, whereby the word ‘adventure’ in this context could connote new experiences. Also, several recipes are presented, using simple and non-expensive ingredients wherein the word ‘traditional’ often recurs. Continuing on the cooking, the Maldivian cuisine is mentioned to be very local, because localness is an important element in the backpackers’ discourse. It is mentioned that ‘the cuisine and craft have been shaped by the resources that were available from the surroundings and skills that were brought by the waves of settlers from around the Indian Ocean, who made the islands their home’ and that ‘the traditional cuisine is heavily based on fish and coconut, with several dishes that have no parallels anywhere in the region’. This connotes the unique and different food experience tourists can only get when visiting the Maldives. Then, it is mentioned that the tourists can ‘unwind in the jacuzzi, enjoy smoothies and mocktails from our bar and use our free Wi-Fi to keep your friends and family updated on your tropical escapades’. The jacuzzi connotes modernity and luxury, and the

smoothies and mocktails connote healthiness, freshness and tropicality. The ‘mocktail’ instead of ‘cocktail’ indicates that there is no alcohol served. By saying ‘free Wi-Fi’ this connotes money-saving, which corresponds with backpackers travelling on a shoestring-based budget (Pearce 90). Moreover, by mentioning that the tourists can update friends and family, it indicates that they are travelling alone, which suits the general backpacker definition of being independently organised. Other leisure activities promoted for backpackers are adventure-oriented, focussing on diving and water sports. Besides these activities, the backpackers can also visit the spas. However in this case, these are said to be ‘designed to give the best of the services with an affordable price’, which focusses again on luxury tourists’ experiences offered at a low cost. Then, there are activities organised that mostly revolve around local experiences, such as visiting several islands to experience ‘the Maldivian island life and the serenity’, whereby serenity connotes peacefulness, away from hecticness and chaos. The uniqueness of these islands is elicited by mentioning to ‘enjoy its unique features, such as a mythical freshwater lake and explore the old Buddhist temple ruins’. The ‘old ruins’ connote in this discourse authenticity and history, and by saying ‘mythical’ and including religion, it could connote supernaturalism but also tradition. However, it is remarkable that regarding the cultural and local activities, nothing is mentioned about the dominating Islamic religion on the islands. The old Buddhist temple ruins are promoted, while leaving out the well-known Old Friday Mosque. This gives the impression that there is a conscious decision made to omit this information, which could create an incorrect perception about the destination.

Locality

What stands out in the backpackers’ discourse, is the sentence: ‘if you stay in a guesthouse on an inhabited island, you will have the chance to meet Maldivians, experience local culture and cuisine, and join in what the islanders do for relaxation’. This indicates that by staying in a guesthouse, you will see more of the island culture than when staying in a resort. By saying that tourists can ‘meet’ Maldivians, ‘experience’ and ‘join in’, the culture seems very open and inviting to foreigners. It is added that tourists can join the Maldivians in ‘playing football in the late afternoon, lounging on one of the *joalis* near the beach or relaxing over a hot black tea and eating short eats’ in a seaside café. This gives the impression that tourists can really become a part of the Maldivian population during their holiday. Here, a form of mimicry is visible. As Bhabha’s explains, mimicry often refers to a society imitating the Western culture (Bhabha 129). Yet, in this case the opposite is happening, whereby the tourists seem to have the desire to imitate the Maldivian lifestyle by becoming a part of it during their stay. Continuing on this, it is said that tourists can ‘experience the relaxed attitude and style of the islanders, which modernisation has found impossible to change’. This sentence can raise different connotations. On one hand it can be seen as negative, since it can connote laziness and lagging behind with regards to the modernisation of the country. However within the backpackers’ discourse, it can have positive connotations such as a stress-free lifestyle with no pressure. This also

accounts for the word ‘simple’ that is used several times when explaining about the Maldivian lifestyle. For backpackers this is high likely meant to connote ideas as back to basic and easiness, but for others the word could mean low-class or mainstream. Moreover, it is said to ‘stroll on the beach, engage with locals and get insight into their lives. Who knows, you could get invited to visit one of their homes and meet their families’. This fits with the backpackers quest to meet people during their travel (Pearce 90) and goes further than ‘observing’ locals. However, this does present an example of ‘othering’, whereby the local people and their lives are being objectified for the Western tourists. The locals are perceived as a social group that is distant from the tourists, and therefore in this case interesting to get to know. The close interaction with the locals, gives the idea that the Maldivians are very open and accepting of tourists. However as mentioned, in reality the local Maldivians did not have a positive image regarding the tourists for a long time, which has just started to change (Scott 66). Furthermore, the website does not directly address the religion of the country. However, it does mention that tourists staying on inhabited islands, which therefore does not include the luxury tourists, should ‘respect the local culture and dress modestly’. It is also added that ‘the import of alcohol by individuals is not permitted’. These statements can be traced back to the Islamic culture.

Transportation

For backpackers there is one popular way mentioned to travel from one place to another, which are the ferry rides. The ferry rides are said to be operating from Male to most of the other islands, connoting accessibility and freedom. Ferry rides are said to be way cheaper than travelling by plane or private boat, which again puts the focus on the price. Moreover, it is said that the backpackers get the chance to meet similar travellers, which highlights the social atmosphere backpackers surround themselves in. It is also said that the backpackers can make use of the twelve domestic airports that organise daily flights. Since backpackers are very flexible in their itinerary (Pearce 90), the mentioning of different travel options in the discourse is useful for this audience.

2.3.3. Discourse luxury tourists and backpackers

One of the aspects that came forward when analysing the branding of the country for both audiences at the same time, were the liveboards where tourists can accommodate in. Liveboards are boats where the tourists can stay in, which are said to ‘offer you the opportunity to see more of the Maldives’. The website presents three liveboards, which are all presented in a luxurious manner by saying ‘guests can enjoy a view from the ocean suites’ which are ‘stylishly designed and provide a luxuriant large interior and exterior living space’. Moreover, it is mentioned that ‘the yacht provides maximum tranquillity at sea’ and that ‘great detail has been given to achieve the highest standards for quietness’. The word yacht connotes luxury and expensiveness. Also the focus on tranquillity seems to be more in line with the luxury holiday experience. At first instance, this could create the idea that this way of travelling targets the luxury tourists. However, the discourse around the liveboards also contains

aspects that can be linked to the backpacker's profile. For example, the boats are not completely private but often shared with others. One of the liveboards has eleven rooms, which seems more interesting for backpackers since luxury tourists highly value their privacy (Iloranta 7). It is also mentioned that 'this thrilling adventure goes on to take you deep below the blue waves that beckon under the tropical sun and beyond the virgin islands waiting for a fresh print on its shoreline'. According to the literature, the words 'thrilling' and 'adventure' do fit more with the backpacker's profile rather than the luxury tourists. This also corresponds with the highlighting of diving and surfing on these liveboards. However as mentioned, luxury tourists nowadays also desire more active vacations (Popescu 320). Also, both audiences have an interest in the undiscovered and the untouched, which is emphasised by the word 'virgin'. Since these liveboards seem to attract both tourist audiences, it can be seen as a third space where in this case there is an overlap of different socio-economic classes that form new cultural identities through mixing their interests (Bhabha 53). Another aspect that stood out in the branding of the Maldives for both the audiences, is the promotion of the dive centres on the islands. Dive centres are essential components of any resort and it is mentioned that there are also several dive centres on 'the guesthouse islands'. By calling these islands 'the guesthouse islands', the separation between both is elicited. This separation is also emphasised in the text by saying that 'resorts and guesthouses organise their very own snorkelling excursions'. This indicates that even though both the audiences are on the same destination, the two will not be mixed. However, it is noticeable that the MMPRC often tries to address both the audiences at the same time. An example of this is 'the Maldives offer a host of facilities and opportunities to fuel your sense of excitement, whether staying on a plush resort, a hotel in Male, or in a simple guesthouse on an island far away, there is a lot you can do for yourself or for your family'. In many sentences on the website, it is mentioned that the excursions offer an experience for you or for your family, such as 'go on bouncy banana rides with friends or family or on a solo ride trimming the waves on a jet ski or wakeboard' and 'for kids there are child play areas'. These sentences do not only differentiate the tourists based on accommodation type, but also based on travel company. Independent tourists are often backpackers, and tourists that bring their families on holiday, are mostly the luxury tourists. What is noticeable, is that for both audiences there is nothing specifically mentioned about the religion, even though it plays an important role within the country. When scrolling towards the end of the home page, there is a sole Instagram post visible with a picture of the Maldivian sunset with an Arabic text on it. When clicking on this image, the Instagram page translates the text saying 'wishing you all a blessed Ramadan'. Moreover, the sections on the website that explain about the Maldivian culture take into account the language, writing, origins of the locals, music, dance and food, but religion is nowhere mentioned at all. This is remarkable, since in some holiday destinations religion is even presented as a unique selling point. An explanation for this could be that the conservative Islamic culture on the islands does not directly fit within the oriental fantasy tourists might have, including cliché themes such as exoticism, romance, sensuality and fantasy (Saïd 4).

Chapter 3: Travel guides

3.1. The Lonely Planet

The Lonely Planet is a travel guide publisher that started off in 1973 as a company that provided travel guides for mostly backpackers. Over the years it has grown into the globally recognised brand as it is nowadays for the larger audiences. The purpose of the Lonely Planet is to inform the readers, but also inspire them with trusted content from experts that visit every destination they write about, whereby their main objective is to encourage global travel. Starting off as a printed travel guide publisher, these days the Lonely Planet is also active on digital platforms. However, the information on their website and app is not as extensive as in printed travel guides, which makes the printed version more eligible for analytical purposes. Some might think that travel guides are not as popular as they once were. However, after a few years of decline in printed travel guides, the sales started to rise again. It is stated that since 2012 the core market of travelling consumers has come to realise what kind of valuable information printed guides offer.

3.2. Layout travel guide Lonely Planet

The main focus of the Lonely Planet seems to revolve around the small uninhabited islands, whereby they highlight the separation of the islands and thereby the privacy that comes along. On the cover, there is a picture presented that shows an uninhabited island surrounded by the ocean, far away from mainland. The white empty beaches and sandbanks are shown, and on the island there is a tropical forest. There are no transportation vehicles, people or animals visible. This creates the perfect image of being a private ‘tropical escape’, whereby the tourist is separated from the mass. The rest of the pictures in the travel guide also omit other tourists and the local population. Most of the pictures are unpopulated areas, with sometimes one person on it that is supposed to represent the tourist self. Also in the text, the Maldives is presented as a deserted island that is not different from other cliché images of tropical islands, which according to the guide means ‘the fantasy of simplicity, tranquillity, the beach and the sea’. However, this presentation can create a distorted portrayal of the country, since the truly escapist environments will not be found on the islands where tourists will stay. Furthermore, the travel guide is divided in four ‘easy-to-use sections’, which are: plan your trip, on the road, understand, and survival guide. These sections include chapters that address the different tourist audiences. There are for example chapters called ‘choosing a resort’ or ‘independent travel’, and there are also the dollar signs (\$-\$-\$-\$) the Lonely Planet works with in order to indicate how expensive a certain accommodation or activity is. Within these chapters, there is much information written on the five aspects for the analysis. Moreover, the Lonely Planet looks well-organised, since they work with tables of contents for each chapter that provides an overview of the information. The guide is visually

designed, including many pictures and maps. Bolding and colours are also used in order to emphasise certain words or images and there are many references to other pages for more detailed information. Besides this, the guide is only available in English.

3.3. Connotations

3.3.1. Discourse luxury tourists

Beach and ocean

There is a separate section in the Lonely Planet written on the beaches at resorts. What is noticeable, is that the text starts with saying that ‘very few resorts in the Maldives do not have an amazing beach’ since some suffer from erosion and have to work with sandbags and seawalls. This creates negative connotations, because it implies that there are some beaches that are not as aesthetically attractive as presented everywhere. All the pictures in the guide present clean beaches, which in this context could connote the strategic removal of undesirable elements. It is also added that ‘the more expensive the resort, the more effort is made to ensure that the sandbags are not visible’. This could create the idea of inaccessibility, since access to the most beautiful beaches depends on the money tourists want to spend. However, in the luxury tourists’ discourse this would rather connote exclusivity, since the ones with the highest budgets can enjoy these beaches. Furthermore, it is said that the resort beaches are cleaned everyday by teams of employees, which is necessary since ‘even the fanciest resorts get dozens of plastic bottles and other flotsam washing up of them every day’. This could create ideas of unsustainability and irresponsibility, which corresponds with the over-consumptive and over-productive image of luxury tourists (Athwal 407). Yet, in the luxury tourists’ discourse, the everyday cleaning could have positive connotations, since this could be perceived as a high service that optimises their holiday by providing them with a clean beach every day. Moreover, the travel guide mentions several times in the sections addressing the luxury tourists, that the beaches are pristine and the lagoon is turquoise. Turquoise is said to associate calmness, freshness and serenity, which can be linked to the relaxed holiday luxury tourists desire. Moreover, turquoise is also a valuable mineral that is in many ancient cultures a symbol of wealth and prosperity. It is also mentioned that the beach is ‘heaven’, whereby the word heaven could connote being at the highest level one can reach.

Accommodations

The Lonely Planet has a chapter that is called ‘choosing a resort’. What is immediately remarkable, is that the chapter discusses all types of accommodations ‘from budget and extremely average to the best of everything’. It is said that it is ‘your choice of resort or guesthouse’, yet the title implies that only resorts will be discussed in the chapter. This shows the importance of resorts in the Maldivian tourism industry. It is mentioned that before choosing a resort, one should decide ‘what type of holiday you want’. In the luxury tourists’ discourse this could give the impression that they have the power in

deciding what they want for their holiday and that the Maldivian resorts will make sure they provide it. This corresponds with the expectation of personalised service packages luxury tourists have (Popescu 322), being an example of the notion of power that Saïd discusses in his theory (7). Furthermore, the expensive character of the resorts is elicited by using words as ‘the Louis Vuitton resort’, or saying that the resorts are ‘the playground of millionaires and royalty’. Using the word playground connotes childishness, which for the luxury tourists could sound as a happy place where there are no worries or obligations. Then, the resorts are called ‘perfection’, which means that the tourists are at the best place they could ever be. As mentioned by Popescu, luxury tourists often believe that their efforts should be rewarded through this type of vacations, proving that they have made it to the top (320). Another focus of the resorts, is the ‘personal creation of one individual’ that is elicited by the words: spoiled, high levels of comfort, pampering and eye-watering range of treatments, which is exactly what luxury tourists want to spend their hard-earned money on (Popescu 320). The Lonely Planet takes the pampering aspect one step further by saying that ‘the level of pampering is almost legendary’, since you get your own *Thakuru*. A *Thakuru* is mentioned to be a personal butler ‘who will look after you during your stay’. This connotes high service and being taken care of during an ultimate break, where the tourists do not have to do anything themselves. By using the Maldivian word *Thakuru*, it might create certain feeling of authenticity, which is nowadays becoming important in luxury holidays. However, for locals this could emphasise a postcolonial relationship whereby the Western tourists are being served by the local Maldivian ‘butlers’, presenting them in an inferior position (Saïd 7). Moreover, according to the Lonely Planet, children and big families are not very welcome in resorts, even though it is mentioned that luxury tourists prefer going on holidays with more generations of the family (Popescu 320). Children are negatively portrayed, since it is said that luxury tourists ‘surrounded by screaming children may come to regret their decision’ and ‘most of the market here are honeymooners, couples and families, but kids will certainly not run riot and even if they do, there will be enough space to get away from them’. Also, most resorts impose a limit on the number of children, since they do not fit within the image of a calm and relaxed holiday. The romantic vibe also recurs by stating that ‘the more budget the resort, the more families and groups you’ll get, and the intimacy of the romantic experience can be diminished’. What also stands out in the Lonely Planet, is that the open-air aspect is very important in the luxury tourists’ discourse. It is often said that the accommodations have ‘open-air bathrooms’ or other ‘private open-air areas’. Furthermore, what is noticeable, is that several resorts are mentioned to be very simple and traditional, with no television or loud music. These resorts focus on the deserted island image, mentioning that they ‘are well-designed, use imported woods and natural fibres and have little or no air-conditioning outside the bedroom’. It is added that the simplicity of such places is what attracts people. The word ‘simple’ is often used in this, yet the experience is more luxurious than being a real castaway. These resorts admittedly add ‘supreme style and comfort to the mix’. It is surprising that the simple and traditional resorts attract the luxury tourists, since it gives the idea that they want to experience what the ‘lower socio-economic

classes' experience, however in a comfortable and luxurious manner. The travel guide calls this 'barefoot luxury', whereby barefoot in this context connotes simplicity. This can be linked to Bhabha's concept of mimicry, whereby the lifestyle of the 'lower socio-economic classes', either locals or backpackers, is being copied. Not only the Maldivian locals are therefore seen as the 'other', but also the backpackers as being the opposite tourist audience. Since the accommodations are adapted to a certain level of luxury, the process of mimicry produces hybridity as well. Then, the food in the resorts is also mentioned, which is said to be 'universally top notch, with a large choice of cuisine and European and Asian specialist chefs'. Hereby the Eastern and Western cultures are being mixed through food, which is a direct example of hybridisation. When it comes to socialness, it is mentioned that the social life on the resorts is quiet and usually revolves around one of the bars. This highlights the privacy and calmness that is expected on the resort islands. In the luxury tourists' discourse the bar is presented as a social space, while for the local population the bar could have negative connotations such as the consumption of alcohol. Last but not least, there is a section written on gay and lesbian travellers. The Lonely Planet states that 'of course in the country's resorts things are very different' since same sex couples can 'book a double room without issues'. This gives the impression that this is not accepted on the inhabited islands and that resorts can act according to Western concepts of freedom and the rule of law. Through this, it is elicited that the resorts are separated from the rest of the country, creating the idea that the resort islands are mimetic representations of Western law, even though they are being part of the Maldivian country.

Leisure activities

One of the main activities promoted for luxury tourists, is the visitation of private desert-islands. This highlights the importance of privacy and escapism for luxury tourists. There is also a possibility to visit the inhabited islands, which is said to be one of the very few ways to see something of the 'real' Maldives. This elicits the separation, which clearly exists between locals and luxury tourists. By using the word 'real' in this context, it connotes that the resort islands are not reality. Luxury tourists therefore seem to stay in a bubble or a fantasy. The trips that are organised, take the tourists to inhabited islands, whereby 'you can see a small island community'. It is added that these trips can rather feel 'contrived', yet can be very enjoyable depending on the friendliness of the locals. Using the word 'contrived' stirs up negative connotations, such as staged experiences. Moreover by saying that it is depending on the friendliness of the locals if the trip is enjoyable, it implies that the locals can also be unfriendly towards tourists. Yet, the resort guides are said to be helpful in these situations, whereby they 'help in making contacts'. Here, the tourists are even 'served' in the socialising process. This can also be linked to postcolonial theories, whereby the Western tourists are the persons in power that access 'new' land. Furthermore, the Lonely Planet also mentions the wedding ceremony that can be held. It is said that almost all resorts organise such ceremonies. Yet, there is a disclaimer added to the description, which says to be aware that one cannot get married at this moment. It is namely only

possible to organise non-legally binding services, although ‘this might change in the near future’, which could connote development and hybridisation. Some resorts do require a wedding certificate before they organise anything like this, which connotes opposite ideas such as traditionality and conservatism. The fact that tourists need to bring their wedding certificate, can be linked to the Islamic culture that dominates in the Maldives. Even though the Islam is not directly mentioned, several rules that are connected with the religion are communicated. Moreover, what is noticeable in the text about activities, is that the word ‘special’ is used very often, such as in ‘special packages’, ‘special deals’ or ‘special extras’. The word special connotes in this case exclusivity and personalisation. Then, most of the activities revolve around the marine environment. It is said that the resorts all have their own diving schools and access to ‘good’ diving, which indicates that there are also places in the Maldives where the diving opportunities are not optimal. Some resorts do have advantages by having access to private places, where ‘other travellers cannot come’. This creates a feeling of specialness and privacy, highlighting the escapist environment where the tourists will have the good places for their selves. It is also elicited that non-motorised water sports tend to be free in the better resorts. This highlights the quiet, calm and relaxed environment the luxury tourists get when they have the money. The spa is also again mentioned as one of the top activities, called the ‘home of pampering’. It is mentioned that the spas are nowadays usually at the centre of the luxury experience.

Locality

What stands out in the chapter on resorts, is that there is a separate section called ‘eating local in resorts’, combining traditionality with luxury. The fact that there is a separate section for local food in resorts, elicits the important role food plays in the luxury tourists’ experience. Cooking and culinary programs are interesting for luxury tourists, since gastronomy is perceived as a way of getting to know other cultures (Popescu 322). In this section it is mentioned that it used to be rare to find Maldivian food in tourist resorts. However, nowadays many resorts organise a ‘Maldivian night’ at least once a week, which according to the guide is ‘very enjoyable if not authentic’. This sentence emphasises the hybridisation that is apparently still an ongoing process in the resorts. It also elicits the importance of locality and country-related experiences in the luxury tourists’ discourse, yet on ‘own ground’. Regarding the food in the resorts, it is added that sometimes there is an exotic cuisine on the menu, but there will always be an option to have ‘some standard Western-style dishes that kids will also find appealing’. The local food is called ‘exotic’, which for the luxury tourists could connote unfamiliarity and foreignness. However, connotations of the word exotic have led to several discussions worldwide. Some people argue that it has racist connotations because of history, whereby the word should not be used in contemporary conversations. Yet, whether someone considers the word ‘exotic’ negatively or not, depends on the motive. Furthermore, visiting Male is one of the activities promoted, which according to the Lonely Planet is a ‘great way to get a feel for the Maldivian culture’. This also emphasises the interests that luxury tourists have nowadays to get to know other cultures. It is said that

when visiting the capital, the ‘terrifyingly polite resort staff is replaced by a friendly down-to-earth city populace’. It is odd that the word ‘terrifyingly’ is used, since this is a word that brings up negative connotations. The resort staff and the locals are presented as opposites of each other, whereby the locals are put in better light. Then, there are *Bodu Beru* performances held in the resorts on regular base, introducing the tourists to the local culture in an entertaining way within their own environment.

Transportation

It is said that most people enter the Maldives through Velana International Airport. However, it is added that the terminal looks very aged and that it is ‘awaiting an up-grade to a world-class airport terminal’. This idealised view could emphasise the development and the anticipated future of the country, so it will eventually fit within the luxury holiday image the tourists are expecting.

Furthermore, the seaplanes are promoted as transportation method for luxury tourists. It is said that these fly the tourists to resorts, since they normally have contracts with the carriers or some resorts even have their own seaplanes. Seaplanes are expensive, so the fact that resorts have their own, connotes luxury. It is added that almost every corner of the country can be reached by these planes, which in the luxury tourists’ discourse connotes accessibility, but also a form of power that allows these tourists to go everywhere they want to. These flights can also be booked for sightseeing and photography, which allows the tourists to ‘experience staggering views’. However, these ‘staggering views’ can only be seen when one has the money to pay for a private seaplane. Therefore, this also connotes exclusivity for the wealthier tourists. Furthermore, it is mentioned that yachts and even super-yachts can be booked by luxury tourists, since these charge high fees for cruising permits. Yet, here the (touristic) underdevelopment of the Maldives is highlighted by saying that there is only one marina set up for servicing yachts in a professional way. For the ferry network, it is specifically mentioned that this is not developed for people to travel between resorts, since in this case one should book ‘far pricier speedboats or seaplane transfers’. The ferry services therefore do not fit within the ideas of the luxury experience since it could connote ‘lower class’ travel.

3.3.2. Discourse backpackers

Beach and ocean

The focus regarding the ocean is mostly on the ‘incredible underwater world’ and the diversity of sea animals. Although the beaches are called ‘magnificent’ and the sandbanks called ‘famous’, the focus of visiting the beaches is more on the experience rather than the scenery and the views. It is often mentioned that one should ‘enjoy’ the beaches, which connotes pleasure and activity. However, it is noticed that when writing about the beaches and the ocean, the text regularly shifts towards local elements. An example is the sentence whereby it is said that many independent travellers that come to the Maldives for the beaches and for diving, often say that ‘the human element is a real highlight’. Adding to this, there are pictures presented in the chapter for backpackers that do not all present the

clear blue ocean, since there are also pictures from the harbour where the water is not clear at all. Also in here it is visible that the local elements are highlighted, such as the catching of fish, instead of the tropical images that most people have in their minds. It creates the idea that the Maldives has more to offer in a cultural way, rather than only the cliché images of the white-sand-blue-ocean destination. What is also noticeable, is that there are specific bikini beaches mentioned in the text, which are beaches that are assigned for tourism purposes. Here tourists can walk around in bikinis or other forms of swimwear, without offending the local population. This brings up the traditional culture that dominates on the inhabited islands. The fact that there are separate bikini beaches on different islands could connote a conservative and modest culture, but at the same time also acceptance and openness. The so-called conservative population namely turned several local spaces into tourist spaces, so that they can behave in their own (Western) manner. This presents a space of enunciation, which shows that culture has no fixity (Bhabha 55). In this way, the results of the governmental 'enclave tourism' whereby the tourists and locals were separated, is still visible on the inhabited islands (Scott 63).

Accommodations

It is mentioned that one should book a guesthouse if 'you can't imagine something worse than being confined to a resort'. This obviously creates negative connotations regarding the resorts. However what is contrasting in this, is that the guesthouses in the Lonely Planet are often compared with the resorts themselves. It is said that sometimes the guesthouses are very upmarket, with prices that are comparable with resorts. These guesthouses offer 'almost identical facilities minus the availability of alcohol'. Besides the fact that the luxury component is apparently part of the branding of the guesthouses for backpackers, the alcohol part elicits again the fact that resorts can make their own rules, disregarding the local culture in the country. This creates an image of luxury tourists having more power than the backpackers that stay on inhabited islands. Therefore it is mentioned in the descriptions of several guesthouses that 'it is almost a resort!', whereby 'almost' emphasises the fact that they are not, even when offering the same luxury. Contrary to this, is the sentence that in general the guesthouses are similar, tending to be 'modest and fairly small yet comfortable'. What is remarkable in this, is that on one hand the guesthouses attract tourists by imitating the resorts, while on the other hand they are branded as complete opposites. It is mentioned that the guesthouses often offer 'full-board accommodation, since there are just a few or no other suitable eating options on the island'. This initiates the idea that there is not much to do. Yet, it is specifically said that every guesthouse has a full list of activities and excursions to ensure that 'boredom doesn't ever encroach'. Therefore, it seems that the guesthouses try to create the idea that there is always something to do that keeps the backpackers busy, even though at first glance it seems that the island does not offer many options. Furthermore, the islands where the guesthouses are located, which are mostly *Maafushi*, *Thulusdhoo* and *Rasdho*, are called 'traveller islands' or 'backpacker hubs'. These names directly describe the target audience the islands aim to attract and thereby exclude other groups of travellers.

Then, it is mentioned that staying in a guesthouse is a unique way to experience the ‘real’ Maldives on an inhabited island. All the aspects that have to do with localness are highlighted, making this very important in the branding for backpackers. It is said that the tourists can ‘interact with locals, eat traditional food and experience something totally different to life in a resort’. Getting to know the country culturally, seems to be of high importance for backpackers, whereby the guide adds that ‘the best guesthouses will facilitate cultural interaction’. Since the ‘best’ guesthouses will arrange this, it gives the impression that this is one of the highest services backpackers can receive.

Leisure activities

When it comes to activities, these are extensively described in the chapter ‘independent travel’. It is notable that the word independent is used, since the audience is named after one of the backpacker’s characteristics. In first instance, the focus is on the ‘budget sun, sand and diving holiday with plenty of other travellers and low prices’, which connotes a cheap holiday and social contacts that are of high importance for the independent travellers. However, within the backpackers’ discourse the sun, sea, sand image could be perceived as boring and not enough adventure, which is what backpackers search for. It is even directly mentioned that for the independent traveller there is very little to do, except for ‘the incredible underwater world and water activities’. It is noticeable that the islanders are aware of this and work on organising activities for backpackers, in order to distant themselves from the ‘bored’ image. It stands out that in the backpackers’ discourse there is often a comparison made with the resorts, which is also the case when it comes to the activities. It is said that the ‘more budget accommodations will have more enthusiasm for activities than elsewhere’. This could connote that there is more ‘fun’ and ‘pleasure’ when staying in guesthouses rather than resorts. What is immediately visible when analysing the activities, is the importance of introducing the tourists to the local Maldivian culture. Besides chilling on a bikini beach, there are for example activities such as ‘big-game fishing trips’ that are mentioned to be cheaper when going with more participants, which connotes a social environment. It is also promoted to ‘chill on *Maafushi*’ as one of the top ten experiences, saying that it is a traveller centre with lots of competition and low prices for accommodation, diving, snorkelling and other excursions. By often mentioning that the prices are cheap or that costs can be divided, it implies that the backpackers are very price-oriented. Moreover, it is recommended to see *Bodu Beru* performances on the inhabited islands, which are ‘performed by the local youth after nightfall’, which connotes authenticity. Adding to this, it is mentioned that the activities the inhabited islands organise are authentic and therefore ‘contrary to very touristy excursions’. This corresponds with the backpackers’ anti-tourist behaviour (Larsen 691). Examples are visiting the national museum in Male, the ‘fascinating markets’ and the ‘ancient mosques’. Continuing on the word ‘ancient’, history also seems to be an important aspect in attracting backpackers to the country. A great part of the chapter namely focusses on the history of the country and the national Maldivian hero *Muhammad Thakurufaanu Al Auzam*. Then, what stands out is that the backpackers’

discourse goes further than the beautiful scenery and traditional culture of the country. It is said that the island of *Hulhumale* should be visited, which is mentioned to be ‘hardly a beauty’, but it is ‘fascinating to see how central planning has created a new island’. This means that there is interest in the future development of the Maldives. It is surprising that the backpackers’ discourse focusses on two extremes, the history/traditionality and the future/modernity. The conjunction of the past and present connote regeneration and progress. Furthermore, the Maldivian marine environment cannot be missed in the activities. Most of the water activities revolve around the nature reserves, which connote sustainability and eco-friendly leisure, fitting with the backpackers’ image of being environmentally conscious (Scheyvens 157). It is also possible to dive with tiger sharks, manta rays and other animals. The more popular dive tourism gets, the more impact it has on the animals’ environment. Also, pollution is one of the problems that occur in diving activities. However, this is not mentioned in the discourse. Then, one of the most outstanding things, are the newly introduced alcohol boats. It is mentioned that since there is a lack of alcohol on the inhabited islands, more and more boats with bar licences now dock off inhabited islands where alcohol is illegal. The tourists that would like to drink alcohol, can take a free transfer to the boat. In this case the local culture adapts to the Western culture on ‘no man’s land’, which is a form of postcolonialism that can be explained through the concept of mimicry. The Western society is imitated by the local population that suppress their own cultural identity for tourism purposes (Bhabha 122).

Locality

When it comes to locality, life on the local Maldivian islands is called ‘starkly different to that in a resort’. Added to this, it is stated that ‘alcohol and bikinis are out, while calls to prayer from the mosque and landing the daily catch are in’. This emphasises the difference in how the local culture influences the tourist experience on the inhabited islands. The inhabited islands are called conservative, yet visiting one is a ‘unique cultural experience’. The word ‘unique’ connotes exclusivity, what can be traced back to the ‘sense of elitism’: the desire to experience better things than the mainstream tourists (Larsen 691). The fact that the local culture is emphasised in the backpackers’ discourse, could connote cultural survival, even when opening the inhabited islands for tourists. This creates a sense of authenticity. The social climate is also emphasised by mentioning that tea shops are the social hubs on the islands. Here the tourists can meet other people and ‘find out what’s going on each day’. The local interaction is therefore stimulated. Not only the local interaction, but also the island hospitality is an important component in the backpackers’ discourse. Staff members at guesthouses are said to be a highlight themselves, which can create negative connotations such as objectifying the local staff as tourist attractions. However, in this discourse it refers to the friendly and hospitable character. This is also confirmed when mentioning that the ‘friendly local families treat the tourists like their own’ by ‘taking you to desert islands and let you fish, dive and snorkel’. This connotes openness and acceptance towards foreigners, whereby the mixing of the two cultures goes

well. The guesthouses also get involved in this process by ‘arranging to meet locals and perhaps inviting you into private houses or to various social events, such as a family meal’. Through these statements, the human element seems to be a highlight in backpacking trips. However, a truly local experience is said to be perceived when visiting islands where there is a relatively small tourist presence, where ‘you’ll be as much of a novelty for the local population as they are for you’. This gives the impression that backpacking tourism is not that popular yet outside the well-known backpacker areas, which connotes a private local experience off the beaten track. Besides this, the travel guide says that only in guesthouses, the tourists will get a taste of the ‘real Maldivian cuisine’. This implies that the local food served outside the inhabited islands is not ‘real’, which therefore indirectly disqualifies the Maldivian dishes served in the resorts. There is also a separate chapter that is called ‘eat and drink like a local’, which is specifically aimed at backpackers in order to provide them with information about traditional food. Also, in the chapter for the ‘independent traveller’, the religion is extensively discussed on how this affects the holiday experience. It is said that previously the ‘government ensured that the devout and conservative local Muslim population was kept entirely separate from the alcohol-drinking, pork-guzzling, bikini-wearing Westerners frolicking on the beaches’. This negative image is directed to the stereotype Western tourist, that is being unkempt and immoral (Scheyvens 145). As mentioned, these days the government allows tourists on the inhabited islands, however the tourists have to respect the religion. This is explained in the section ‘avoiding offence on local islands’, which informs on how to adjust to the ‘very conservative Muslim country’.

Transportation

The transportation for the backpackers is quite limited. Since private seaplanes and boats are expensive, backpackers often make use of the ferry network that follow schematic routes and are therefore not flexible. All inhabited islands are connected, which means that ‘independent travel to the most remote islands is possible’, highlighting the accessibility within the country. The ferries do take much time, yet backpackers are well-known for travelling for longer periods (Zubair 257). It is said that guesthouses have the most up-to-date transport information, which elicits the importance of this transportation method for their residents. Taking the local ferry is ‘a fascinating local experience, since you often find yourself the only non-Maldivian’, which according to the guide is a great way of meeting people and getting a feel for local life. In the backpackers’ discourse the transportation therefore also focusses on the social environment and authentic experiences. Also by saying that the tourist is often the only non-Maldivian, it expresses that backpacking is not that popular in the Maldives (yet). Furthermore, one relatively new transportation trend mentioned, that ‘massively changed things for independent travellers’, is the growth of regular private speedboat services between the airport and the inhabited islands. It is added that these services are mainly aimed at ‘tourists and wealthy locals’ to travel between the islands in a fast and relatively affordable manner. Since it is mentioned that it is a transportation mode for wealthy locals, it can be distracted that travelling by

speedboat is ‘affordable’ for Western standards, not for Maldivians. Furthermore, there are international airports in the country that only allow flights from China, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These are countries that backpackers often combine with a holiday in the Maldives because of the close distance. This makes the Maldives a perfect destination for backpackers travelling in South Asia. What is remarkable, is that tourists staying in guesthouses get discount for domestic flights. Flying is known as a more expensive way of travelling, which therefore is not directly expected to be promoted for shoestring-based budget travellers. Also because backpackers are known to be environmentally friendly, this does not correspond with short distance flights that are very polluting.

3.3.3. Discourse luxury tourists and backpackers

One of the things that stands out in the text, is that the different desires of the different audiences are acknowledged. For example, it is said that honeymooners that stay in resorts and ‘will find themselves surrounded by package-tour groups and screaming children may come to regret their decision’. Similarly it is said that divers or surfers ‘may find the social-life vacuum in a resort a little claustrophobic’. By presenting the differences in interests for different socio-economic classes, the Lonely Planet lets its readers know that they are aware of the situation of attracting two different target audiences. At first, it seems that there is a barrier between the audiences, whereby the separation between the two is highlighted. It is mentioned that resorts do have ‘obvious advantages’ compared to guesthouses, since they have access to different diving sites that are not accessible for others. This creates the idea that the luxury tourists get the ‘better places’, excluding other travellers. Furthermore, since the inhabited islands where the guesthouses are located are called ‘backpacker hubs’, luxury tourists will high likely not visit these areas either. This also works the other way around, since the islands where luxury tourists stay are called ‘resort islands’. In this case not only geographically, but also in the branding, the two audiences are separated and prevented from mixing. Also, the text often mentions how disconnected the resort islands are from the rest of the local life, which almost creates the idea of staying in separate countries. However, one of the meeting points where backpackers and luxury tourists cross each other, are the speedboats that are used as transportation methods. For both the audiences the use of speedboats are promoted. When continuing on the transportation forms, it is noticeable as well that it is said that most resorts and guesthouses help the tourists to arrange a *dhoni* charter. This shows the commonality of the two audiences in their interest for local experiences. However, it is still emphasised that from a resort, the charter will cost more than when booking the same charter from the inhabited islands. This differentiates the tourist audiences based on wealthiness. Furthermore, the ‘safari cruises’ can be booked by either of the two audiences. These are ‘typical, modern and spacious boats’ with air-conditioning, hot water, Wi-Fi, a full bar, appetising meals, television, and comfortable cabins. Also here it is emphasised that the costs per person are lower when sharing the boat with more passengers, however one can also book a safari cruise for private use. There are different types of boats that can be chosen from: from basic boats with communal dining

and shared spaces to more private and spacious boats. Another crossing point is the capital Male, which is promoted for backpackers as well as for luxury tourists as a city to roam around. This is the only place in the country that is different from the escapist 'sun, sea, sand' image, where local 'city life' can be experienced. However, the activities in Male gives the possibility to do group-tours but also private ones, which indicates that there is an existing desire by tourists for booking private tours. Moreover what is surprising, is that staying in the resorts is mentioned as an activity for backpackers. It is said to 'treat yourself to a few days in one of the island's amazing resorts if you can'. It seems that in this case backpackers would like to experience what the luxury tourists experience. By putting this on the activity list of backpackers, it could imply that backpackers have a desire to copy the person in power, in this case people from a higher socio-economic class, which is a form of mimicry. The luxury tourists are perceived as the 'other', the opposite culture. This also happens the other way around, since there are luxury tourists that want to experience what the 'lower socio-economic classes' experience by staying in simple and traditionally designed accommodations (with a certain level of luxury). This shows that the audiences have an interest in each other and that the boundaries between the social groups are being transgressed (Urry 105).

Chapter 4: Travel agencies

For this chapter, one of the travel agencies whose website is going to be analysed is TUI (Netherlands), which is one of the biggest travel agencies in Europe nowadays. However, TUI and other European travel agencies organising holidays to the Maldives, solely address tourists that stay in resorts. Therefore, the analysis of TUI will only focus on the luxury tourists' discourse. For the backpackers' discourse it is more difficult to find a Western travel agency that organises holidays to the Maldives for this audience. This, because backpackers are known for independent travelling. However, BeachLife Tours is a Canadian travel agency that is selected for this analysis, focussing on backpacker trips to the Maldives, which is promoted via the website Backpacker South East Asia. This means that the chapter will consist of an analysis of two travel agencies, one focussing on the luxury tourists' discourse and one on the backpackers' discourse.

4.1. TUI

TUI (Touristik Union International) is an originally German multinational that has been active in the tourism sector since 1968. Through fusions with British tour operators, the company grew in 2014 into the biggest supplier of package tours. The company nowadays has interests all over Europe and with travel agencies, tour operators, airlines, hotels and cruise ships, it has become the biggest tourism group in the world. Since TUI is such an important holiday provider for European (luxury) audiences, the analysis will present the way in which TUI brands the Maldives for Western luxury tourists.

4.2. Layout website TUI

The main content TUI presents, are obviously the accommodations. The website of TUI Netherlands shows all the luxurious resorts they offer tourists, whereby every resort has its own description. Furthermore, the pictures all look the same, presenting deserted islands with the cliché images of white sand, blue water, palm trees and beautiful skies. Also, the hut accommodations are highlighted on the pictures. This gives the impression that the resort islands where the tourists will accommodate, do look like desert-islands. The twenty resorts TUI offers, are automatically sorted on the 'most booked' accommodations. However, they can also be sorted on price and score. There are several filters that can be chosen from, whereby the most popular ones are 'all inclusive', '5-stars', '4-stars', 'child friendly' and 'swimming pool'. The descriptions per resort are all categorised in exactly the same way by starting with a short description that continues in separate sections on facilities, restaurants/bars, swimming pools, beach, wellness, sport & activities, entertainment, sustainability, hotel care, location, and tips. The website is attractively designed by showing many pictures, the score other tourists give the accommodations and the reviews. By making use of many categories, it is easy to obtain information.

4.3. Connotations

4.3.1. Discourse luxury tourists

Beach and ocean

There are certain words that are repeated when describing the ocean and the beach. The word paradise is one of the most recurring ones. The word paradise could reflect the garden of Eden, which links to the Christian religion that dominates in Western countries. Moreover, the word paradise comes from the word *paradeisos*, which means royal enclosed park. Also by TUI, the word ‘ocean’ is often replaced for the word lagoon, which stimulates the idea of being separated. Regarding the ocean itself, it is stated that it is crystal clear, calm and swim friendly. Even though the word crystal connotes expensiveness, the main focus of these words seem to be the safety aspect. This is important in the resorts where people come to relax and children are often present. Moreover, the ocean is said to be a ‘turquoise mirror’. A mirror is not only seen as a physical object, but also as an important machination in myths and legends that connote something mysterious. Mirrors are also often associated with vainness, whereby the luxury tourists are able to see themselves in the clear glasslike water. The underwater world is said to look like an aquarium, where ‘fans of Nemo are here at their best’. This refers to the film *Finding Nemo*, which is a Western animated film that became very popular among children. Through mentioning this, the resort addresses families with children. It is also stated that the tropical fish ‘expect you’, which implies that the sea animals are used to people swimming with them. This damages the marine environment and is not environmentally friendly at all. However in the luxury tourists’ discourse, this could connote ideas as familiarity between the animals and people, and a safe environment. When it comes to the beach, it is said that the sand is ‘pearl white’ and ‘whiter than white’. The word pearl connotes the expensive rounded bead that can be found in the ocean, which links the word directly with the Maldivian environment. Through emphasising the whiteness of the sand, it connotes ideas such as being clean, pure and untouched. Besides this, it is also mentioned that the rooms in the resorts are located directly near the ocean and the beach, which elicits the importance of these aspects in the luxury experience. It is also added that one could go directly from the room into the clear Indian Ocean if ‘you think you should be awarded through this’. Mentioning that the luxury tourists should ‘award’ themselves, corresponds with the thinking of rewarding themselves through this type of vacations (Popescu 320).

Accommodations

It is said that when arriving at the resorts, you will imagine yourself in a different world. This presents the contrast Western tourists can experience. The privacy and disconnection of the resorts are elicited through writing how ‘cool’ it is that one entire island is completely in hands of one resort. This could also connote a form of power, since ‘in the hands of’ means that they are in control of that part. Furthermore, it is said that the resorts offer a *life like a god in France*, and maybe even better, which is

a Dutch saying that means to live a pleasant and carefree life. TUI makes this possible by offering 'real paradise' on the uninhabited islands. The fact that uninhabited is specifically mentioned, creates the idea that for luxury tourists, paradise is only experienced when not being in direct contact with the local population. It is added that all Google pictures become reality on the Maldives, implying that it does not remain a fantasy. The accommodations are said to be beach villas or water villas, whereby the word 'villa' connotes large private and luxurious houses, where one can stay with more people. It is mentioned that the tourists almost 'get used to the luxury', which creates the idea that the accommodations surpass the 'normal' luxury the tourists are used to. Moreover, the star classifications are specifically mentioned for every resort, which are not less than four-star accommodations. Besides this, it is also mentioned that the accommodations have a *Travelife Gold* quality mark, which means that the resorts are supporting people, animals and the environment in the country. Also, the pictures on the website all show the well-known 'hut' accommodations, which are said to be built from natural materials. This connotes traditionality and sustainability. Sustainability is an important term, since the resorts have an image of polluting and damaging the environment (Buckley 270). Emphasising sustainable behaviour, aligns with the contemporary growing interest in sustainability (Athwal 406). What stands out in the resort descriptions, is that it is often mentioned that products or services are 'free'. For example, it is mentioned that honeymooners get a 'free' fruit basket and wine or a 'free' boat excursion. It is also added that the tourists should consider booking an all-inclusive resort, so 'all *Rufiyaas* stay in the wallet'. This connotes high-services, but it does not correspond with the idea that luxury tourists are very wealthy and want to spend their 'hard-earned money during their holiday' (Popescu 320). However, this could have to do with the separation that is taking part within the resorts themselves. Several resorts namely mention that there are restaurants exclusive for guests that stay in specific accommodation types, and that other guests should eat in other restaurants. It is however added that at a surcharge, people can still eat in the 'exclusive' restaurant. This presents that within the audience of the luxury tourists, there are differences visible depending on the wealthiness. This creates sub-groups that are separated in the resorts themselves, meaning that there are also luxury tourists in the resorts that are not included in the 'top-layer', for who the free services would be more appealing. The resorts frame the luxury tourists as one audience, sharing same interests, even though there are many sub-cultures within this audience. This shows that that cultures are never unitary (Bhabha 53). Besides the luxurious villas and the five-star comfort, there are also 'superior beach bungalows'. The word 'superior' in the luxury tourists' discourse could give the idea that these holiday houses are dominating and better than the rest. Furthermore, it is said that every resort has hairdressers and beauty salons, which connotes personal care and self-treatment. It is also mentioned that one could make life-long friends at the beach bars or the fancy swim-up bars. This sentence presents that the luxury tourists perceive the bars as the social spaces within the resorts. The word 'cocktail' is recurring in the discourse on the bars, which gives the impression that social contacts are created while enjoying an alcoholic beverage. As mentioned, the consumption of alcohol is a controversial topic in the Maldives,

but allowed in the resorts. The ‘excellent service’ is also elicited in the discourse. It is said that the staff takes care of everything before even thinking about it yourself, ‘so let the staff serve you some tropical cocktails and Maldivian snacks’. The way this is mentioned on the website, could seem derogatory regarding the local staff. However, for the luxury tourists it could have positive connotations, such as pampering. Moreover, the Maldives is said to be an exotic country for families. However, to guarantee the ‘complete rest’ that luxury tourists desire, there are kids/teen clubs and even private babysitters that could take care of the children. This gives the impression that even though families are there together, they are separated so everyone has their own personal time. To continue on this, the Maldives is mentioned to be perfect for a trip as a couple, whereby the villas are romanticised and the ‘baths are filled with rose leaves’. Through the many options for child day-care, couples with children are in this way still able to have a romantic holiday.

Leisure activities

It is immediately visible that the main activities that the resorts offer, are related to outside sports. Some resorts even have golf courses. Golf is associated with wealthy, older, upper-class people, which are very likely part of the luxury target audience. It is said for some resorts that the tourists can exercise as much as they want to and that there are special sport programmes organised, such as body and mind classes. This connotes self-care, which is an important aspect in luxury holidays, but also connotes activity. This corresponds with luxury tourists nowadays desiring more active vacations, whereby sport plays an important role (Popescu 322). Furthermore, water sports are extremely popular, such as diving (with animals), snorkelling, surfing and canoeing, which gives the tourists the opportunity to discover the ocean that is supposed to be one of Maldives’ highlights. The scenery is important in this discourse, which is emphasised through mentioning the ‘incredible’ sunrises and sunsets. The sunsets are said to be unique, since they ‘can only be experienced like this in the Maldives’, which connotes an exclusive experience. When explaining about the sunset cruise, it is said that the tourists can ‘for a moment meet the locals of *Rasdhoos Atol*’, where after they will view the sunset from the boat. Meeting locals ‘for a moment’, presents that there is an interest of being in contact with the local population, but not for too long. This shows a certain distance between the luxury tourists and the locals. Continuing on this, for every resort it is stated how far the resort is located from the capital. This could be mentioned to inform tourists how far the resort is from the airport, however it can also promote visiting the capital. Moreover, the relaxing environment has been emphasised through mentioning the massages, spas, beauty salons, but also the fact that the guest are being pampered. However, the pampering is being ‘tropicalised’, since the relaxation aspect is often brought in contact with the tropical image through sentences as ‘relax between the palm trees’ or ‘chill in the evening with the feet in the sand’. This elicits the difference between relaxing in the home country and the Maldives. Even though spas and other wellness activities are normally focussing on the self, the discourse stimulates the tourists to do these activities as a couple. This can create ideas

such as romance and quality-time with your partner. It is also briefly mentioned that the tourists can repeat their wedding vows during their stay. Besides this, the live entertainment on every resort is highlighted with ‘parties on the beach’ and ‘DJs in resorts’. The entertainment is directly linked to partying, which connotes fun and socialness, but again for the local population this could have negative connotations. It is also added that ‘everyone will know your name in no time’, which corresponds with the social atmosphere of parties, but also connotes personal attention and a small-scale environment.

Locality

When it comes to food in the resorts, Western food is promoted by TUI. It is said to take a chocolate croissant as breakfast, that there are international kitchens where you can choose from pizza to Thai or seafood, or that you can take a ‘*Nespresso*’, which is a diminutive for Nespresso. Every afternoon, there are also high teas organised. High tea is a typical old-fashioned English custom, which could refer to the colonial period of the Maldives. This is an example of mimicry, whereby the colonised takes over the coloniser’s customs as their own (Bhabha 129). As can be noticed, the food in the resorts is extensively mentioned and therefore an important aspect in the branding. The food is also said to be sublime, which connotes grandiosity and spectacularism. Besides the typical Western dishes, it is said that the tourists can ask the cook once during their stay for a typical Maldivian meal, called *Mas huni*. Also here it is noticeable that the tourists have interest in the local culture to a certain extent, yet not ‘too much’, since one Maldivian meal seems to be enough. It is also said that the smell of the local spices will guide you towards the restaurant in the resort. This is an example of Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, whereby local species are supposed to attract tourists to the restaurants, even though it is said that they provide food from international cuisines. Also, by saying that Western dishes are served, while at the same time mentioning that the tourists can eat the catch of the day, gives the impression that locally provided food is prepared in a Western style as a result of hybridisation. Besides the food, alcohol plays a significant role in the luxury tourists’ discourse. In every resort description, the consumption of alcohol is mentioned. It is said to let the staff serve the tourists cocktails or to choose from the premium whiskeys, whereby the word ‘premium’ connotes exclusivity. Besides that these beverages are being promoted, the consumption of alcohol is also glorified, which can be noticed in sentences as ‘lie under the starry sky with your glass of red wine’. Furthermore, it is said that the sandy paths on the islands are made for slippers or bare feet, ‘so leave heels at home’. This could connote that luxury tourists can let go of their ‘tight’ and representative image during their holiday in the Maldives. In this case, the bare feet in contrast with the heels, emphasises the feeling of freedom. What stands out in this, is that no resort is accessible for people with a limited mobility, which directly excludes this audience. Furthermore, what is noticeable on several pictures, is that they often present white people relaxing at the pool or beach, while local brown people serve them with food and drinks. These hegemonic representations can create an idea of

‘colonial nostalgia’, which refers to the (unconscious) longing for former imperial and colonial glory. This can also be noticed in resort events that are promoted, whereby local people are presented as part of the entertainment. It is for example said that to end the perfect days, watch ‘how the locals will dance the stars of the Maldivian heaven’. It is not stimulated to join, but rather to watch and be entertained by the locals. Then, it is stated that if the tourists book an all-inclusive package, the resorts will take them on a snorkel excursion or a fish excursion per *dhoni*, which connotes a local experience. It is not extensively promoted to visit the inhabited islands, only in combination with the sunset cruise, or going on an optional trip to visit a fishing village. While other activities are recommended, this excursion is mentioned as optional, which connotes that it is not a highlight in the holiday experience.

Transportation

Regarding the transportation, for every resort it is mentioned that the tourists will arrive by speedboat. It is elicited that transport is always included in the booking. Through this service, TUI gives the impression that they try to make sure that the tourists will experience a care-free holiday on the Maldives. Moreover, it is also added that tourists sometimes can fly to the resorts. Here TUI is pointing at the domestic flights that operate regularly. Flying is often associated with a luxury form of travelling, which can also be noticed in the promotion of sea planes. For several resorts it is namely possible to arrive by seaplane, which is called a VIP treatment. The word VIP in this discourse connotes exclusivity and special services, being treated like a celebrity. For one of the resorts, it is said that the tourists can explore and discover the surroundings per kayak. The kayak is not directly perceived within the luxury tourists’ discourse as a luxury transportation method, yet it could connote freedom, locality and even adventure.

4.4. BeachLife Tours

BeachLife Tours is a Canadian travel company that specialises in small group tours to South East Asia for backpackers. Since 2002 the company stands for a laid-back style of travelling. By operating these trips by means of friendly guides, small groups and going off the beaten track, BeachLife Tours claims that they have brought a new approach of travelling in groups. Especially since the trip offers tourists the freedom of travelling individually within the group, with the convenience of having everything organised beforehand, they almost create a new form of travelling. As mentioned, the trip to the Maldives is promoted via the website of Backpacker South East Asia.

4.5. Layout website Backpacker South East Asia/BeachLife Tours

The main content seems to revolve around travelling in a group. The images and texts present a social ambiance, with group pictures on the beach and near the ocean. What stands out, is that many group pictures are taken at resort islands, where the luxury tourists accommodate. The website starts with pictures and a dense information section that presents the unique selling points of the trip. After this,

the description starts with the day by day itinerary. There are categories that provide information on the tour operator, start dates, reviews, refund policy, and there is also an option to watch a video or ask a question. When it comes to the design, the information is presented in a slightly chaotic way. There is a lot of information that could have been divided into sections, in order to give a clearer overview. Also, bold, italic, and coloured words are all used, which makes it difficult to focus on what to read. Yet, the website is professional and has all the components that are needed to book a trip to the Maldives.

4.6. Connotations

4.6.1. Discourse backpackers

Beach and ocean

When it comes to the ocean, it is said that the water is crystal clear and has a colourful marine life. Although, there seems to be more focus on the beaches. It is mentioned that the beaches are the ‘most beautiful ones you will ever see’. This connotes uniqueness, since nowhere else on the world the tourists will see something similarly beautiful. The beaches are said to be ‘unspoiled’, which connotes the untouched by presenting true nature. This creates a feeling of authenticity. The trip is focussing on ‘living the beach life’, which connotes freedom, nature and relaxation as an opposite from city life and a built environment. Furthermore, what is noticeable, is that all the pictures on the website present tourists at the beach and in the ocean, dressed in bikinis and swim shorts. Here, the Maldives is represented as a place where people can hang around in swimwear. The Islamic culture is not mentioned on the website at all, and the fact that tourists should dress modest on the islands, except on the bikini beaches, is not visible from the presentations by the travel agency. This is the portrait that the travel agency sketches, even though the local population does not approve this way of dressing on the inhabited islands. Therefore, the Western culture seems to be dominant, taking over the narrative that is being communicated. The dominant Western culture therefore influences the portrayal of the Maldives, even though it does not reflect the ‘real’ image of the Maldives.

Accommodations

The accommodations, which are mentioned to be hotels/guesthouses, are said to be hand-picked by the guides. These are ‘always very safe, clean, with air-conditioning, satellite television, private bathrooms, and ALWAYS right next to the beach’. The importance of the beach in the holiday experience is emphasised. At the same time the description connotes a modern and convenient room, that offers more than just basic facilities. Also, the fact that the rooms and bathrooms are private, gives the idea that privacy on trips like this is highly appreciated. The accommodation is said to be based on double occupancy, that can be ‘booked together with a friend or you can be paired up with a new friend’. This elicits that backpackers are independent travellers, yet with an open mindset and social

behaviour. It is also possible to book your own room, but there will be extra costs. This stimulates the tourists to surround him/herself in a social space. Furthermore, the accommodations are called cosy. Cosy does not connote a luxurious, sleek and modern design, but rather a comfy, sociable one. The accommodations are included in the booking, so it is said to 'leave all your worries behind' since they take care of everything. This is remarkable since it connotes high service and attachment, and therefore does not directly correspond with the discourse on the characteristics of backpackers. It seems that the travel agency offers a new form of backpacking, whereby the backpacker experience is wrapped in a luxury jacket. This can also be seen at other (European) backpacker travel agencies, such as *Riksja travel* or *Van Verre*, that combine backpacking with the convenience of 'building blocks'.

Leisure activities

Every day, there is a 'full itinerary of daily activities and locations' and most of them are included in the price. This gives the impression that the backpackers will be busy (and therefore not bored) at all times, doing all the 'incredible' and 'unforgettable' activities as mentioned on the website. However, it is added that 'if you do not feel like doing an activity, it is no problem'. It is up to the tourists what they choose to do along the way. This gives the idea that even though it is a pre-arranged group tour, you can still experience the independency whenever you want to. Therefore, the agency gives the backpackers the freedom of travelling alone, but the 'ease and hassle-free convenience of having everything organised'. The first stop of the trip is in *Maafushi*, which is said to be the home to 4000 local people. This creates a local and authentic atmosphere. The bikini beach is said to be the first thing that will be visited during the trip, which means that without getting an impression of the local environment, the 'tourist beach' will be experienced. This can create a false image of the conservative destination. The backpackers' desire to meet similar travellers is also presented on the website, since the pictures show the tourists together in groups and the text often emphasises the importance of making new friends. It is mentioned that during the trip you will 'meet like-minded people', 'get to know your new travel buddies', 'enjoy new friends' and in the end 'say goodbye to new friends and arrange to meet them again soon'. This connotes long-lasting friendships and elicits the sociable image of the backpacker trip. By saying 'like-minded people', the travel agency implies that all the backpackers have the same thought-processes and ideas, even though these are all individual persons. This indicates that the characteristics of backpackers are being used to create a backpacker identity. Besides meeting other people, there is also a focus on snorkelling and scuba diving 'among the world-class reefs'. 'World-class' gives the impression that the reefs are outstanding, ranking among the world's best. It is added that these experiences 'should not be missed in the Maldives'. The focus of these activities seem to be on the animals that reside in the ocean. Activities that are highlighted for example are: snorkelling with sharks, dolphins, sea turtles and other 'tropical fish and colourful marine-life'. It is added that at night, the sting-rays can be watched outside the hotel. What is remarkable, is that even though backpackers are characterised as being environmentally friendly

travellers, nothing is mentioned about the effects these activities have on the marine environment. Another activity is island hopping to uninhabited islands and visiting ‘remote sand-bank islands’, where the tourists can sunbathe, swim with animals, and enjoy a picnic lunch in private. Although backpackers are often characterised as social travellers, searching for authentic and local experiences, the importance of privacy sometimes, away from the local population, seems to shine through the discourse by using words such as ‘uninhabited’ and ‘remote’. ‘Food moments’ are also presented as activities, such as the ‘picnics on the white sand’ and the ‘BBQs on the beach under the stars’. What also stands out, is the trip to *Thinadoo*, which is said to be ‘one of the most amazing islands in the Maldives, with a relaxing luxury feel to the place’. The term ‘luxury’ is used in the branding of the activity for backpackers, which indicates they have a certain desire for the luxury experience. This desire recurs in the activity of visiting a five-star resort. The travel agency writes that the tourists can get a day pass to visit the resorts, in order to ‘find out what it’s like to live the life of a celebrity and experience a 5-star island resort in the Maldives’. The word celebrity could be associated with fame and popularity, which according to the literature would more likely fit within the luxury tourists’ discourse. The ‘super exclusive resorts’ and ‘luxury bungalows’ are mentioned to be \$1,000 USD per night, connoting expensiveness and high-end luxury. However, the backpackers will be able to visit the resorts one day for around \$120-\$150 USD and ‘take advantage of all of their facilities!’. It is remarkable that the word ‘taking advantage’ is used, since this rises negative connotations. Also by saying ‘their facilities’, the agency presumably refers to the luxury tourists. This gives the impression that the backpackers do not belong there. It is added that during the excursion, ‘you will enjoy private speedboat transfer, luxury buffet lunch, unlimited alcohol, full use of the swimming pools, private beaches and all facilities’. All the activities are luxury experiences that can now be experienced by the backpackers. What stands out, is that the unlimited consumption of alcohol is also seen as a luxury experience, which is specifically highlighted. This elicits the interest Western tourists apparently have for alcoholic beverages and strengthens the image luxury resorts have when it comes to the pouring of alcohol. What is noticeable for this activity, is that the travel agency portrays the backpackers as ‘poor’ tourists, that should feel lucky to get a taste of luxury life by stepping into the environment of the ‘opposite’ audience. By copying the luxury lifestyle of a higher socio-economic class in this sense, this could be seen as a form of mimicry. Moreover, the resort in this context can be perceived as a third space, whereby a ‘new’ cultural identity is being created as a fusion of the two tourist audiences (Bhabha 53). It is imaginable that the backpackers entering the luxury resorts, could lead to conflicts between the audiences. Besides this, the entire tour can be perceived as one grand activity that can be booked. The agency mentions that this is an ‘affordable one-of-a-kind chill-out group beach holiday’. The price is emphasised as an important factor through the word ‘affordable’, but also by adding on the website that if a cheaper trip is available, the tourists should contact the company and they will ‘beat any price’. Many days are spent per location, so this allows the tourists to have time to relax and ‘fully experience island-life’. This means exploring the islands, learn more about local cultures, laze

on the beach, and no rushing around locations or feel pressure to do anything. From this, it can be deduced that the relaxation aspect is important in this trip and there is no need to travel on fast. This is called the ‘chilled out style of travel’. The tourists get the time to get an impression of the local island culture and explore the off the beaten track locations.

Locality

The travel agency elicits the ‘remote islands’ that are visited by the backpackers. Remote could connote distance, but in this discourse also locality and the undiscovered. It is also specifically mentioned that the islands that will be visited, are ‘untouched by mainstream tourists and big resorts’, which creates a feeling of authenticity, but also exclusivity since most tourists will not visit these places. It differentiates the backpackers from ‘other’ tourists, highlighting the escape from the mass. It is added that there are no big buildings or traffic, only the tropical islands. Even though the environment is said to be untouched by tourists, the pictures present white tourists that are often in groups, with no local people to be found. This portrays that there is much interaction with the fellow travellers, but not directly with the local population, even when staying on local inhabited islands. The ‘localness’ does occur in the descriptions on the food during the trip, which is said to be ‘delicious local food’. All breakfast and dinner meals are included, which is said to be Maldivian and Western dishes. This implies that some of the travellers do not want to eat local food all the time. Furthermore, when it comes to locality, the island of *Fulidhoo* is mentioned to be the most local of all the islands that are visited. This, because it is mentioned to have a ‘special laid-back island vibe’, which in the backpackers’ discourse could connote a chill and relaxed atmosphere. Although, other tourist audiences could perceive this as a negative vibe and associate it with laziness.

Transportation

The trip starts off by arriving at the airport where the tourists will meet the guides. From here it is written that ‘the tourists will be left behind’ and via private speedboat, the first island paradise will be reached. Through stating that the tourists will be left behind, the backpackers are distanced from regular tourists. The ‘tourists’ in this context stir negative connotations, since it is made clear that the backpackers are not like the stereotype tourists at all, which immediately reflects the anti-tourist behaviour (Larsen 691). The transportation is mentioned to be ‘quick and easy’, connoting a simple form of transportation, but not the local *dhonis* that take many hours to go to places. Moreover, it is said that the tourists should make sure that their flight arrives before 4.30PM, since this allows enough time to catch the last transfer. This gives the impression that the transportation methods are not very flexible or personalised. Moreover, it is mentioned that during the trip there are ‘amazing day tours on our private speedboat’. Using the word ‘private’ gives an impression of personalised transportation and therefore creates a sense of luxury. The transportation is said to be safe and reliable, and all transport is included in the booking, which could be associated with high-service.

4.7. Discourse luxury tourists and backpackers

Since two separate travel agencies are analysed, that both focus on separate tourist audiences, there are almost no parts in the discourses that focus on the interweaving of both audiences in the branding. Yet, there are crossing lines where both worlds meet. What is remarkable, is that for the luxury tourists a clear image is sketched, focussing on aspects one expects when thinking about the branding for this audience. Yet, the branding of the Maldives for backpackers by the travel agency has many similarities with luxury travelling, while at the same time they distant themselves from this group. Moreover, the separation from the ‘tourists’ as mentioned in the text, most likely refers to the luxury tourists that accommodate in the resorts. However, at the same time the backpackers do want to visit these. This is a remarkable aspect that will be discussed further in the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research has been conducted since there is insufficient information available on the branding of the Maldives, and more specifically, on the branding of two extreme tourist audiences: luxury tourists and backpackers. Since these two audiences from different socio-economic classes are being conjoined in one holiday destination, the branding of the archipelago has been an interesting subject matter. Especially since corporate branding theories claim that the target audience should be specific, which is clearly not the case in the Maldives. Since Western tourists are the largest tourist audience, the research question formulated was: “In what ways do national tourism corporations, travel guides, and travel agencies in the tourism industry brand contemporary Maldives as a holiday destination for different Western tourist audiences?”. By means of a multimodal discourse analysis, texts and visuals have been analysed from a primarily postcolonial perspective.

The results of the analysis present many differences when it comes to the branding of the Maldives for luxury tourists and backpackers. What stands out from the analysis, is that the two audiences share several similar interests, yet they manifest differently. Both audiences have an interest for local experiences, however the backpackers’ discourse seems to put more focus on authenticity and realistic experiences, while local experiences in the luxury tourists’ discourse seem to revolve less around authenticity and more around the entertainment factor. However, the concept of an authentic experience is relative and highly debatable, since perceived authenticity is the factor of enjoyment that leads to satisfaction. Another difference is that luxury tourists highly value their privacy, which is on the foreground in the branding. Even though the backpackers’ discourse also includes privacy, it stands out that in general backpackers are presented as more sociable that surround themselves in interactive environments, while luxury tourists are often portrayed as being very private and separated. Moreover, the luxury tourists’ discourse generally concentrates on the relaxation and the scenery, which corresponds with the spotlight on the ‘self’ that is noticeable in the branding, while the backpackers’ discourse emphasises (local) activities and experiences. This can be linked to their adventurous image. For both the audiences escapism is an important factor. Yet, the luxury tourists’ discourse seems to elicit the escape from their busy everyday lives, whereas the backpackers’ discourse describe the escape from mass tourism. Furthermore, in both discourses the ‘other’ audience is regularly mentioned for comparative purposes. However, what stands out in the backpackers’ discourse is that the ‘other’, i.e. luxury tourists, is often openly rejected. Then, the role of alcohol makes a substantial difference in the branding of the Maldives for the luxury tourists. The consumption of alcohol in resorts is often glorified, while for the backpackers on inhabited islands alcohol is not permitted. This can also be noticed in the creation of social spaces, whereby for backpackers these are places like local tea shops or on the *dhonis*, whereas for the luxury tourists these are clearly the resort’s bars and parties. However, this does not mean that backpackers have no desire for alcohol consumption. This can be noticed through the newly introduced ‘alcohol boats’ and resort

day tours that present alcohol as a highlight. What is also remarkable, is that colonial discourses are often recognised within the luxury tourists' discourse. This can refer to power structures and a (unconscious) feeling of dominance. In the branding of the country for luxury tourists, it is remarkable that the local population is not always portrayed as positive. There is a certain interest in the local population, however to the degree that it does not affect the initial holiday experience. Yet for backpackers, the interaction with the locals plays an important part during their stay.

However, besides these differences, there are also similarities regarding the branding for the two audiences. One of these shared interests, is the desire for unique and extraordinary experiences. In both discourses there is a certain elitist feeling. Luxury tourists perceive themselves as 'better' tourists, since they have the resources for more unique experiences that others are unable to have. Backpackers on the other hand, see themselves as 'better' tourists since they get off the beaten tracks and pave the way for their own experiences, which are personal and therefore also unique. Moreover, both audiences are presented as price-oriented tourists. In the luxury tourists' discourse there is a pay-more-get-more mentality. For backpackers, it is encouraged to keep costs down by continuously mentioning words as 'cheap' and 'free'. Also, sustainability is a subject that recurs in both discourses. The theory mentions that sustainability is part of the backpackers' identity, which can be noticed in the backpackers' discourse. However for luxury tourists, the theory discusses the unsustainable and polluting image these tourists have. By bringing sustainability more to the foreground in the luxury tourists' discourse, it attempts at setting this image right. Furthermore, neglecting the Islamic religion, is something that is remarkable in both discourses. The religion is sometimes shortly discussed, however always on the background. A reason for this could be that the conservative religion clashes with the Western image of the oriental fantasy. Moreover, there is a visible overlap in having an interest in the 'other'. As can be noticed in the luxury tourists' discourse, there is to a certain extent a desire to experience, or even imitate, the traditional and simple lifestyle of backpackers or locals. This is also the case for backpackers whose discourse mentions that they have a desire for luxury experiences and facilities, even though the literature states that backpackers do not demand luxury services.

As can be seen, the Maldives is a complicated destination. On one hand, there are two opposite audiences present, which are the luxury tourists and the backpackers, while on the other hand the West meets the East. Additionally, the analysis presents that within the backpackers and luxury tourists audiences, several subgroups are formed, moving away from the 'typical' characteristics, with each having their own travel motivations. This presents that new cultural identities are being formed through mixing and that culture therefore does not know any fixity. This process can create difficulties when it comes to the branding of the Maldives. In the analysis, the actors show on one side that there is a mixing of cultures, while on the other side a strict separation. This does not only apply to locals and tourists, but also to luxury tourists and backpackers. Through this, the branding of the country seems to be at a point where actors are stuck with the choice of either presenting the hybridisation

process and create a more international culture, or keep discriminating these cultures from each other.

What can be concluded, is that the discourses for both the audiences are interwoven and therefore not opposites. This presents the essence of Bhabha's theory, which says that it is much more complex than just two different worlds being opposites of each other. The Maldives present that hybrid cultures are being fused, which creates overlap and displacement of domains of differences. Therefore, it could be said that the Maldives in its entirety could be perceived as a third space. It is important to emphasise that these are discursive constructions, whereby the country and its tourist audiences are not studied in practice. The discourse reveals the mindset tourists can adopt, rather than revealing who the tourist actually is.

The multimodal discourse analysis is used to analyse texts and visuals from mainly a postcolonial perspective. The method takes into account how individual actors brand the Maldives in their discourses, whereby similarities and differences are being presented. However, one of the limitations of this approach, is that the research has been conducted in the face of postcolonial studies, wherein tourism is linked to colonialism. This frequently helped supporting the arguments in the analysis and clarified the motivations of the actors. However, it also determined how the discourses are perceived and consequently limited the perspective of the analysis, even though the discourses have other sides to it as well. For one, tourism is and has been an enormous economic booster and a means of helping (local) people climb the socio-economic ladder.

The results of this research can be useful for tourism development, but also has value in the socio-economic field. This leads to recommendations for future research, whereby it would be interesting to study the discourses from a perspective other than a postcolonial one, but also to look at discourses addressing non-Western audiences. For example, the Maldives also has an Asian and domestic tourist audience, who might be an interesting target to continue this research on. Moreover, it is also possible to continue this research on other similar destinations and compare the outcomes.

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