



# **‘Africa’s Little People’ in danger?**

**The representation of African ‘Pygmies’ in National  
Geographic Magazine in 1960 and 2005**

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## Abstract

Travel writing and tourism marketing have in common that both forms of communication want to entice the reader to either visit or imagine about the destination they write about. In relation to non-western destinations, this often culminates in the exoticizing and Othering of said places by western writers and companies, even in the 'postmodern' world. In this thesis research about travel writing and tourism marketing will be combined to look at the contemporary representation of African Pygmies in the *National Geographic Magazine* (NGM). Two articles, one from 1960 and one from 2005, have been selected because they are both written in an autobiographical way, just like a travelogue. A framework based on Echtner and Prasad's (2003) three third world marketing myths has been used to study the representation, both visual and textual. The research question is: how has the visual and textual representation of Central African Pygmies changed in National Geographic Magazine between 1960-2005? Certain elements of the representation have changed but on the whole, the representation has not changed much. Both African Pygmies and the non-western representation in NGM have been subjects of much research. However, research about Pygmies usually focuses on the colonial representation whilst the representation of Pygmies in the NGM has not been studied before. This thesis will be an addition to both fields of research.

Keywords: *Congo, Pygmies, National Geographic Magazine, representation*

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## Introduction

*“The monkey-eyed woman had a remarkable pair of mischievous orbs, protruding lips overhanging her chin, a prominent abdomen, narrow, flat chest, sloping shoulders, long arms, feet turned greatly inwards and very short lower legs, as being fitly characteristic of the link long sought between the average modern humanity and its Darwinian progenitors, and certainly deserving of being classed as an extremely low, degraded, almost a bestial type of a human being.”<sup>1</sup>*

The British explorer Henry Morton Stanley made several visits to Central Africa between the 1860's and 1880's. He wrote several books about his experiences on the continent, the last of which this passage is from. *In Darkest Africa* (1890) chronicles his own accounts of the expedition he led to relieve the Emin Paşa.<sup>2</sup> It is here, in the area that we now call the Congo, that he met the Pygmies or ‘dwarfs’ as he also called them.<sup>3</sup> A people already mentioned in Homer's *Illiad*, from which they have gotten their Western name: Pygmy, referring to their small stature. Up until the seventeenth century, it was generally accepted that Pygmies were mythological creatures that did not exist.<sup>4</sup> However, with the exploration of the inlands of Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans could no longer deny the existence of these ‘little people’.<sup>5</sup>

Their ‘discovery’ by Europeans collided with the advent of scientific reasoning. No longer was it generally accepted that humans were created by a god. Charles Darwin's evolution theory shook European society to its core, if his theory of natural selection and evolution was applicable to animals it could also apply to human beings. Social Darwinist theories imply that there is a human hierarchy that can chart the evolution of human races as some ‘ascend’ and others ‘decline’. One thing is certain, in all these theories the intellectual and moral superiority of white people (Europeans) was unquestioned, black Africans were seen as lowest on the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), contents of volume I, accessed through Project Gutenberg, released 9/9/2013.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Middleton, “Henry Morton Stanley, *Encyclopedia Britannica* last edited 6/5/2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Morton-Stanley>.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Kidd, “Inventing the ‘Pygmy’: representing the ‘Other’, representing the ‘self’”, *History and Anthropology* Vol. 20 No. 4 (2009); 402-403.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 402-403.

human ladder. From the 1850's onwards some western scientists even argued that black people were not just a separate race but a separate species. People of sub-Saharan descent were thought to be some of the most savage forms of humanity, especially those people that had little to no contact with other non-African cultures.<sup>6</sup> According to Christopher Kidd, many academics saw Pygmies as the 'missing' link between humanity and animals. In the supposed racial hierarchy of Darwinism, Pygmies, falsely believed to be exclusively hunter-gatherers, stood at the bottom, possessing neither history nor culture. As a result of these Darwinian ideas and because of their image as a primordial people 'frozen in time', anthropologists began to see Pygmies as 'a window to the past'. It was believed that by studying Pygmies one could derive how all hunter-gatherers that had ever lived behaved.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Kidd states that: "*The assumption of this theory (Darwinism) was that, in essence, all human beings were once hunter-gatherers but had since evolved to a level where we could leave hunting and gathering behind us. The repercussion was that continuing hunter-gatherer communities were seen to be behind the rest of humanity, a vestige of our former selves*".<sup>8</sup> Not only were they seen as lagging behind modern civilization, but scientists also believed that Pygmies had inferior brain capacities, furthering the idea of them as an 'inferior race'.<sup>9</sup>

A 'Pygmy mythology' was created in the western scientific community which was "*composed of a set of characteristics deemed diagnostic of this diminutive 'race', articulated with an exceptional degree of confidence by travelers and metropolitan scientists alike*".<sup>10</sup> Chris Ballard distinguishes three categories in colonial writing about Pygmies: the primordial, the bestial, and the infantile. He adds that "*each of which is commonly employed to describe colonial subjects more generally, pervade all of these more specific assessments of Pygmies, in whom the three tropes are seen in their most extreme form*".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Kidd adds that Pygmies are either negatively represented as primitive or positively represented in 'romantic isolation'. With the latter he means that scholars, from various disciplines, have romanticized the life and culture of Pygmies. They are seen as closer to nature and living a harmonious life. Just like the historically derogatory view of Pygmies as primitive, this view also serves to

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<sup>6</sup> Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 142-143

<sup>7</sup> Kidd, "Inventing the 'Pygmy'", 402.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 396.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 402-403.

<sup>10</sup> Chris Ballard, "Strange alliance: Pygmies in the colonial imagery", *World Archaeology* Vol. 38 No. 1 (2006); 133.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 140.

distance indigenous peoples from dominant society's conceptions of their own identity, and position indigenous peoples in direct opposition to that identity.<sup>12</sup>

Pygmies have been represented in the western consciousness in numerous ways during the past two decades. But, who are these Pygmies 'really'? As stated before, the name 'Pygmy' was given to them by nineteenth-century explorers who stumbled upon them and is a reference to the mythical Pygmy population from Homer's *Illiad*. The word 'Pygmy' is derived from the Greek word 'pygmaios', a distance unit from hand to elbow.<sup>13</sup> According to Serge Bahuchet, Pygmy is a blanket term used to designate any kind of rainforest people with a short stature and a nomadic lifestyle. This term embraces an artificial combination of scattered ethnic groups culturally and physically different that are living in Central Africa between latitude 5° N and 5° S. Pygmies are not a homogenous group of people, they live spread out over several Central African countries, use different languages, and are not all purely hunter-gatherers. Thought of as completely different from their non-Pygmy neighbors in the past, it is now commonly accepted that their shared ancestors split somewhere around 60.000 years ago. Based on genetic and language research smaller splits occurred throughout the ages.<sup>14</sup> Pygmies do not have an 'original' language anymore, but have taken over the languages their non-Pygmy neighbors speak. Many Pygmy groups have strong relationships with their non-Pygmy neighbors (often called Bantu neighbors even when they are not Bantu) and rely on them for goods that they cannot get themselves. Lastly, most Pygmies are not purely hunter-gatherers but also live off of trade, labor, and horticulture.<sup>15</sup>

Almost all of the historical information about Pygmies came from travelogues written by those explorers, scientists, missionaries and other white people that went to Central Africa. A travelogue cannot be a neutral object as their narrative is written from a first-person perspective and thought is inherently subjective. According to Carl Thompson the 'Othering' of those the narrator meets is always present in travelogues because "*all travel writing must, arguably, engage in an act of othering in the first sense, since every travel account is premised on the assumption that it brings news of people and places that are to some degree unfamiliar*

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<sup>12</sup> Kidd, "Inventing Pygmies", 400-401.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Eisner Putnam, "My life with Africa's little people: in the Belgian Congo's Ituri Forest a New York artist copes with witchcraft and tragedy among the Pygmies", *National Geographic* Vol. 117 No. 2 (February 1960); 283.

<sup>14</sup> Serge Bahuchet, "Changing language, remaining Pygmy". *Human Biology* Vol. 84 No. 1 (2012); 11-15.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Verdu and Giovanni Destro-Bisol, "'African Pygmies: what's behind a name?'" *Human Biology* Vol. 84 No. 1 (2010); 1-10.

and 'other' to the audience. More debatable, however, is whether all travel writing inevitably 'others' other cultures in the second, stronger sense of the term."<sup>16</sup> Here, Thompson distinguishes between two kinds of 'othering'. The first kind is weaker and denotes the process by which the writer of one culture identifies and highlights the differences between themselves and members of another culture. In the second and stronger process, the writer does not only depict the culture he/she describes as different but also as inferior to their own. Thompson gives several motivations for the 'Othering' present in travelogues:

*"often these motives will be unconscious and over-determined, springing from a complex mixture of emotions, such as fear, envy, revulsion, incomprehension and sometimes even desire, when another culture stirs taboo fantasies that travellers wish to repress and disown. Very often, however, instances of pejorative 'othering' in travel writing serve an important justificatory function. They may legitimate the traveller's personal conduct towards the people he or she met; more crucially, perhaps, they also often work to legitimate the conduct of the traveller's culture. The traveller's portrayal of another people or place is often in this way ideologically motivated, seeking at some level to justify and encourage a particular policy or course of action towards those others."*<sup>17</sup>

He goes on that travelogues also reveal the so-called 'imaginative geographies' which illuminate the mental maps individuals and cultures have of the world, and the larger matrix of prejudices, fantasies and assumptions that have influence on their encounter with, or description of, the Other.<sup>18</sup> It can thus be concluded that some form of Othering is always present in travelogues and that travelogues can reveal to the reader preconceived ideas or values the writer carried with them. In Stanley his case these are visible in how he related the physical appearance of Pygmies to his knowledge and belief in social Darwinism and the fact that he felt the need to describe Pygmies in these exact terms.

Above mentioned examples of travelogues all are historical examples that took place and were written in colonial times. However, the travelogue is still a popular existing genre of travel writing. Some scholars such as Hazel Tucker and John Akama argue that travel narratives written in the so-called 'postcolonial time' are still discourses of colonialism because one

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<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Travel writing*, 132-133.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 135-136.

culture interprets, represents and tries to dominate another.<sup>19</sup> Thompson seems to agree with this sentiment. According to him many characteristic tropes of colonial discourse and strategies for representing the Other have survived in contemporary travel writing, albeit in subtly reinvented forms. He adds that “*travel writing remains a genre thoroughly, enmeshed in, and contributive to, the neo-colonial networks of power and inequality by which the West maintains in current global dominance*”.<sup>20</sup> Not only in the genre of travel writing tropes of Othering are used. In the closely related genre of tourism marketing Othering is also still used to attract tourists to so-called ‘third world’ destinations. According to Charlotte Echtner and Pushkala Prasad (2003) context surrounding third world tourism marketing was still lacking at the time they published their article “The context of third world tourism marketing”. By analyzing images in brochures to such destinations they found three myths that pertain to the marketing: the myth of the unchanged, the myth of the unrestrained, and the myth of the uncivilized. These myths have their origin in colonial discourse and in a way, continue it just like travel writing does.<sup>21</sup> Both forms of communication also have in common the fact that it tries to entice its readers to either visit and/or imagine the destinations described. Interestingly, like travel writing is often written from a western perspective, so was the tourism marketing of the ‘third world countries’ that Echtner and Prasad studied, whom found out that most of the marketing happened through western agencies.<sup>22</sup>

### Status questionis

One modern medium through which travel writing reaches a large audience and through which destinations are also unconsciously marketed is *National Geographic* (NG). Famous for its iconic yellow-bordered magazines (NGM) and its television channel (NGC), it is widely recognized as a cultural icon and seen by many readers as a scientific and cultural authority.<sup>23</sup> Over the years the goals and stance of the NG on what it is and what its values are have changed.

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<sup>19</sup> Hazel Tucker and John Akama, “Tourism as postcolonialism”, *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies* edited by Tazim Jamal and Mike Robinson (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 504-511.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, *Travel writing*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> Charlotte M. Echtner and Pushkala Prasad, “The context of third world tourism marketing”, *Annals of Tourism Research* Vol. 30 No. 3 (2003); 679-680.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 661.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew L. Mendelson and Fabienne Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ interpretation of visual and verbal narratives of a National Geographic story on Saudi Arabia”, *Journalism* Vol. 10 No. 6 (2009); 798



In its early days the NG avoided publishing on ‘controversial topics’ as the policy of the magazine was to print “*only what is of a kindly nature . . . about any country or people*”.<sup>24</sup> Later, with changes to editorial policy, the NG also decided to publish articles that criticize violence or warn against climate change. However, according to Curtis Keim: “*National Geographic, our window on the world, is rarely a place to get a balanced picture of Africa. This magazine calls itself scientific, yet avoids controversy, thriving on beautiful photography and safe topics. It would have to take such an approach to be so widely accepted in the United States and indeed in the world.*”<sup>25</sup> Both the magazine and the television channel have been subjects of academic work, both qualitative as quantitative studies, especially in regards to their representation of non-American cultures. However, the representation of certain western cultures shows that even these are Othered when it suits the needs of NGM’s editors. The NGM has an uneasy relationship with academia. According to William G. Moseley NGM efforts to enhance global understanding and expand peoples' view of geography as a field of study have good intentions, However, the magazine has also come under criticism by academics from several disciplines for its Orientalism and perpetuation of stereotypes about the global South.<sup>26</sup>

For western countries: the representation of Canada (Beaudreau, 2002), Spain (Gabriel and Alvarez, 2019), and Finland (Hakoköngäs, Kivioja and Kleemola, 2020) in NGM. The articles about Canada and Finland were largely quantitative in nature, tracing a historical change in how their respective country were represented in NGM. Both studies concluded that it was not only editorship that has influence on how a destination is represented, overarching historical events like the Cold War or the rising awareness of global warming have shaped the representations presented in NGM. Overall, the representation of both countries was not seen as objective with Othering, or the opposite, used to arouse certain feelings or opinions in its American readers.<sup>27</sup> The article about the representation of Spain was written in Spanish and unfortunately could not be taken in to account.

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<sup>24</sup> Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: curiosities and inventions of the American mind* second edition. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> William G. Moseley, “Reflecting on National Geographic Magazine and academic geography: the September 2005 special issue on Africa”, *African Geographical Review* Vol. 24 No. 1 (2005); 93-100.

<sup>27</sup> Sylvie Beaudreau, “The changing faces of Canada: images of Canada in National Geographic”, *American Review of Canadian Studies* Vol. 32 No. 4 (2002); 537-538 and Eemeli Hakoköngäs, Virpi Kivioja and Olli Kleemola, “Developed but close to nature: the image of Finland in National Geographic Magazine from the 1900s to the 2010s”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2020); 248-250.

As for non-western cultures and countries: Kealeboga Aiseng and Ufuoma Akpojiv (2019) studied the representation of two Benin cultures on NGC. The authors discuss how ‘traditional’ religious rituals and rites of passage are misrepresented and (not so) subtly judged according to western standards as brutal and tribal, not taking into account the participant’s feelings or significance of the rituals.<sup>28</sup>

In an article about the Philippines (2009) David Hyndman discusses how the NGM exoticized one tribe (Tasaday) in the Philippines, whilst primitivizing another tribe (T’boli). Although the Tasay were exoticized first, with the ‘discovery’ of the T’boli (which later turned out to be a fraud) their representation was changed to represented them as primitive and all its negative characteristics so that the T’boli could now be presented as an exoticized and romanticized premodern ideal.<sup>29</sup>

Andre L. Mendelson and Fabienne Darling-Wolf (2009) studied the textual and visual representation of Saudi-Arabia in NGM. Central in their article is the way NGM creates narratives and how those are picked up by readers. After letting three test groups of students read the same article on Saudi-Arabia, they come to the conclusion that the textual and visual narrative that the NGM conveys are two different ‘stories’. Students that either read only the text, only saw the images or did both all had different ideas about Saudi-Arabia. They conclude that the textual narrative and visual narrative in NGM tell different stories, which can create tension of understanding within the reader/viewer.<sup>30</sup>

William G. Moseley (2005) critiqued the special NGM issue on Africa from September 2005 because of the way Africa is portrayed. Although the promise of the editor was to ‘set the record straight on Africa’, this issue is not without its problems. Moseley critiques its promotion of a simplistic understanding of the relationship between multiple geographical and biological factors such as environmental degradation and population growth. It also does not take in to account the position of Africa in the global political economy and it prioritizes

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<sup>28</sup> Kealeboga Aiseng and Ufuoma Akpojivi, “Anthropological vs. orientalist representation: issues with the National Geographic Channel”, *Visual Anthropology* Vol. 32 (2019); 445-459.

<sup>29</sup> David Hyndman, “Indigenous representation of the T’boli and the Tasaday lost tribe controversy in postcolonial Philippines: interpreting the eroticized, effeminizing gaze in National Geographic”, *Social Identities* Vol. 8 No. 1 (2002); 45-66.

<sup>30</sup> Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ interpretation of visual and verbal narratives of a National Geographic story on Saudi Arabia”, 798-818.

preservation of animals over human livelihoods. Lastly, Moseley felt like the NGM was too positive about outside actors such as NGO's and certain non-African governments.<sup>31</sup>

Monica Perez-Marin wrote her dissertation (2016) about Columbia in which she found that representations in NGM between 1903-1952 were not scientifically nor neutral, and did not follow a fixed pattern. The NGM serviced those in power, for example: the American government or a particular business. Colombians were either portrayed as civilized or primitive based on what the purpose of the article was.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, John D. Perivolaris (2007) researched the portrayal of Puerto Rico at the beginning of the twentieth century. He concluded that the NGM made sure to represent the United States as the “*sweet paternalistic colonizer helping the poor people out of their primitiveness and European influence*”.<sup>33</sup> Signs of Spanish civilizations and black presence were erased since they did not fit in the image of Puerto Rico the NGM tried to convey: that of a ‘virgin maiden’, ready to be discovered.<sup>34</sup>

Lastly, Robert P. Wheelersburg studied the representation of peoples indigenous to the artic in NGM (2017). Wheelersburg (whom unfortunately still refers to indigenous Artic people as ‘Eskimos’) argues that the stereotypical ‘Eskimo’-image that exists in Nort-America was created by NGM and is still maintained by them. Ignoring modernization in Artic communities, the NGM still favors to portray Inuit and others as traditional as possible. According to him, this shows that the NGS editorial purposely portrays ‘Others’ as being ‘exotic’ rather than mundane, to attract the attention of its readers.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, there are those authors that do not focus on a single continent, people, or country. Radhika Parameswaran (2002) focused on one specific issue of NGM about ‘modernity in Asia’. According to him this issue’s representations are deeply rooted in colonial ideas about race and its relation to either the masculine and feminine, and stereotyping. Juxtaposed to an article about Africa as ‘vanishing cultures’ “*Asia becomes aligned with the*

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<sup>31</sup> Moseley, “Reflecting on National Geographic Magazine and academic geography: the September 2005 special issue on Africa”, 93-100.

<sup>32</sup> Monica Perez-Marin, “Critical discourse analysis of Colombian identities and humanature in National Geographic Magazine (1903-1952)”, Phd Diss., The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 2016, UNM Digital Repository.

<sup>33</sup> John D. Perivolaris, “‘Porto Rico’: the view from National Geographic, 1899-1924”, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* Vol. 84 No. 2 (2007); 202-203.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 197-212.

<sup>35</sup> Robert P. Wheelersburg, “*National Geographic* magazine and the Eskimo stereotype: a photographic analysis, 1949-1990”, *Polar Geography* Vol. 40 No. 1 (2017); 35-58

vitality of modern progress while Africa remains anchored to the amorphous state of extinction and the ephemerality of a culture that cannot be assimilated into modernity”.<sup>36</sup> Binaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ shape our reception of these cultures and subtly help in the ‘Othering’ of these cultures for the western reader.<sup>37</sup>

Anja Nygren (2006) focused on the representation of South-American tropical forests and forest-dwellers in NGM. Here Nygren discusses how travel-accounts in NGM have created images of either ‘bad’ or ‘good’ forest-dwellers. According to her, particular representations and discourses are privileged in the magazines travel accounts which tend to create hierarchical polarities. In the end she concludes that “*The importance of the role of travel writings in formulating popular conceptions of tropical forests and tropical peoples can hardly be overestimated. With the global spread of tourism, travel narratives – like travel itself – have been made available to a large audience, and the genre of travel writing has become one of the most popular and widely read forms of literature*”.<sup>38</sup>

Lastly Anne Marie Todd (2010) focusses on how the African landscape is represented in NGM and its sister magazines Adventure and Travel, Africa is made accessible through the NGM because most readers will never visit themselves. Images and stories intend to provoke tourism: whether simply transporting us to distant lands with these photographs, or suggesting itineraries that influence our travel plans. African landscape is portrayed in three different ways: a vast desert plain, a wilderness theme park, and a part of global scenery. The representation of Africa as a ‘troubled continent’ also fits in this rhetoric since she also suggests that NGM posits tourism as a vehicle for change, by portraying Africa as troubled, tourism seems to be an option for positive development.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Radhika Parameswaran, “Local culture in global media: excavating colonial and material discourses in National Geographic”, *Communication Theory* Vol. 12 No. 3 (2002); 312.

<sup>37</sup> Radhika Parameswaran, “Local culture in global media: excavating colonial and material discourses in National Geographic”, *Communication Theory* Vol. 12 No. 3 (2002); 287-315.

<sup>38</sup> Anja Nygren, “Representations of tropical forests and tropical forest-dwellers in travel accounts of National Geographic”, *Environmental Values* Vol. 15 No. 4 (2006); 505-525. Quote specifically from 519.

<sup>39</sup> Anne Marie Todd, ““Anthropocentric distance in National Geographic’s environmental aesthetic””, *Environmental Communication* Vol. 4 No. 2 (2010); 206-224.

## Research question and research methods

As I have shown in the introduction, travel writing is still a popular genre of writing which influences people's perceptions of destinations just like tourism marketing does. In both travel writing and tourism marketing forms or 'Othering' are present because this is what the reader or our potential tourist might expect or entice to pick up that story or book that holiday. The NGM is a source of information for many that are curious about the world and its people. Previous research has shown that NGM has a dominant hand in creating and molding readers perception of a destination. Although the NGM claims to be objective, they represent places and peoples in such ways that it fits their narrative, sometimes still heavily influenced by colonial tropes such as those existing in older travel writing. For my thesis I will study the contemporary representation of African Pygmies in the NGM. I have chosen this group specific because their representation in NGM, or even their contemporary portrayal, have not yet received academic attention. Furthermore, since they were the subject of much travel writing in colonial times, it would be interesting to study how much of these tropes are still present in contemporary representations.

For my case study I have chosen two articles written in the twentieth and twenty-first century (1960 and 2005) in order to not only study them separately, but also compare them to each other to see how the representation of Pygmies in central Africa has changed. My main research question will be: how has the visual and textual representation of Central African Pygmies changed in National Geographic Magazine between 1960-2005? I would like to add that these two articles are not the only ones that have Pygmies as subject, before and between, but not after 2005, multiple articles have been published. I have chosen to compare these two because they have been written in different times (one contemporary but still in colonial time and the other in a contemporary postcolonial setting) and are about the same subject: the Mbuti Pygmy that live in the Ituri forest. This will give the most trustworthy comparison since there are certainly differences in culture and lifestyle between the various Pygmy groups that reside in Central Africa. I have decided to do both a visual and textual analysis because some previous research suggests that these two narratives tend to tell a different story, I am curious to what extent this is applicable to the subject of Pygmies.

For my framework I have decided to use the three tropes of tourism marketing by Echtner and Prasad; the myth of the unchanged, the myth of the unrestrained, and the myth of the uncivilized. I have chosen these over other tropes, such as those proposed by Ballard, because the NGM is in some ways a form of tourism/destination marketing. Read by many

western people, the NGM influences the way they see and perceive places. These three tropes can be applied to both visual and textual, both in a slightly different way. For the textual analysis, each trope will get its own chapter in which the trope will be explained more into detail. For the visual analysis the articles will be analyzed chronologically, the tropes will be explained at the beginning of the chapter.

For this paper, in order to analyze both text and images, I will make use of the multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) put forward by David Machin and Andrea Mayr. This methodology is not without criticism. However, since its focus is on analyzing few texts and/or images it is suitable for smaller in-depth research like this paper. Since I am looking at the representation of Pygmies in NGM specific, I am of the opinion that what I conclude by looking at three texts can be seen as representative for the whole of NGM. Another critique against multimodal analysis is that it focuses too much on the academics perception of the text and too little on what the actual reader of the text perceives. As much as this might be an issue for some texts, I suppose this will not be an issue for the National Geographic, since it sees itself and its readers as scientifically up-to-date and higher-educated.<sup>40</sup> One would expect them to be critical to some degree about what they are reading. Furthermore, I think the MDA will be the most suitable for the purpose of my paper since it does not only analyze the explicit lexical and rhetorical tropes but also the implicit. Many facets of the representation of Pygmies in NGM lie at the surface, but I am also interested in the subtler image making that is going on.

In the MDA put forward by Machin and Mayr, the first thing to pay attention to is what kind of vocabulary does an author use? Which words do they use and which do they avoid? Discourses are communicated implicitly and the words chosen do not only have denotations, but also connotations, which authors can use to their advantage. Machin and Mayr pay attention to: overlexication, suppression or lexical absence, lexical choices and the genre of communication. Secondly, it is extremely revealing if we look closely at the words chosen to represent how someone has spoken, Machin and Mayr differentiate between 5 different types of 'verb use' that are used for their connotative power. These can influence discourse and identities, and power perceptions the reader may have. Thirdly, there is a range of choices available to writers to decide how they wish to represent individuals and groups of people, who in CDA are often termed as 'social actors' or 'participants'. The realm of semiotic choices are referred to as 'representational strategies'. This means that there is no neutral way to represent

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<sup>40</sup> Wheelersburg, "National Geographic magazine and the Eskimo stereotype", 43-44.

a person, every choice of words you make will draw attention to certain aspects of identity that can be associated with certain kinds of discourses.

The next step in MDA is to analyze how the way people are perceived is not only shaped by the above mentioned representational strategies but also by representation of transitivity, or how they are represented as either acting or not acting. A transitivity analysis can show us who, in a text, are presented as subject or object. According to Machin and Mayr “Transitivity analysis not only a powerful basis for analyzing what is in a text, but also what is absent from it”. In the sixth step Machin and Mayr consider two linguistic strategies of concealment: nominalization, which obscures agency and responsibility, and presupposition, which can either be implying something without stating it or presenting things as ‘facts’ whilst they can be contested. In the second to last step rhetoric and metaphor are discussed. According to Machin and Mayr these can be of ideological significance. which metaphors become accepted can implicate how we think about and understand the world, how we act, which institutions are build, and how society is organized. Metaphors and rhetoric tropes are seen as excellent linguistic resources to turn the concrete in abstractions. Lastly, Machin and Mayr turn their attention to modality and hedging. Both are used to make claims whilst at the same time distancing ourselves from them, this can be done in multiple ways.

What is, for the purpose of this paper, the definition of Othering? The ‘Othering’ of people was first described (in these words) by literary scholar Edward Saïd. According to him, Europeans ascribed positive characteristics to themselves and negative ones to non-Europeans, in this way they made a difference between them and the Other. They could do this because between the two people (European and non-European) they were the dominant power.<sup>41</sup> In Othering an Other there is always a dichotomy present (good/bad, black/white, civilized/uncivilized). Many scholars, in relation to representation and NGM, have uncritically taken over this dichotomy. However, according to Perez-Marin this dichotomous framework of the Western world and non-Western world is very problematic because “*it leads to the study of media representations as homogenous, immobile, and rigid essences*”<sup>42</sup> and “*this kind of binary is problematic since it hides the oppressive structures and the historical context where these specific media representations where created and legitimized*”.<sup>43</sup> She suggests that media

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<sup>41</sup> Editors, “Edward Saïd”, *Britannica* Accessed on 24-1-2022.

<sup>42</sup> Perez-Marin, “Critical discourse analysis of Colombian identities and humanature in National Geographic Magazine (1903-1952)”, 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

representations are more fluid, fragmented, contradictory, and contested constructs as they are always in relation to material conditions and historical context. Although I do agree with her last statement about the nature of media representations, I disagree with the assertion that these cannot be researched with a dichotomous framework. I think using such framework is case study dependent. Since historical western thought was dichotomous, certainly in relation to Pygmies in Africa, dichotomous frameworks such as Othering can be used to assert what oppressive structures and historical contexts are still present.

### Africa in the western mind

Before we turn our attention to the representation of Pygmies it is important to discuss how Africa in general and Congo more specific have been represented over time because these portrayals have had influence on the authors and editors of the NGM but also on the readers of the NGM. How has Africa, as an imagined space, been present in the European discourse?

In medieval and early modern times the representation of Africa was of an ambivalent nature. According to Noah R. Bassil it is a misconception to think that racism against Africans can be discerned from the Hellenic age to contemporary times. It was not until the late nineteenth century that black Africans began to be perceived different from Europeans themselves based purely on their skin color.<sup>44</sup> The metaphor of the ‘dark, or darkest, continent’ only took form in the late nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> In Great-Britain, after the abolition of slavery in its colonies, abolitionists set their mind on eradicating slavery and slave trade in Africa to ‘save’ the continent. Africa was not in need of British generosity but of British intervention, and Christendom. Other countries followed suit in this ideal.<sup>46</sup> For Europeans, Africa was a continent full of savages who were drawn to bloodshed and murder, worshippers of heathen gods and believers in witchcraft and magic. In their intellectual abilities they were no further than simple children. Only Christianity and commerce could save them, or so Europeans

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<sup>44</sup> Noah R. Bassil, “The roots of Afropessimism: the British invention of the ‘Dark Continent’”. *Critical Arts* Vol. 25 No. 3 (2011); 377-379.

<sup>45</sup> Lucy Jarosz, “Constructing the dark continent: metaphor as geographic representation of Africa”, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* Vol. 74 No. 2 (1992); 106-108.

<sup>46</sup> Bassil, “The roots of Afropessimism”, 390-391.



believed. The landscape too, was scrutinized, Africa was portrayed as a 'white mans grave', its hinterlands impenetrable, full of deadly diseases, cannibalism, and wild beasts.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time that the 'scramble for Africa' took place, 'scientific ideologies' like social Darwinism took off. Whilst the African continent was being Christianized by missionaries, theories of human evolution were developed in Europe. Although many conflicting theories existed, two issues in relation to Africans are relevant. The first question is whether black Africans were to be considered human, and the second, if the answer was yes, where do they stand in the imagined human hierarchy? For some scientists the perceived similarities between some black African people and apes was prove that they were the missing link between white men and our ape ancestors. Seen as barely human, and according to some, more ape-like, thus proving that black Africans were animals.<sup>48</sup> Those scientists that did view black Africans as human often were of the opinion that they constituted the lowest form of human life possible. Here, they based themselves on ethnological 'prove' that Black people were not only intellectually different, but also physical different from the 'white race', and that this difference was a sign of perceived 'backwardness. It was though that the greater the perceived physical and cultural difference from European culture, the less developed the race.<sup>49</sup>

The representation of Africa as a 'dark continent' solidified in the late nineteenth century when European powers began using it as a reason to conquer and subdue the continent. This portrayal of Africa spread through missionary reports, travel diaries, and fictional work about Africa such as Joseph Conrads's book *Heart of Darkness*. Although created in colonial times, with the decolonization of Africa, these negative stereotypes of the continent and its inhabitants did not disappear. Lucy Jarosz has shown how the image of Africa as primitive and savage is still being cultivated by media, in for example, reports about the AIDS epidemic.<sup>50</sup> According to Keven C. Dunn, there are three discursive images of Africa in modern travel discourses: Africa as a 'primitive paradise', Africa as a zoo, and Africa as underdeveloped, traditional and pure. These tropes can be found back in writings such as Paul Theroux's book *The Lower River* (Africa as underdeveloped, traditional and pure) and B. Caitling the *Vorrh-*

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 12 No. 1 (1985); 166-203 and John & Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the historical imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 220-221 and Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 142-143.

<sup>49</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Jarosz, "Constructing the dark continent", 111-113.

trilogy (Africa as paradise).<sup>51</sup> They are also closely related to those tropes found by Echtner and Prasad in destination marketing, with similarities in how Africa is portrayed as ‘primitive’, ‘pure’, and a focus on its nature.

### ‘Darkest of dark’: images of Belgian Congo

Central Africa was one of the last places on the continent to be ‘discovered’, the area of what we now call Congo-Kinshasa being one. After being colonized it came in to the personal possession of the Belgian king Leopold II. His ‘Congo Free State (CFS) existed until 1908, when possession was transferred to the Belgian government and the colony was renamed Belgian Congo, which existed until 1960, when Belgium granted Congo independence. After gaining independence the country has had its ups and downs, with civil strife, and war in neighboring countries severely destabilizing it. Between 1971 and 1997 the country was known as Zaïre, and it is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo Congo-Kinshasa.<sup>52</sup>

How has Congo been represented in European discourse? First of all, it was seen as being in need of a paternalistic European hand. This is why, according to Bassil, the Belgian colonization of Congo was warmly received by British public. He states that “*Leopold offered the British a mirror image of their own perceptions of Africa*” and “*Leopold successfully disguised his lust for wealth and power as well as his imperial appetite in the clothes provided by British paternalism and cultural arrogance towards Africa*”.<sup>53</sup> This attitude towards Congo did not change with the takeover by the Belgian Government. Public opinion back home was shaped not only through written and (photo)visual material, but also through events like world fairs or institutions like the Belgian Congo museum (now called Royal Museum for Central Africa).<sup>54</sup> Repeatedly the Congo and its inhabitants were portrayed as in need of European

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<sup>51</sup> Wesley Paul Macheso, “The problem with the traveler’s gaze: images of the dark continent in Paul Theroux’s *The Lower River*”, *Journal of Humanities* Vol. 25 No. 2 (2017); 45-61 and Robert A. Saunders, “Reimagining the colonial wilderness: ‘Africa’, imperialism and the geographical legerdemain of the Vorrh. *Cultural Geographies* Vol. 26 No. 2 (2019); 177-194.

<sup>52</sup> Ntsomo Payanzo, “Democratic Republic of Congo”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* last accessed 14/6/2022.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo>.

<sup>53</sup> Both Bassil, “The roots of Afropessimism”, 393.

<sup>54</sup> Vicky van Bockhaven, “Exhibition review: Decolonising the Royal Museum for Central

(read: Belgian) help in exterminating slavery and Arab influences. Their culture and habits were portrayed as primitive so as to give Belgium's 'paternal' policies in the Congo a just cause.<sup>55</sup> Later on, after the second World war, Belgium actively promoted tourism to the Belgian Congo, not so much for its economic value but more so for its marketing and propagandic qualities.<sup>56</sup> According to Andrew Wigley these promotions worked twofold. It highlighted the accomplishments of Belgian colonialism and it sought to counteract negative images and impressions of colonialism. Photographs of modern colonial cities, industries and welfare provisions for Africans were commonplace in official guidebooks and tourist literature.<sup>57</sup> Congo was represented as an innovative modern country to show the progress Belgians had made in 'modernizing' and 'civilizing' the country and at the same time its natural resources were also promoted. Yet, its people were still represented as primitive and exotic, to show that the Belgian task of civilizing was not done yet.<sup>58</sup>

### The National Geographic Magazine (NGM)

The National Geographic magazine was first published in 1888 by the National Geographic Society as a periodical for American readers. Its various and diverse topics provide the armchair traveler with literate and accounts of faraway places.<sup>59</sup> Nowadays its audience reaches beyond the borders of the United States, the magazine is being published in more than 40 languages.<sup>60</sup>

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Africa in Belgium's Second Museum Age", *Antiquity* Vol. 93 (2019); 1084-1085 and Matthew Standard, "Bilan du monde pour un monde plus deshumanise: the 1958 Brussels world fair and Belgian perception of the Congo", *European History Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 2 (2005); 267, 280.

<sup>55</sup> Maarten Couttenier, "The museum as rift zone – the construction and representation of 'east' and 'central' Africa in the (Belgian) Congo museum/Royal Museum for Central Africa", *History in Africa* Vol. 46 (2019); 329.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Wigley, "Against the wind: the role of Belgian colonial tourism marketing in resisting pressure to decolonize from Africa", *Journal of Tourism History* Vol. 7 No. 3 (2015); 193-209.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 205 and Gert Verhoeven and Nina Payrhuber, "Les pelerins de la saison seche': colonial tourism in the Belgian Congo, 1945-1960", *Journal of Contemporary history* Vol. 54 No. 3 (2019); 575.

<sup>59</sup> Editors, "National Geographic Magazine", *Encyclopedia Britannica* last accessed 14/6/2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Geographic-Magazine>.

<sup>60</sup> Hakoköngäs et al. "Developed but close to nature", 236.

Currently, NGM is a part of National Geographic Society (NGS) a for-profit based in Washington D.C.<sup>61</sup>

According to Keim the NGM is a ‘picture window on the world’ for many Americans.<sup>62</sup> It is not a window without controversy. Keim himself, in relation to the representation of Africa, adds that it is not the place to get a balanced view. Since the beginning editors have avoided publishing stories that might stir controversy as the policy was to publish “*only what is of a kindly nature . . . about any country or people.*” How can a magazine claim to be scientific yet avoid that what can cause discussions? Likewise, although the NGM is not actively exploiting stereotypes about the continent, it still reinforces them, both visual and textual. For it represents Africa not as a ‘dark continent’ but as ‘Wise Africa’, a representation in which modern elements such as cities are ignored.<sup>63</sup> The NGM allows us, the western reader, to follow the, often male and white, gaze of the photographer when we look at the photographs. Almost never is this gaze returned in the photos, which is distinctively colonial according to Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins. They add that “*the Westerners do not seek a relationship but are content, even happy, to view the other as an ethnic object*”.<sup>64</sup>

Even though it might strive to be, the NGM can never be an ‘objective’ source of information. As the status questionis has shown the writers and editors of NGM often push narratives that suit their needs or current values in American society. These representations, how harmless they may seem, are not without danger as they influence the readers of NGM whom base their ideas and notions of destinations on what they see and read in the magazine, which can lead to either false or over-simplified perceptions.

### Who is who? An introduction of the authors

Now that the NGM has been discussed broadly, I turn my attention to the two articles that will be analyzed. In this chapter some basic information about the authors and their articles will be given.

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<sup>61</sup> “National Geographic Magazine”, *Britannica*.

<sup>62</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 21-23, 64-65.

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, “The photograph as an intersection of gazes: the example of *National Geographic*”, *Visual Anthropology Review* Vol. 7 No. 1 (1991); 142-143.

The first article, “*My life with Africa’s Little People*”, was published in the February 1960 issue and written by Anne Eisner Putnam, the photos were provided by multiple people. Anne Eisner Putnam (1911-1967) was an American painter and art collector whom was married to anthropologist Patrick Tracey Lowell Putnam (1904-1953) until his death in 1953. Patrick Putnam had studied African Pygmies in the Belgian Congo since 1928, and in the 1930’s had started Camp Putnam. Here, Pygmies could receive education and medical help. The Putnam’s also received tourists and researchers on the camp.<sup>65</sup> After Patrick Putnam’s death Anne continued to run Camp Putnam for some years before closing it down and returning back to the United States. In 1954 she published a book *Madami: My Eight Years of Adventure with the Congo Pygmies* about her experiences living with the Pygmies.<sup>66</sup> As an artist, Putnam was inspired by the Pygmies in her art. The article is 24 pages long and features 17 black-and-white pictures. There are no color pictures in this article. “My Life with Africa’s Little People” is written in an autobiographical style. It focusses on Anne Putnam’s experience with Pygmies in Belgian Congo after she returned to Camp Putnam in 1956. The name of this group of Pygmies is not mentioned, only that they live around the Epulu River (at the edge of Ituri forest). However, the Pygmies she came in to contact with are probably of the Mbuti clan.

The second article, “*Who rules the forest?*”, was written by the journalist Paul Salopek for the September 2005 issue of NGM. Photographs were provided by Randy Olson. In this article, Salopek writes about the various people he encounters in and around the Ituri forest, as he makes his way through the forest. The Pygmies he follows are Mbuti but he also describes his encounters with other non-Pygmy inhabitants and visitors of and to the forest. Where Anne Putnam only mentions non-Pygmy Africans in the context of their feudal-like relationship with Pygmies, Salopek also mentions them in other contexts, such as allegations of cannibalism against warlords, or completely separate from Pygmies, such as the ‘inventor’ Salopek meets in the forest. In total this article is 22 pages long and contains 14 color photographs, of which 5 are one or two pages big. As shortly mentioned in the status questionis, the September 2005 issue of NGM was a special issue about Africa. This issue’s title was “*Africa: whatever you thought, think again*”, implying that they will make you rethink everything you thought you knew about the continent. From the title alone one cannot discern whether you will be positively or negatively influenced by this special issue. In the “*From the Editor*” it becomes clear that he wants you to rethink Africa in a positive way. His hope and belief is “*that Africa can be a model*

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<sup>65</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 279-280.

<sup>66</sup> It is still sold, see: <https://www.amazon.com/Madami-eight-years-adventure-pigmies/dp/B0007DS4RQ>.

for the world in finding a balance between the needs of the people and the needs of wild places".<sup>67</sup> Furthermore in the "Behind the scenes" section it is mentioned that this issue wants to celebrate Africa.<sup>68</sup> It can be deduced from this that it was the editor's intention to give us a positive representation of Africa. One would expect that this tone would be continued in the articles. However, it is not in Salopek his article. The scenes he describes are gloomy and rather macabre. Although Pygmy life continues as usual and he is not necessarily negative about them, he is about their faith in the everchanging forest. Can their lifestyle continue amid war and threats of cannibalism? Pygmy life is celebrated, but African life around them certainly is not in this article. Instead of changing our view of Africa, it reinforces a negative image of (Central) Africa as brutal, war-torn and poor.

### Hypothesis and relevance

The main research question was: how has the visual and textual representation of Central African Pygmies changed in National Geographic Magazine between 1960-2005? In line with previous research about representations of non-western cultures in NGM I expect to conclude that the way NGM portrays Central African Pygmies is not 'neutral' or 'objective' but heavily influenced by a few factors such as geopolitics and the state of colonialism. Research by Chris Ballard about Pygmies specific and Anja Nygren about forest dwellers in South-America found out that both groups are either represented as 'good' in a romanticized way or 'bad' in a primitive way. I expect to find either an overtly romanticized or an overtly primitive portrayal of Pygmies in the articles of Putnam and Salopek. Either way, I also expect to find all three of Echtner and Prasad's tropes back in the two articles, as they fit in with the editorial policy of the NGM to not write about that what can cause controversy. Since the first article was written in colonial times and the second one 50 years after colonial rule ended, I am curious to see to what extent the representations in both articles are similar. Comparing Pygmy representation to representations of 'Africa' more general I expect the representation of Pygmies to be more 'positive' and romanticized than general representations of the continent. However, with the critique of Moseley on the 2005 special issue in mind, I will not be surprised to see some elements of his critique back in Salopek's article. I also content, in line with previous scholars,

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<sup>67</sup> Chris Johns, "From the editor", *National Geographic Magazine* September 2005, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Editors, "Behind the scene", *National Geographic Magazine* September 2005, 16.

that they create a representation of ‘Africa’ as an imaged space rather than Africa in a geographical sense.<sup>69</sup>

The relevance of this thesis is threefold. First of all, it contributes and is an addition to already existing literature about the representation of Pygmies. Much academic work exists that is occupied with Pygmies. However, only a tiny fraction is concerned with representations of Pygmies, and the work that is, is focused on colonial representation. Secondly, this thesis contributes to the already large body of work on representation in the NGM. As shown in the status questionis, the claimed objectivity and neutrality of the NGM is questioned by current research. This thesis will add to the already rich material and probably agree with the common consensus that representations in NGM ‘Other’ non-American cultures for various reasons. Lastly, this thesis will contribute to the body of academic work related to the contemporary representation of Africa in western media.

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<sup>69</sup> Martin Scott, “The myth of representations of Africa”, *Journalism Studies* Vol. 18 No.2 (2017); 191-210.

## Moments that are a thousand or more years: Pygmies as unchanged

In this chapter I will analyze how Echtner and Prasad's myth of the unchanged is visible in the representation of Pygmies by Putnam and Salopek. The myth of the unchanged can be subdivided in to elements relating to the destination and elements relating to the inhabitants of the destination. Since not all of the characteristics of the tropes are applicable to the case study of Pygmies, I will only mention those that are relevant or those that can be tweaked so as to fit. Some characteristics of this trope are: the destination is firmly fixed in the past, as if one travels back in time. In this myth atmospheric themes such as opulence, mysticism and strangeness surround the representation and the culture is surrounded by mysterious legends. Its people are described as simple, unchanged and exotic remnants of a time gone by. The myth of unchanged reinforces several binaries between the 'western' and 'non-western' world. The myth also portrays the 'non-western' destination as:

*“firmly entrenched in a time ripe for a journey of discovery. Through both the verbal and visual representations, the tourist expects to find legendary lands—to uncover their mystical secrets, to marvel at their exotic people, and to wonder at their opulence. These representations are strongly reminiscent of the colonial eras of exploration, trade and conquest. In many ways, modern day tourists are encouraged to relive the journeys and experiences of colonial explorers, traders, treasure hunters, archeologists, etc. Consequently, in order to re-enact these journeys, these Third World destinations must appear to remain unchanged.”*<sup>70</sup>

It may be clear now that the myth of the unchanged serves several causes and has some clearly delineated characteristics which can be applied to the representation of Pygmies in NGM too, as I will show below.

Putnam her focus is on the Pygmies around Camp Putnam, which had been 'under control' of her late husband and her and judging by the text, they are in frequent contact with westerners that visit Camp Putnam, not really ripe for actual discovery anymore.<sup>71</sup> However, they can still be discovered by the reader from his sofa, as in this time, not many Americans would ever visit Africa themselves. Putnam wastes no time in setting the tone for she mentions in the introduction of her text that, before moving from NYC to Congo, as a painter *“the thought*

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<sup>70</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The context of third world tourism marketing”, 669-672.

<sup>71</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa's little people”, 279-282



of having an unspoiled landscape and primitive Pygmies as subjects exited me”.<sup>72</sup> Unspoiled means that it has not been damaged or ruined (yet), so it has not changed.<sup>73</sup> To her, before she left for the Congo, it was an unchanged destination. Furthermore she thought of Pygmies as ‘primitive’, as people not much changed since the early days of the homo sapiens. It also becomes clear that she did not think of these people and landscape as interesting in itself, they were interesting because they could be subjects for her paintings. It reminds me of colonial discovery and the drawings of ‘exotic’ and ‘newly discovered’ people that were send back to Europe. Just like the people and landscape back then were subjected to the pencil of the colonizer, the Ituri forest was ready to be discovered by the brush of Anne Eisner Putnam.

“*Civilization had come to the Ituri forest*”, Putnam remarks after she moved back to the Congo, implying that in the few years she was gone, change had happened.<sup>74</sup> She goes on to complain about the fact that ‘natives’ (unclear whether she meant Pygmies, Bantus or both) began drinking beer at the newly created local trading center. The old Congo custom of smoking marijuana had been outlawed by the Belgians and to Putnam’s horror the ‘natives’ had started to use it again, which she outlawed. Which is ironic given that she mentions how it is a custom, but apparently these aren’t allowed when it goes against the western anti-drugs standard.<sup>75</sup> These are not the only changes she noticed, other traditions have also been modified. It was usual for bride and groom to hold iron axes in their mouths during a wedding ceremony but when Anne Putnam witnessed one, the axes were replaced by ten Franc notes.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the Pygmies have also started to cultivate starchy plantains, a diet staple, something they did not do in the ‘olden days’ according to Putnam.<sup>77</sup>

It is not only the people and their habits that have changed because civilization was brought to the Ituri forest, the landscape itself has also changed. Between when she left and when she came back to the Congo, six trade stores, a bakery and a motel had been opened in the vicinity of Camp Putnam. About their placement she seems neither positive nor negative, however she does blame the trade centers for the drinking and smoking that the ‘natives’ participate in now. Apparently she did not view Camp Putnam, created by her late American

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>73</sup> “Unspoiled”, *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/unspoiled>, last accessed 20/6/2022.

<sup>74</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 287.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 301

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 289.

husband, as having brought forth ‘civilization’, even though it attracted western travelers and included a school and medical facility.<sup>78</sup>

That Pygmies are supposedly unchanged is alluded to on page 283 when she discusses their ‘origin’. Here, she tells the reader:

*“Mystery shrouds the origin of the Pygmies, but they seem to have dwelt in the forest for many centuries. They are mentioned and pictured in early Greek and Egyptian works, and some anthropologists believe they were the first humans in central Africa. The Greek, in fact, coined the word pygmaios, indicating the distance from elbow to knuckles – the Greek notion of a Pygmy’s height.”*<sup>79</sup>

And:

*“Racially, Pygmies remain a puzzle for the anthropologists. Most authorities agree that these little people do not belong to the Negro race.”*<sup>80</sup>

The myth of the unchanged has an atmosphere of mystery, just like the one that Pygmies are shrouded in. They are a mystical people, whose origins are unknown but whom have been mentioned in historical works before. They are also presented as a ‘unique’ people because Putnam mentions how they are seen separately from the ‘Negro race’. The fact that they are seen as separate from other African people and the fact that she mentions that some believe they were the first human inhabitants of Central Africa sure makes them look ‘ancient’ and ‘mysterious’. Read together, it is also a lesser direct version of the social Darwinist idea that there is a human hierarchy, or if they reader is more ‘white supremacist orientated’, that Pygmies are not quite human. The piece is directly followed by Putnam mentioning that the Bantu neighbors consider Pygmies to be ‘subhuman’, giving those aforementioned readers more fuel to believe in the hierarchical order of human beings.<sup>81</sup>

Pygmies also live in a relationship to their Bantu neighbors that is described by Putnam as ‘feudal’, a practice not seen in Europe, except for Russia, since the medieval times, and something that has not existed in the United States at all.<sup>82</sup> It is an old style of living that has

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 289.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 283

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>81</sup> For the relation between Pygmies and Darwinism see: Kidd, “Inventing the ‘Pygmy’: representing the ‘Other’, representing the ‘self’” and Ballard “Strange alliance: Pygmies in the colonial imagery”.

<sup>82</sup> As a historian I am obliged to mention that nowadays ‘feudalism’ or the ‘feudal system’ is an outdated and sometimes controversial term because, among many reasons, it makes it seem as if there was one system all across Europe, which is not the case, or that it was a system, which it also was not.

existed before colonial times and still exists today. It came in to being after Arabs invaded the interiors of Central Africa in the early seventeenth century looking for ivory and slaves. The Bantu, fighting, saw the usefulness of having Pygmies hunt and forage for them and tried to keep them in serf like status. In exchange, the Pygmies were protected by the Bantu.<sup>83</sup> The practice might not be ‘old’ as in ‘ancient’ or ‘thousands of years’ like that myth of unchanged is associated with, but through the use of words like ‘feudal’ and ‘serf’ which the western reader will associate with ‘a long time ago’ and ‘not practiced in the west anymore’ it is portrayed as being old and unchanged.

Lastly, Putnam mentions how the Pygmy lifestyle and material culture is ‘simple’. She remarks that Pygmies “*have never mastered the art of forging metal*” and that they “*obtain tools and utensils from their lieges (their Bantu neighbors)*”.<sup>84</sup> Pygmies rely on a trade system in which they trade meat and honey for non-food necessities, cash, and agricultural products. They are apparently so unchanged, that they have not even mastered the art of forging metal, therefore they are unable to produce what they need for themselves and need to get it from the Bantu. This dependency on others has been discouraged by the Belgian government as they tried to get Pygmies to participate in agricultural activities so that they did not have to continue their ‘feudal like’ relationship with the Bantu, but this has been unsuccessful. “*Cultivation requires confinement and labor in the hot sun – the sort of life that repels a forest-loving nomad*” Putnam adds.<sup>85</sup>

In other aspects she does view the Pygmies as ‘frozen in time’ negatively. For example: the use and accusations of witchcraft in the Pygmy community are viewed as backwards and having to be solved by white people, in this case Anne Putnam. This is not unchanged in a positive way, but in a negative one. Anne Putnam recounts the death of a Pygmy man named Alberi, who died of dysentery. However, the Pygmies believe he died of a ‘bolozi’, a revenge or punishment that can be enacted upon someone that did not honor their part of an agreement. As a result of his death, witchcraft charges are brought up against some women in the Pygmy community and one of the accused is almost lynched, which Putnam prevents. In the end peace returns when the tree suspected of carrying the bolozi is felled in a storm. Here, the ‘illogical’ explanation of his death (a bolozi) is easily explained to western audiences, but this explanation (dysentery) is insider information known only to Putnam and her readers. They believe in

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<sup>83</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 282-283

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 282.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 283-284.

modern medicine and knowledge about diseases, the Pygmies rely on superstition. Putnam, the white leading character in this story, had to be the voice of reason, apparently being the only one that found lynching to be wrong and curses to be superstition.<sup>86</sup>

In the 2005 article, written by journalist Paul Salopek, we immediately stumble upon a hunting scene. Salopek describes how a group of Mbuti men, living in the Ituri forest, is hunting for blue Duikers. “*The moment is a thousand or more years old*”, later on commenting that “*Pygmies do things that most humans forgot a long time ago*”.<sup>87</sup> This reiterates the sentiment that what modern day Pygmies do is not so different from what their and our ancestors did thousands of years ago. By claiming that (metaphorically) the moment is a thousand or more years old he denies the Mbuti any historical change, rooting them firmly in the past. By claiming that they do something most of us humans have forgotten, he makes them a ‘unique’ people, ignoring the fact that in many non-western cultures hunting is still widely practiced for sustenance.<sup>88</sup>

However, the surroundings in which this hunt takes place have changed. After a dictatorship and a civil war, the Ituri forest has become the stage of violence and conflict, which have not only changed the environment but also threatened the Mbuti’s way of life, even in a literal sense. The Mbuti are victims of different threats: cannibalism by soldiers and deforestation, which means a loss of habitat.<sup>89</sup> Descriptions of a Mbuti hunt alternate narratives of violence and conflict in Salopek’s article. Modernity is juxtaposed against the perceived ancient way of life of the Mbuti, whilst the violence of contemporary conflict surrounds them they still engage in activities more than a thousand year old. The forest is still relatively pure and untouched, as long as big logging companies do not get a chance whilst civil conflict is still going on.<sup>90</sup> Compare this to the impoverished main road that Salopek travels along. It is crowded with people and not properly maintained, a future that can await the Pygmies if the Ituri forest is not protected. The Pygmies are cast as victims of modernization, their way of life and their habitat threatened by the forces of modern life, civil unrest and deforestation. They are not the uncontested rulers of the forest anymore like in a time long gone by, their place in

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 294-300.

<sup>87</sup> Salopek, “Who rules the forest?”, 82.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 82

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 82-84.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 91.

the rainforest is questioned. Even though Salopek tries to be positive about the situation, he himself sounds quite depressive about the situation as he writes:

*“Waking up in their kingdom of trees, the Pygmies peek out warily into the morning’s half-light. The Toleka men’s eyes flutter open to yet another day on the road. A rebel soldier sits up abruptly, as from a nightmare, and reaches for his gun. Will they all see the world they are expecting? Or will a gigantic chasm open up at their feet – an abyss that plummets to the very core of the Earth, into which they all will shortly tumble?”*<sup>91</sup>

The question is not if the forest will cave under all pressure, but when it will cave in under pressure.

Salopek ends his article with *“The Pygmies have erected them (their huts) since the time when the forest was born. They will continue to do so for as long as the forest lasts”* again implying that modern day Pygmies’ dwellings are not any different than what their ancestors used to live in.<sup>92</sup> With this sentence he also implies that the Pygmies cannot change. They will continue to do so for as long as the forest lasts, it is only when the forest ends that their lifestyle will too. The changes that do occur in their lives are not caused by them and inclusion in the global world is seen as a threat against their lifestyle.

Right under the text is a box with information for the reader. This box reads *“**INTERACT WITH AFRICA** – Experience the ‘miraculous and enigmatic empire of color’ surrounding the Mbuti Pygmies with narration by photographer Randy Olson. Then join our forum: ‘Can Africa’s final frontier be preserved?’”*<sup>93</sup> Especially the last part of this box is interesting, the question whether Africa’s final frontier can be preserved. For the American reader, ‘frontier’ will most likely be associated with a region or territory that sits at the border of already settled land. Thus, it is implied that this area is not settled yet and that this also should not happen. The question is not whether Africa’s ‘last frontier’ should be preserved, it is can it be preserved? The question also does not offer a positive outlook, it could also have asked ‘how can it be preserved?’ instead of ‘can it be preserved’, because it leaves the ‘no’ answer out. Especially in an issue of NGM that claimed to let readers see another, more positive, side of Africa, a yes or no question like proposed here can quickly lead to negativity.

Both authors mention the supposed unchanged nature of Pygmies, treating them and the Ituri forest like relics from the past. However, there is a difference in their portrayal. Salopek

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 93

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 93.

represents it as a ‘romanticized’ unchanged, certainly when you compare descriptions of Pygmy life with his descriptions of ‘modern’ life around it, which is characterized by violence and poverty. Unchanged here is good and positive, especially for the Ituri forest since Pygmies are presented as the only people, together with white conservationists, that treat the forest with respect. In Putnam her article the ‘unchanged’ is present in a more paternalistic way. Pygmies are often referred to as little people as if they are children that do not know any better than to live life the way they do now. Also the fact that Putnam, and others apparently too, constantly refer to the Pygmies as ‘my’ and ‘her’, makes it look like as if she is the teacher and the Pygmies are her young pupils. Her unchanged is a sign of their infantile nature and vice versa. In both cases the supposed unchanged nature adds to the appeal of Pygmies as endearing people that should stay the way they are.

## An enigmatic empire of colour: Pygmies (and the Ituri forest) as unrestrained

In the myth of the unrestrained a destination is represented as a ‘present paradise’, as opposed to the beautiful past in the myth of the unchanged. In this ‘present paradise’ the nature is pristine and the people are subservient and friendly. Furthermore, in the tourism marketing context of Echtner and Prasad the myth also presents indulgence for tourists, and absolute access to anything the tourist wants. According to Echtner and Prasad this myth presents a romanticized version of colonial exploitation. Since the Pygmies are not like the tourism destinations Echtner and Prasad studied, not all of the aspects of the myth of the unrestrained are applicable. Therefore, for this chapter I will focus on the pristine nature and friendly (and subservient) people particularly.<sup>94</sup> How are these elements present in NGM representations of Pygmies? Since the myth of the unrestrained focusses on two different topics I will first discuss pristine nature and after that the people.

### Pristine paradise

A natural pristine paradise is often conceived as ‘unspoiled’, but not too much since this would also include unspoiled elements of nature that could negatively impact a destination’s representation such as hurricanes, or vermin. Since the focus in the myth of the unrestrained is on the pristine nature, focus on buildings and built elements is discouraged. In general, in both articles, the negative ‘raw’ elements of nature are also part of the narrative. However, these are not always viewed as negatively impacting, but as positive aspects of unspoiled nature of Pygmy habitat. There is also no focus on permanent built elements, which is logical considering that Pygmies live nomadic lifestyles in degradable huts. These huts are frequently mentioned in all three articles but again, like with the negative natural elements, are seen as ‘scene’ enhancing, adding to the unspoiled natural beauty of the place since they are not permanent. I note that nature is described in positive as well as ‘negative’ terms by all three authors. Here, I will focus mostly on the positive aspects.

For Anne Putnam, the Ituri forest could serve as inspiration for her paintings. She stated that “*the thought of having an unspoiled landscape and primitive Pygmies as subjects excited*

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<sup>94</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The context of third world tourism marketing”, 672-675.

me”.<sup>95</sup> Untouched and unspoiled nature, ready to be painted. And indeed, a few weeks in to her stay she decided to go into the forest to paint Pygmy life. Her description of the forest is like reading the description of a painting, according to Putnam it has a “*strange blue-green atmosphere, highlighted with yellow here and there when the sun splashed through onto the high mongongo leaves.*”<sup>96</sup> It is quite logical for Putnam to give the readers a description of the forest like this since the photos provided are black-and-white. A strange blue-green, so not ordinary, presumably on the darker side, since yellow is highlighted here and there where the sun can shine through the thick vegetation. However, it is not an extensive depiction on itself, one would need the backgrounds in photos to situate these colors better in the context of the Ituri forest.

Putnam is also realistic, letting her readers know that the Ituri forest is home to dangerous animals. When she got stuck at night with her car on her way to Camp Putnam, she worried about animals prowling at night. Then, the next night when she is in the camp she is awakened by driver ants coming in to her room, which bite and have to be deterred by spreading hot coals all over the room. “*Thank heaven, I thought as I dozed off, at least there are no leopards around. I was wrong. The next morning I found that a leopard, most dangerous marauder of the region, had got a baby okapi at an animal station across the road from Camp Putnam.*”<sup>97</sup> One later turned out to be a leopard family of three: father, mother and child. These parts are not meant to deter people from Africa or to think negatively about its nature. Even after these remarks about the dangerous wildlife she still ends her article with “*when I saw my guests out, moonlight flooded through the Epulu as it flowed calmly through the Ituri forest. The trees beyond the river were so high that the outline of their tops was like the crest of a mountain. More than ever I felt in love with my African home.*”<sup>98</sup> For context, she just had a Christmas party with her white neighbors and was sending them off. The Ituri forest is represented as a beautiful natural landscape that gives a picturesque view at night. Here again, the reader is supposed to get a good impression of the Ituri forest as beautiful and pristine.

Salopek his descriptions of the forest are more lively and poetic than those of Putnam, which I think is thanks to his journalistic background. He makes use of many metaphors to illustrate the Ituri forest, some more logical than others, but all pertain to the atmosphere of it.

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<sup>95</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 280.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 284.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 302.



Interestingly, the forest is only regarded positively in the article parts that are about the Pygmies. In those that are about other Africans living in and around the forest, he is a lot more negative about his natural surroundings, these will be explained in the next chapter. Already his positivity begins in the introduction, which I have decided to quote at full length to discuss it in more depth.

*“Rain forests are light-struck places. This comes as a surprise. Countless books and movies would have us believe otherwise. The world beneath a jungle canopy is neither dim, nor gloomy, nor monochrome. It glows with the light of some alien order – a light so improbable it has a dreamed quality, the way colors in dreams can possess actual weight, or create sound, or stop time.*

*I have looked up, startled, from my notebook to see the forest suddenly electric white: suffused with the calm, almost glacial cleanliness of a fluorescent lit office. A few moments later, or merely a few steps away, the jungle turns metallic. Falling rain, leaf shadows, the bloodied pelt of an arrowed monkey – all appear dipped in shivery tones of silver. Once, on the steamy banks of the Ituri River, I saw the twilit undergrowth erupt in unearthly constellations of fire: sunset burned through the pin-holed canopy, and its deep, red laminar shafts spattered the sodden leaves like flecks of lava. Rain forests, everyone knows, are valued for biodiversity. But few credit the kaleidoscopic richness of their light – ethereal and hallucinatory, filtered as though through antique glass, unlike any other in the world.*

*Right now, at this precise instance, the jungle is blue – rinsed in the color of indigo ink diluted in water, its shadow deep as the bluing on a gun.*

*Musa Yambuka’s glistening eyes are stained pale blue. The sweat on his face sparkles star blue. He’s a Mbuti Pygmy, a small, perfectly muscled man, crouching with a spear behind the roots of a fig tree, waiting to ambush a forest antelope. (these animals too, are smokey blue, a fact noted in their western name, blue duiker.) The moment is a thousand or more years old. The beaters come yodeling through the forest, driving the game before them. Musa tenses, digs in his toes, ready to spring, to slice something’s throat. In the canopy, the monkeys grow still, fall silent. I hear an invisible bird flap away.*

*I have seen this scene 20, maybe 30 times now. We have been traveling together for days, the Mbuti and I, through the jungle of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Pygmies do things that humans forgot a long time ago. Like drive cat-sized antelope into nets. Or live in adult accord with pain and sudden death. Or mold soccer balls out*

*of the sap from a certain liana. All of this, of course, is interesting. But what distracts me more than ever, what's got me disoriented, even a little spooked – my eyes, these days, seem like borrowed things – isn't what these people do as much as the light they do it in: this miraculous and enigmatic empire of color that only the Mbuti know.*

*It shifts again.*

*Musa's ferocious grin shines aquamarine. The drivers approach through a white-hot slab of brilliance that could burn diamonds. Dazzled, I look down at what, apparently, are my hands. In the bottom-of-the-sea sheen of the forest, the skin looks insubstantial. Almost translucent. The hands of a ghost.*

*I hold my breath.*

*Maybe birth is like this.”<sup>99</sup>*

A few repetitive characteristics of the Ituri forest shine through in his text. Color, especially the color blue which he uses multiple times to describe a variety of things. The color blue can be a symbol for many different things depending on culture. According to the French historian Michel Pastoureau blue is, in the western color symbolism, represented and perceived as calm, pacified, peace, distant. It evokes the sky, the ocean, travel, vacations and the infinite. Pastoureau asserts that blue, in modern times, has become the most peaceful color since it is not an aggressive one.<sup>100</sup> However, blue can also have a different meaning in color symbolism, that of depression, negative feelings, failures. Examples are “feeling blue” in English which means you feel down or “een blauwtje lopen” in Dutch which means to be rejected. In the context of Salopek his article I would argue that, with his use of different shades of blue, he is more in line with Pastoureau. It is not only the forest that is described in shades of blue. Musa, the Pygmy Salopek is traveling with, his eyes, sweat and ‘grin’ are all blue as is the forest antelope (blue duiker) he is hunting. Is it coincidence? That the way Salopek sees the forest is the same color as the prey of the hunt? I think not, especially because he emphasizes in two ways that the blue duiker is ‘blue’ (by mentioning its western name and the supposed smokey blue color of its hide) instead of just calling it a forest antelope and leaving it at that. By using the color blue to describe everything he creates unity between nature, its wildlife and its human inhabitants. It also creates the perception that the Ituri forest is ‘easy’ on the eyes. Looking at a wall of blue paint is easier to look at than looking at one painted in all colors of the rainbow.

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<sup>99</sup> Salopek, “Who rules the forest?”, 82.

<sup>100</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: the history of a color* translated from French by Markus I. Cruse (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001) 179-181.

The forest does not possess these different colors on her own, it is the light that creates them. Salopek attributes an ‘otherworldliness’ to this light, an ‘alien order’. “*But what distracts me more than ever, what’s got me disoriented, even a little spooked – my eyes, these days, seem like borrowed things – isn’t what these people do as much as the light they do it in: this miraculous and enigmatic empire of color that only the Mbuti know.*”<sup>101</sup> Looking at the word choice in this segment is interesting. *Distraction* is “*something that distracts: an object that directs one’s attention away from something else*”.<sup>102</sup> Here he states that looking at light and color in the Ituri forest is not what he was supposed to focus on and yet he cannot help but be drawn too it. It not only distracts, it also disorients and spooks him. He cannot believe his eyes. Spooks again seems so refer to this ‘otherworldliness’ the forest seems to possess. It disorients for all is the same color. The forest is overwhelming to him, but not to the Pygmies. By claiming that only the Pygmies can understand this ‘miraculous’ and ‘enigmatic’ empire of color he attributes them special status. He is an outsider who can only gape at and be confused by the colors of the Ituri forest. The Pygmies are home in it, are part of this dazzling light spectacle Salopek sees. The light and the color it produces also effects his ‘being’ at that moment. “*I look down at what, apparently, are my hands. In the bottom-of-the-sea sheen of the forest, the skin looks insubstantial. Almost translucent. The hands of a ghost.*”<sup>103</sup> ‘Bottom-of-the-sea’ blue for this comparison. When one looks down in the sea the view is not cloudy and the waves trouble sight, one moment you can see your hands and a second later they have disappeared in the waves, like Salopek’s hands seem to disappear against the blue of the Ituri forest.

Then, if I may say so, the most unique metaphor used in this whole article: Salopek compares his feelings of being in the Ituri forest and watching a hunt to birth. This can probably be understood in a multitude of ways. However, the way I interpreted it, is that it is a reference to “*The drivers approach through a white-hot slab of brilliance that could burn diamonds*”<sup>104</sup> or his own feeling of being invisible and a spectator. When birth is depicted in movies from the point-of-view of the baby they often represent it as emerging from the dark and suddenly seeing the bright light of the world outside the womb. Compare this to how he describes the drivers approaching through a ‘white-hot slab of brilliance’, here he emerges from the dark to be met

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<sup>101</sup> Salopek, “Who rules the forest?”, 82.

<sup>102</sup> “Distraction, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/distraction> last accessed 20/6/2022.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 82.

with light that the drivers approach through. This would mean that “*Maybe birth is like this*”<sup>105</sup> references to him feeling like the infant being born. In another scenario it could reference to the drivers approaching through the light as them being the ‘newborn’ and Salopek feeling invisible as spectator witnessing such act.

Salopek ends his article just as the Mbuti give up their hunt for duikers. A storm is coming and Pygmies dislike hunting and moving in a wet clammy forest. The light Salopek was so amazed by is quickly driven away by the incoming darkness of the storm. But this darkness need not be feared, for all that the forest brings cannot be bad. Musa and his wife rest in front of their hut of mongongo leaves. Huts that, according to Salopek, start decaying as soon as they are built. These huts are intrinsically linked the forest as Salopek mentions that they have been erected by Pygmies since the forest was born at that they will continue to be built as long as the forest stands. Not only tying the huts to the forest, but the Pygmies that live and make them too.<sup>106</sup>

## The people

In the myth of the unrestrained people are friendly and subservient, ready to help and serve the tourists, catering to every need they might have. These types of representations resurrect the asymmetrical relationship between former colonizers and colonized. Relationships which were characterized by a power division between master and servant. Furthermore, ironically, colonizers were discouraged from mingling with natives out of fear that this would lead to degeneracy. Yet, this did not stop them from fantasizing about native live. Nowadays people are free to interact with native people, whom are readily available, since it can add to their experiences of paradise.<sup>107</sup> In the Pygmy context the people are often mentioned in this friendly and subservient role, helping the authors live and navigate the strange environment that is the Ituri forest.

In Anne Putnam her article this ‘subservient’ characteristic is most notable, as the Pygmies are there to serve every need she has. The way how she describes her relationship to the Pygmies sounds, at least for readers in the twenty-first century, the most ‘colonial’ of all. The Pygmies with which she is in contact with that live around Camp Putnam are constantly

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>107</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The context of third world tourism marketing”, 672-675

referred to as “My Pygmies”, also by others around her. For example: during a conflict in which a woman is accused of witchcraft a young man comes over to Anne Putnam to warn her “*You’ve got to do something about Sau, or all your Pygmies will be dead*”.<sup>108</sup> This mirrors how the Pygmies have a relationship with their Bantu neighbor, certain Pygmy ‘belong’ to certain Bantu.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the Bantu might be ‘masters’ over Pygmies, Putnam is boss over them all, as it appears that Bantu do most of the heavy work around Camp Putnam such as building a garage for Putnam’s car. However, this relationship is not forced in any way by Putnam. According to her, the spokesperson of the Pygmies told her, after the death of her husband Patrick, “*Now that Bwana is dead, the forest is left in your hands. We give it to you.*” And after she came back to the Ituri “*The forest still belongs to you. It does not matter how many other white men come.*”<sup>110</sup> She is not ‘master’ over them against their will, they choose her. Still, the story has a colonial element to it.

The myth of the unrestrained in relation to the depiction of people is less applicable to Salopek his article since he did not have the prolonged contact with Pygmies that Anne Putnam had. However, the friendly and ‘guiding’ characteristics of Pygmies are still visible in this article. First of all, and that applies to both authors, it is very cordial of the Pygmies to let the authors join their hunts since their presence could possibly disturb the success of the hunt. Furthermore, the authors are also another mouth to feed, eating food that could also go to the Pygmy community. In the representation of people in the myth of the unrestrained there is an asymmetrical relationship present between peoples, one that is present, in a modified form, in Salopek’s article. Writing about the main road, used for commerce, he mentions that Mbuti watch the traders from the shadows.

*“The Pygmies covet, as we all would, the aluminum pots, cigarettes, and manufactured clothing carried by Congo’s bicycle caravans. Yet in exchange, loads of timber, wild meat, and gold are streaming out of their forest home along the same tracks – a bonanza of raw materials swindled from the Pygmies by unscrupulous shopkeepers and middlemen.”*

And

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<sup>108</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 297.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>110</sup> Both ibid, 282.

*“‘They are easy to cheat’, a roadside merchant says of the Pygmies along the way. ‘Like children’.”*<sup>111</sup>

Pygmies are victims of the circumstances around them. They desire the items the merchants sell, but they are not to blame for that since Salopek assures the reader that we all would want them. This is reminiscent of colonial exploitation, but it is not romanticized. They are duped by those more ‘worldly’ around them, that know the value of the raw materials residing inside the Ituri forest, they are conned out of what is ‘theirs’. Pygmies are ready to help and serve, not tourists, but people that swindle and con them.

In Putnam her article the myth of the unrestrained was more visible in the people and their subservient and friendly behavior and attitude. She constantly refers to the Pygmies as ‘hers’, which can give a colonial impression on the reader, which is not completely surprising since the Congo was still a colony of Belgium at the time Putnam resided in the Ituri forest. There is some form of exploitation as it becomes clear that both Bantu and Pygmies serve Putnam for everything she wants. Nature, even though bad things were also narrated, is still pristine, and unspoiled landscape that could become the subject of her paintings. Salopek focused more on the natural aspect of the myth of the unrestrained. By juxtaposing the natural beauty of the not yet spoiled forest against the ugliness and decay of its ‘modern’ main road the Ituri is made to be a natural paradise. However, not everybody can see its total and true beauty, only the Pygmies can, giving them a unique status as inhabitants of the forest. The people are unrestrained, but that is also their downfall as they are victims of those around them that swindle them.

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<sup>111</sup> Both Salopek, “who rules the forest?”, 84.

## Lost in an alien world? Pygmies as uncivilized

In the myth of the uncivilized the destination is represented as a primordial place, where civilization is almost absent and nature savage. Here the tourist discovers ‘wild nature’ as opposed to the pristine and tamed nature in the myth of the unrestrained and its native inhabitants, not in a serving role, but ‘living their life’. In the myth of the uncivilized references to anything (permanently) built is missing since this would ‘ruin’ their portrayal as uncivilized. Landscape is represented as “supposedly savage, covered with inhospitable and bizarre vegetation that harbors rare, often dangerous animals”. The people are described as distinguishable by their tribal features and unpredictable dispositions.<sup>112</sup> For the Pygmy context this means that for this myth I will focus on how the authors describe Pygmy behavior and culture, and on the landscape again. Furthermore, what ‘tribal features’ are mentioned in the articles? This chapter, especially the parts about the natural landscape, will have some overlap with the previous chapter. This is because the way nature is represented in both articles depends on how the reader wants to interpret the information. If he or she has a certain prejudice against nature than they might think more negatively about the portrayal than the author intended and vice versa.

Putnam her article was published in 1960 but the story she narrates happened somewhere at the end of the ‘50’s. During this time, the Congo was still under colonial rule by Belgium. Research by Verhoeven and Payrhuber, and Wigley about Belgian tourism marketing for the Congo has shown that, in the postwar period until colonial rule ended, the marketing served as propaganda to convince tourists that Belgian rule in the colony was beneficial to all. In order to reinforce this message, the natives were often portrayed as primitive and savages that still needed the paternal hand of the Belgian state in order to reach a ‘civilized’ state.<sup>113</sup> Since the article of Putnam and this kind of tourism marketing existed around the same time I am curious if this attitude is also present in Putnam her NGM article.

Even though she admires the Ituri forest very much, Putnam her journey to camp Putnam was not the easiest. It is made clear that she is driving over a mud road when she comments “*With the gloom came a violent storm. Quickly it scoured the road into a relief map of gullies*

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<sup>112</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The context of third world tourism marketing”, 675-678.

<sup>113</sup> Verhoeven and Payrhuber, ““Les pelerins de la saison seche””, 575, 585-586 and Wigley, “Against the wind”, 198.

and hills. The car bounced and bucked like a rodeo horse.”<sup>114</sup> In this wild nature untouched by civilization, paved roads are nonexistent. Her next obstacle is a tree that fell down over the road during the storm. She writes “*My only companions would be antelope, okapis, elephants, and lions, until some wandering native might happen along and I could bribe him to cut the tree or return to his village for help*” and “*Then the rain stopped just as abruptly as it had begun. That means the animals would soon start prowling. More than ever I disliked the thought of spending a lonely night there*”.<sup>115</sup> After driving over the tree she had to endure another 95 miles of slick road and almost zero visibility before making it to Camp Putnam. Neither are the surroundings of Camp Putnam a safe place, the next night an okapi baby in a sanctuary nearby is caught by a leopard family. Not to speak about the biting driver ants Putnam encountered in her bedroom. Congo here is represented as an inhospitable place full of dangerous animals. However, it is only in these anecdotes that she speaks negatively about nature in Congo. As shown in the previous chapter in all other instances the Ituri forest is described in neutral or positive terms. Overall she does not want to give the reader a negative impression as she firmly states that the Congo is her home.

On the whole, in this article, it is very clear that Putnam sees a division between her and the Pygmies and her and other non-Pygmy Africans based on how ‘civilized’ they are. She is civilized, non-Pygmy Africans are somewhere in between and Pygmies are at the other end: uncivilized. It is most noticeable in the closing part of her article, which is worth quoting in full length:

*“As Christmastime approached, I decided I had my fill of witchcraft, superstition, and pagan rituals. I wanted to share the holiday joy with my white neighbors, and so I invited them to Camp Putnam for a party. My boys understood and helped me decorate. We hung the living room with green vines from which we strung red fruits from the forest. Candles were margarine cans wrapped with green leaves and filled with palm oil. For dinner we had guinea hens the Pygmies had killed for me with bows and arrows. It was good to sing the old familiar Christmas carols instead of trying to join in the Pygmy chants.”*<sup>116</sup>

Here Putnam admits to being tired of Pygmy lifestyle and culture, she wants to spend time with those that have a familiar culture to her: the white neighbors (of which she interestingly enough

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<sup>114</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 281.

<sup>115</sup> Both *ibid*, 281.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 302.



does not state what ethnicity or nationality they are, even further making the distinction between ‘us’ (white) and ‘them’ (black)). She specifically states that she is done with those elements of Pygmy culture generally seen as ‘uncivilized’: witchcraft, superstition and paganism. Anne Putnam wanted to celebrate Christmas as she was used to doing at home in America. Even in the uncivilized surroundings of the Ituri forest where decorations cannot be bought at a shop and have to be made from plant material and turkey is nonexistent she managed, with the help of ‘her boys’, to set up a western celebration. A little island of civilization in the Ituri forest. Her anecdote also makes no mention if any Pygmies or Bantu took part in the celebrations or if she asked them to participate. They helped her decorate but were unwilling or not asked to celebrate too, making the distinction between ‘white’ festivities and Pygmy festivities even more clear.

The fact that she and her late husband lived in a Camp Putnam whilst the Pygmies themselves live in the nearby forest already inexplicitly shows the difference between them and how their living space will be perceived by readers. Although nowhere in the article she describes the camp or its buildings in detail, it can be deducted that the buildings in it are permanent since she mentions that some Bantu neighbors patched up her home with mud when she came back after the death of her husband.<sup>117</sup> In comparison, the Pygmies live in degradable nomadic huts which decay over time. Many of her American readers will perceive huts, especially when made from natural materials, as signs of an uncivilized and simple world juxtaposed against the permanent buildings of Camp Putnam, which show that permanent buildings is a possibility in the forest.<sup>118</sup>

However, I should mention that the civilization that has come to the forest is not particularly well received by Putnam, especially the vices that they have brought with them such as drinking and smoking marijuana, which have been taken over by the natives around Camp Putnam.<sup>119</sup> In other instances she thinks highly of the already existing ‘modern’ institutions such as a nearby hospital. When one of the Pygmies is accidentally stabbed by a spear of another, Putnam helps to sterilize the wound and tells the man that he should go to the hospital. Her recommendation leads to a storm of protests and one of the Pygmies even gives a ‘long oration’ on why the man should stay in the village. Putnam remarks “*these Pygmies have*

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 285.

<sup>118</sup> Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Michael Atwood Mason, “African voices”, *African Arts* Vol. 34 No. 2 (2001); 29-30.

<sup>119</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 287.

*lately opposed white men's medicine*" but she gives no reason for why they are opposing it.<sup>120</sup> Finally, she convinces the Pygmies by citing the many victims Patrick, her late husband, had saved and the hunter is allowed to go to the hospital.

Salopek his article is interesting because it is not only about Pygmies but also about other neighboring or passing Africans that make their way through the Ituri. Whether Pygmies are the civilized or the uncivilized in this story can be dependent on how you read and interpret, since both scenarios are possibilities. First I will discuss the 'Pygmies as civilized' and afterwards the 'Pygmies as uncivilized' option.

Salopek sketches the roads and villages surrounding the forest as a dangerous and lawless place in which violence, poverty and substance abuse are rampant. It is unlike the forest, where the Pygmies reside, which has a peaceful and almost otherworldly ambiance. Life of the non-Pygmy Africans is portrayed as dangerous with killings, war crimes, prostitution and cannibalism lurking, child soldiers can be bribed with a cigarette and magic is used in battles. Traders that take their ware through the mud roads of the forest rely on drugs to keep awake and even for those whom have studied, there seems to no future in war-torn Congo.<sup>121</sup> Congo, or at least the 'Congo' surrounding the Ituri forest is described in such a way that most western readers will perceive it as uncivilized. Compare this to the way the Pygmies inside Ituri forest live. With the exception of threats of cannibalism by warlords, their life seems generally peaceful. There is no mention of conflict, no mention of hard unprofitable work, child soldiers or unemployment. The hunt is good and honey is still abundant. Are they aware of the threats against their lifestyle? Salopek makes no mention of it. Against the backdrop of a violent Congo Pygmy life seems more civilized than its non-Pygmy neighbor. At least they aren't embroiled in conflict nor are they actively harming the forest.

On the other hand it can also be interpreted that the Pygmies (and also the rest of the people that he mentions, except for the white people obviously) are the uncivilized. According to Echtner and Prasad, one important element of the myth of the uncivilized is the discovery element. Destinations in this myth are represented as ripe for discovery, just like in colonial times! Discovery and the paternalistic motivation to bring civilization went hand in hand in Africa. Salopek makes it seem like the Congo is ready for its second 'discovery' by white people. The so-called 'heart of darkness' has entered its second period of darkness again, who can help it now? The only two people whom Salopek mentions that want to make changes in

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>121</sup> Salopek, "Who rules the forest?", 82-93.

Congo for the better are white. One is an Italian priest at a missionary station and the more important other is the American biologist John Hart. He works for an American-based conservation society. His goal is to “*protect enough Congolese forest from the advance of small, anarchic logging mills, settlers, and poachers to allow Pygmies to conduct their nomadic lifestyle indefinitely*”.<sup>122</sup> Hart, and the organization do this in a ‘postmodern way’, the wilds of Africa are internationalized. But what does Salopek mean by that? To illustrate what he means he writes:

*“Imagine, for a moment, that the United States is prostrated by civil war. Desperate bureaucrats in Washington D.C., cut off by years of fighting, issue an SOS to foreign green groups: Please help rescue America’s fabled national parks! British activists respond by funding the entire budget of Yellowstone National Park, where gangs of neo-Nazis are holed up, machine-gunning the last buffalo. Japanese wildlife experts, meanwhile, face gunfire while resupplying beleaguered National Park Service rangers at the Everglades, where armed profiteers are peddling real estate. Scores of American rangers have been killed. This is conservation work in Congo.”*<sup>123</sup>

Moral of the story: The Congolese people cannot take care of their forests, wildlife, or their fellow people. They need help from the civilized Western world to bring order and preservation in the chaos. The Pygmies appear as unaware victims of the chaos around them, in desperate need of western conservation, as if they are rhino’s on a steppe, not capable of reflecting on their faith.

Both Putnam and Salopek portray the Pygmies as uncivilized. In Salopek his article they can either be interpreted as being civilized or uncivilized depending on how the reader chooses. They are represented as civilized when you juxtaposition them against the other Africans that move around the Ituri. Unlike them, the Pygmies are not perpetrating any war crimes or acts that cause degradation to the forest. They can be viewed as uncivilized because, as the article shows, it is the ‘white man’ that has to be the catalysator for change and preservation. The Pygmies are too uncivilized to grasp the globalized world we live in. In both scenarios they are portrayed as victims of modern ‘(un)civilized’ society. In Putnam her article it becomes clear that the Pygmies are seen as uncivilized, engaging in activities such as witchcraft and refusing to go to the hospital. However, some vices of civilized life are seen as negatively such as

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 91.

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*S1084319*

drinking. Overall the representation in both versions is somewhat romanticized, with it not necessarily being seen as 'bad' or having to be changed.

## Pygmies visualized

Instead of discussing the images like I have done the texts (thematically) I will discuss them per article for the visual analysis since this will create less confusion if I need to refer to one photograph which represents multiple themes. First I will discuss Putnam her article and after that the one by Salopek. In the end, I will conclude with some general remarks and compare the analysis of the pictures to one another. In the appendix all photographs are given, they are referred to as ‘image (x)’ in the appendix with the (x) given in the text.

The three tropes are almost the same for the visual analysis as for the textual analysis. I will focus on a few characteristics as designed by Echtner and Prasad, these characteristics are as follows. For the myth of the unchanged I will focus on elements from the past, peasant dress, and an atmosphere of mystical and strangeness. Furthermore notions of ‘past versus present’ are strongly present. Since the myth of the unrestrained is the least relevant for this kind of research since its more focused on the sea-resorts and all-inclusive packages, I have adapted the characteristics a bit to fit my research more. These characteristics are: smiling people and a large focus on nature, its pristine and tropical qualities and its gentle and amiable nature. Focus here is more on the natural background and atmosphere of the images than the Pygmies. Lastly, some characteristics of the myth of the uncivilized in visual images are: nature, wildlife, people in tribal dress, and lastly the destination is represented as ready for discovery and observation.<sup>124</sup> How are these characteristics represented in the photographs of Pygmies in the NGM?

### Putnam

Between the two, Putnam’s photos are the most diverse, showing a wide array of activities that Pygmies undertake, more so than Salopek. The photos, for the most part, match with the information given in the main text. On only a few occasions are events depicted in photos that are not mentioned directly in text, but that are sometimes indirectly connected. One such example is the elephant dance that is visually depicted between the pages 290-293. No mention of the dance is made in the text, but real elephant hunting, and additional rituals before the hunt, are extensively discussed in the main text. By adding “*The elephant dance may precede a hunt to work good magic or follow a kill to celebrate valor.*” The images are connected to the main

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<sup>124</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The context of third world tourism”, 664.

text.<sup>125</sup> Others, like the photos on pages 296-297 seemingly have no connection to the text in any way. In general, the myth of the uncivilized is most represented in the photographs of Putnam's article, but the other tropes are visible too. Lastly, all of photographs in Putnam's articles are black-and-white which leaves no space to do a thorough color or atmosphere analysis.

Anne Putnam opens her article with a photograph of a group of Pygmy men about to dance (1). An older man is beating on the drum whilst the younger ones gather round, none of them look into the camera and most of them are in conversation with each other. The text mentions that "*The start of a dance finds a Pygmy elder intently coaxing provocative rhythms from a skin-covered drum while other performers exchange jokes. To show their hearts are gay, the younger men wear girdles of leaves over bark-cloth breechclouts. Ituri forest Pygmies often dance far into the night.*"<sup>126</sup> This photo fits nicely into some stereotypes about 'tribalistic' Africans that are still around. The stereotype that Africans love to sing, make music and dance and that much of their pastime is filled with this activity. At first glance this might not seem so harmful, however, it does add to the simplification of African cultures, including Pygmy culture. Especially so since often times these songs and dances are not just for fun but have deeper meanings in their cultures, a meaning that is not properly explained in casual literature about them. It is also made directly clear, in both caption and photo, that Pygmies do not wear 'western-style clothes' or even garments made from fabric. The boys around the old man beating the drum are all seen smiling, another characteristic of the myth of the uncivilized. Although I do not deny that these people were genuinely happy at the moment this photo was taken it does add to the 'simple people' narrative that can be spun. Another issue is that the instrument that is featured here (and also later in a photo about the elephant dance) is a drum. Again, I do not doubt Putnam or the editor's choice for this photo was not meant malicious, but if you were to ask the readers of the NGM to name one instrument they associate with 'Africa' it would probably be the drum.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, it reinforces a stereotype that might not necessarily be harmful but one that does give a one-dimensional image of African music.

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<sup>125</sup> Putnam, "My life with Africa's little people", 290-293.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 278-279.

<sup>127</sup> I myself got reminded of a lyrics "*Nowadays technology rules the landscape of modern music, but if we go back to the roots of rhythm, African tribes are the living proof that pleasure and music come straight from the beat of the drum*" from Tatanka, "Africa".

On the third and fourth page (281-282) there are two pictures (2 and 3). The first one features the station wagon which Anne Putnam used to reach Camp Putnam. It appears as if a group of naked Pygmy children just finished inspecting the interior of the car and are let out. From a small distance a woman carrying a baby is looking at the spectacle. A passing Japanese tourist is about to take a picture of the Pygmy children. The text reads:

*“Playful children give the author’s station wagon their approval. Subjecting the French-built Peugeot to tests its designers never dreamed of, Pygmies squeezed in by the dozens. Mrs. Putnam found that other business had to wait until boisterous scores had taken rides. Here a passing Japanese visitor photographs youngsters leaping from the door. Near by, a normal-sized Bantu girl carries her baby sister.”*<sup>128</sup>

It appears that this photo was taken by another Japanese visitor as the name above the photograph is ‘Yosizaka Takamasa’. This photo gives a nice contrast between ‘civilized’ people and ‘uncivilized’ people. Anne Putnam and the Japanese tourist both wear western style clothing whilst the Pygmy children appear naked, the Bantu girl in the distance is clothed but even from far its noticeable she is wearing ‘African’ style clothing. Indirectly a hierarchy is created between those that are dressed to the readers standard, those that are at least covered, and those that are naked: the Pygmy children. If ‘tribal dress’ is a marker of being uncivilized, being naked is even more so.<sup>129</sup> Another observation that would be a marker of Pygmies being ‘uncivilized’ today is their reaction to the car as a novelty. However, even in the United States cars were for most children still something to get excited about in this time, and still today I think. For the American reader in the ‘60’s it would probably remind them of their own, themselves, or neighboring children getting excited about a car, which could have a sympathizing effect on the reader for the Pygmies.

The other picture is a close-up of Anne Putnam herself in the middle whilst holding two small children, each in another arm. She looks into the camera, the child left on the photo looks away in the distance and the child right on the photo appears to be looking to someone or something next to him that is off-camera. The text underneath reads:

*“‘Adopted sons’ of the author renew their acquaintance with Mrs. Putnam. The American woman who cared for them in infancy. The mothers of William J. (left) and*

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<sup>128</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 280.

<sup>129</sup> Jordache A. Ellapen, “Geographies of the black African masculine in Tsotsi and The Wooden Camera”, *Black Camera* Vol. 9 No. 2 (2018); 235-255.

*Katchalewa died in childbirth. William J. has the features of a Pygmy child; Katchalewa resembles his Bantu father and is taller than Pygmies his age.*<sup>130</sup>

Through the caption it is made clear that the reader's focus should be on the physical appearance of the two boys and compare them to each other. Not only are the Pygmies smaller than their Bantu neighbors, apparently their physical features are also different in other ways. This photo resembles the anthropological photos that were taken of non-white people at the end of the nineteenth century by scientists. Physiognomy and anthropometry were much practiced branches of science and both required photographs of the human body and face from all possible angles.<sup>131</sup> Notice how in this image one boy has his head turned forward and one sideways, as if to accentuate the differences of the heads between Pygmies and Bantu children.

On pages 282-283 one photo takes up approximately half of the two pages (4). It shows a group of Pygmies of mixed gender and age sitting in front of a few huts. It appears they are not doing anything in particular. Two boys in front and one woman in the back are looking in the camera. In the background are three houses and a dog. The setting is apparently a courtyard as the text states:

*Forest midgets relax at day's end in their jungle courtyard. Woman resting with chin on hand is Sau, accused of witchcraft, whom Mrs. Putnam saved from death (page 297). Sleeping dog descends from ancient Basenjis, depicted on tombs of the Egyptian Pharaohs. Thatches of leaves, though flimsy in appearance, shed the rain forest's frequent downpours. One unfinished hut reveals its lattice framework. Wicker baskets atop another are used to carry food. Descendants of an ancient race whose origins baffles anthropologists, the 4,5 foot, brick-brown hunters survive with a few crude weapons, courage, and a reluctance to worry about tomorrow.*<sup>132</sup>

This photo shows a way of living together with other people that is not common in the west anymore: clan based communities. Clans of Pygmies reside together in movable villages, every family its own hut. Socializing happens outside the house in the open air. Societies and cultures from Africa are often represented in this way to show the western reader another difference between themselves and the people they read about, their 'family structure'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Putnam, "My life with Africa's little people", 281.

<sup>131</sup> Kidd, "Inventing the 'Pygmy'", 405-407.

<sup>132</sup> Putnam, "My life with Africa's little people", 282-283.

<sup>133</sup>Sheela Athreya and Rebecca Rogers Ackermann, "Colonialism and narratives of human origins in Asia and Africa", *Interrogation human origins: decolonization and the deep human past* edited by Martin Porr and Jacqueline Matthews Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 81.



The next photograph is on page 285. Anne Putnam and another woman are looking at a Pygmy man carrying his hunting equipment (5). In the background huts and other Pygmies are visible. In this photo the height difference between Pygmies and westerners is highlighted as the text reads “*American woken tower like giants above and Ituri hunter. This man stands 4 feet 4 inches, but a bass voice belies his size. He carries his centuries-old hunting arsenal: bow and arrows and a net for trapping animals. Pygmies spend most of their days in zestful pursuit of game.*”<sup>134</sup> This photograph reminded me of colonial photographs of Pygmies, and Africans in general. In these colonial images, white people – almost always men – pose with Pygmies, them in the middle and the Pygmies at the side, to accentuate the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. One example would be the photo on the front page of this thesis. Here, a smiling white man poses with two stoic Pygmies. This photo of Putnam and the other woman standing next to the hunter cements the height difference for the reader as in the pictures before only children in comparison to white adults had been seen. The photo kind of ‘infantilizes’ the Pygmies. A fact which seems to be acknowledged by the writer of the caption since they added “*But a bass voice belies his size*”, as if the information about their small ‘childlike’ stature needed to be compensated with information about the deepness of their voice so that they appear adolescent.<sup>135</sup>

On the next two pages (286-287) a large photo of a Pygmy man during the hunt is featured (6). He is in the foreground turned away from the camera pointing his bow and arrow at a small duiker a few meters away from him. The scene is described as

*“Stealthy hunter, screened by grass, takes aim at a tiny duiker. Every male Pygmy becomes an expert hunter because skill determines his menu. He moves through the forest so silently that some of the Bantu believe he can make himself invisible. Before firing an arrow, the hunter creeps close enough to leap easily upon his quarry, strangle it, or cut its throat. In fact, he often does...”*<sup>136</sup>

here the text stops mid-sentence because I presume it continued on the next page. Unfortunately page 288 is missing from the online official copy of the issue. It is also unknown whether it featured any photographs, it did feature the text accompanying the photo on page 289 since it seems to be missing. This photo shows a young Pygmy man with a stick in his hand that is pointed at the ground (7). On the ground the small stick is rubbed into something and against a

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<sup>134</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”,

<sup>135</sup> Ballard, “Strange alliance”, 137.

<sup>136</sup> Putnam, “My life with Africa’s little people”, 287.

bigger stick, my guess is that the young man is starting a fire. This can show them as both uncivilized and unchanged, for making fire by rubbing two sticks is, in the western mind, one of the most rudimentary forms of starting a fire. It is uncivilized because it appears Pygmies are so far behind on 'technology' they don't even have matchsticks to their disposal and have to make fire the old way. Image 6. Solidifies the Pygmies skills in the forest, also mentioning that the menu of the Pygmies depends on their hunting. It makes the Pygmies seem uncivilized and unchanged for the modern western man rarely has to go out and kill and butcher his own meal. Wide spread hunting for sustenance is not necessary anymore in the west. In the reader it will probably evoke ideas of how 'their' ancestors lived, rooting Pygmies firmly in the past.

The next four pages (290-293)(8-10) show the Pygmies engaging in a so-called 'elephant dance'. In total there are five pictures with one larger text and one smaller text. The large text (page 291) reads

*"Intent spearmen stalk their pretended prey in an elephant dance. One man, with arm extended like a trunk, portrays the swaying beast; two others act the part of the hunters. Slayers of elephants enjoy hero status, for they have passed the ultimate test in courage. Not every 85-pound Pygmy has the nerve. The hunter creeps virtually under the grazing beast, then trusts his spear repeatedly into its belly. If the dim-sighted elephant turns, the attacker must freeze, because the slightest movement will betray him, meaning almost certain death. The elephant dance may precede a hunt to work good magic or follow a kill to celebrate valor. For the sake of a laugh, the performers may toss comic antics into the dance's most dramatic moments. Chanting and shouting, women in the background circle the drums. The hunter below slips in for the attack (next page)."*<sup>137</sup>

The scene is taking place on open grounds since no shade from the canopy is visible. In the background women surround the drums. In the foreground left, a man pretends to be the elephant, right in the photo, two other men are seen crouching holding their weaponry. In the picture 'below', one of the men prepares to attack the 'elephant', who has his back turned and is thus 'unaware' that the attack is happening. In the next photo on the next page we see the 'elephant's' front and the hunter behind him, still crouching. The following photo shows both hunters thrusting their spears into the unsuspecting 'elephant', on both side each. In the last photo the elephant is down whilst the hunter celebrates. The text reads "*Unsuspecting*

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 291.

*'elephant' lifts his 'trunk' as a hunter closes in. Holding a spear under the arm depicts impalement, he topples and falls dead. The victor exults.*"<sup>138</sup>

These photos show some connection to the main text, here Pygmies prepare for an elephant hunt, even buying medicine from a medicine woman in the hopes of catching one. In the end, the hunt is discontinued as a Pygmy man in an accompanying village has died. Instead of portraying the 'real hunt' the photos thus give the reader an idea about what the hunts are supposed to look like. If you look closely at the Pygmies in the background they all seem to be more interested in the large drum than in the 'elephant dance' spectacle, which makes me believe that this dance was set up just so the photographer could take photos of it. Most Pygmies on the background seem completely disinterested in the spectacle going on, surely if it was meant for their eyes at that very moment, they would be more interested, right? Here, the American readers gets to see a show set up for them. A show that can reinforce their idea of Africans, and Pygmies more specifically, as primitive people.

First of all, the almost naked state of the participants and (disinterested) 'onlookers'. Men and women only wear girdles of leaves, torso and breasts are naked.<sup>139</sup> The most 'easiest' sign of perceived primitiveness (and thus of being uncivilized). In the caption it is mentioned that the elephant dance is used too as a kind of magic ritual, another telltale sign of primitive people. Having been little exposed to either Western scientific reasoning or Christianity, they rely on superstitious magic beliefs to govern their daily lives.<sup>140</sup> It is also interesting to see that their weight (85 pound) is mentioned in this story, I presume to highlight the danger that is elephant hunting to the hunter even more. The reader might image a small pygmy (average four feet according to Putnam) against the African giant: the elephant. But here, a nuance that could be made is not made. The African elephants are made up of two sub-species. The well-known savannah elephant, which reaches heights between 10-13 feet and its smaller cousin: the African forest elephant whom reaches heights between 8-10 feet.<sup>141</sup> Although it is the savannah elephant that the reader will imagine in this story, the elephants Pygmies hunt are actually the smaller forest elephants. Not to dilute the fact that it still is impressive to hunt such large animal, Putnam makes the reader believe that the game is bigger than it actually is, especially by not providing photographs of actual elephants or hunts.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 292-293.

<sup>139</sup> Ellapen, "Geographies of the black African masculine", 104.

<sup>140</sup> Macheso, "The problem with the traveler's gaze", 45.

<sup>141</sup> "Olifanten in Afrika", WNF, <https://www.wwf.nl/dieren/olifant/soorten>, last accessed 22/6/2022.

A large picture on page 295 depicts a hunting party, three young men of which two are visible (11). The man in front is carrying a large woven basket on his back and the other behind him has a hunting net draped around his shoulders, they are all holding spears. According to the text,

*“Spear, net, and game basket equip a jungle hunting party. Pygmies connect several nets, each up to 100 yards long and four feet high, to form a barrier that may stretch half a mile. Then the women, some carrying babies, drive game into the trap with whoops and whistles. Men knife small creatures but spear dangerous animals, such as the forest hog, which has razor-sharp tusks.”*

Not only does the photo show the hunting equipment, this photo also gives the reader the chance to admire the Pygmy masculine body. According to Jordache A. Ellapen the “*African body was also represented as a special kind of bodily beauty. The beauty of the African was all physically, all body. The African’s body may be beautiful but its mind is primitive, childlike at best*”<sup>142</sup> which I think is applicable to this image. Not only is their masculinity visible in their body, the caption explains how they kill dangerous animals too, again, highlighting their bravery and masculinity. It could also be read as a sign of their supposed uncivilized nature for apparently their strength lies in their physique and ‘uncivilized’ activities, not their intelligence.

On pages 296-297 we are introduced to some non-hunting activities. The photo on page 296 depicts two women, one carrying a baby, from the waist up (12). They are naked and the left woman and the baby have been painted with black stripes on their face and body.

*“Fashion decrees black stripes applied in whimsical patterns. Women mix vegetable juices and charcoal into a sticky inedible paste with which they fingerpaint one another. Children sometimes get the same treatment. The boy, named Patrick after the author’s late husband, cries in fear of the camera’s flash.”*

The women are photographed bare-breasted in a way that western women would not be put in the NGM because it would cause controversy. In this article women have been portrayed nude before, however, those pictures were taken from afar, this photo is a close-up on the top half of two women. Unlike almost all other photos, which were taken by Helene Fischer, this photo was shot by Edward S. Ross. It is a photo taken by a male for a male audience. Focus of the photo should be the black stripes, most of them are on the face, only one line goes from the arm to the breast. However, in this photo, the woman with the stripes on her face has her head turned downwards, not looking in the camera, just like the woman next to her that does not have a

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<sup>142</sup> Ellapen, “Geographies of the black African masculine”, 106-107.

painted face. Focus is on their breasts and to a lesser extent the baby that does look directly in to the camera. For if the picture was truly just about the face paintings, they could have focused on just her head, but they did not. This photograph also highlights the inequality between women of different skin colors/races since white women would never be represented as such in the NGM. The black female body is an object that the male gaze can look at undisturbed as it is the embodiment of the supposed hyper-sexuality of African women, for them, it was thought, a natural state.<sup>143</sup>

The photo on page 297 shows two heads from behind, age or gender are not mentioned of the persons photographed (13). These photographs are meant to show the elaborate hairstyles of the Pygmies as the text reads “*Modish hairdos require long hours. Fancy designs result from cropping with an old razor blade or broken glass. Ear at left holds two cigarettes.*” Again, this text, and to a lesser extent the photo, highlights the supposed uncivility of Pygmies as it is made clear that they create their hairstyles by cropping with old razor blades or broken glass, not the kind of hairstyling tools that are used in the west. Directly the uncivility is also negated by the mentioning, and including in the photo, of the cigarettes. They are not so uncivilized that they have never heard of rolled cigarettes.

On page 298-299 more non-hunting activities are shown. A larger picture and a smaller photo below it (14 and 15). The larger image shows a group of Pygmies forming a tunnel with their legs through which one Pygmy is crawling and another is already crouching down to crawl too. In the background a bunch of children holding a large drum are looking at the group making the tunnel. In the photo below a group of three young boys can be seen practicing their hunting skills on a fruit target on the ground. The caption belonging to image (14) reads

*“Little folk form a tunnel of legs for comrades to crawl through. Pygmies readily adopt any alien game that strikes their fancy, adding refinements to suit their sense of humor. Children in the background try out a drum that they borrowed from the Bantu, with or without permission. Ituri Pygmies, who make no drums of their own, have such excellent grasp of rhythm that their tempos influence the music of their Negro neighbors. Accomplished vocalist, they sing in harmony and in rounds.”*

The caption belonging to image (15) reads

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<sup>143</sup> Gen Doy, “Out of Africa: orientalism, ‘race’, and the female body”, *Body & Society* Vol. 2 No. 4 (1996); 21 and Kaila Adia Story, “Racing sex – Sexing race”, *Imagining the black female body: reconciling image in print and visual culture* edited by Carol E. Henderson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40.

*“Boy archers bombard a fruit target, sending it dancing across the forest floor. They play with bows and arrows as soon as they can walk, and some are fair marksmen by the age of three. Parents unworriedly let their offspring climb trees, swing on lianas, and play with spears, knives, or discarded razor blades. The author shuddered at such hazards, but discovered that few children got hurt. Youngsters sometimes play a game vaguely resembling soccer, using a ball made of latex from a rubber tree.”*

In both instances it is clear that the caption tells us more than what is visible on the photos.

The first photo, in which the Pygmies form a tunnel and crawl through each other's legs, will remind the western reader of a children's game in which they crawl through each other's legs and then join the tunnel so that it, in theory, forms a never ending tunnel. However, in this game it is not children that are playing but adult Pygmies, whom are portrayed as playful and childlike both in text and visual. They are also portrayed as peculiar and different in the fact that they apparently find it necessary to change these basic games to suit their tastes. For the average American reader, these Pygmies could be mistaken for youngsters, however, by adding children in the background it becomes clear that those playing the game are adolescent. It seems as if Pygmies have not reach beyond a child-like state.<sup>144</sup> The text then focuses on the drum and the music Pygmies produce. I find it interesting that Putnam wanted to make clear the drums were not stolen, but that she also wanted to make clear they might not have been gotten with permission from the owners. She chose 'borrowing'. However, whether something is 'borrowing' without the owner's permission is up to debate. It shows them as mischievous, in an innocent way.<sup>145</sup>

The second photo is the children shooting their arrows at fruit on the ground. From the image it is not immediately clear how old these children are but I estimate they are somewhere under 10 years old. At the moment this photo was taken one of the children must have hit the fruit for it is levitating of the ground. The children seem serious, no laugh can be detected, for them this is not 'just a game' but serious business. Putnam informs the reader that boys learn to shoot as soon as they are capable. For the western reader it might come as a shock, arrows are considered weapons and not toys for little children. Putnam continues the 'dangerous' activities Pygmy parents let their children engage in, and how she, an American woman, shuddered at such hazards. To not worry her readers she adds that few children get hurt. For her western reader such dangerous playtime activities might be signs of the perceived uncivility

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<sup>144</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 35

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

of Pygmies, they simply do not know how to protect their children so that they do not get hurt. To reassure the reader that Pygmy children also have normal activities she ends the caption with the fact that they play a ball game that ‘vaguely’ resembles soccer. It might negate any negative feelings of worries over child safety in the reader. However, the ‘vaguely’ also makes them not too familiar. There should always be an element of difference for it to be interesting to the reader.

The second to last photo on page 300 shows an adult Pygmy man pounding a hammer on a piece of bark in order to make cloth (16).

*“Tap, tap, tap! An ivory hammer pounds cloth from bark. About 10 varieties of wild fig tree provide material for bark cloth, one of the Pygmies few handicrafts. Homemade dyes add color and design. A surprising softness marks the finished product. This man breaks down the coarse fibers.”*

One thing is immediately made clear: Pygmies make few handicrafts and the handicrafts they do make are primitive. The tools the man uses for the making of the cloth are a thick tree branch and a hammer. The tree branch is his workstation and the hammer looks to be one made of wood and stone. The scene is taking place outside presumably because the Pygmy hut is too dark and small for such activity. For the western reader this scene looks very primitive, no modern technology, not even a ‘proper’ workstation or workplace, all outside and rudimentary by modern standards. Cloth is not made from cotton, linen or non-organic fabric but from bark of trees that is pounded in to softness. After this, it is homemade dyes that color the product, not store bought, but made from what can be found in nature. In the 60’s there were still plenty of people in the west sewing their own clothes, but fabric could be bought in stores and dying it themselves was not necessary.

Finally, the last photograph shows a Pygmy woman or girl with a band around her forehead (17). The band holds the weight of a massive bunch of plantains. Because the woman was photographed from head-to-toe the ‘massiveness’ of the amount plantains is really highlighted. That they are heavy is made clear by the text *“Bustle of plantains on a tumpline bows a sturdy four-foot wife. Bantu supplied the fruit, which is cooked before eating. Plantains contains more starch and less sugar than the related bananas.”* Again this photo highlights the supposed ‘uncivility’ of the Pygmy because it is made clear that the Pygmies themselves do not participate in agricultural activities and are thus depending on their Bantu neighbor for food they do need to supplement their diet. This photo also highlights the small stature of the Pygmy people again. The woman is even turned forward with her body, presumably because she would otherwise topple backwards since the plantains seem to be heavy.

In general, the pictures from Putnam's article show the Pygmies as uncivilized, but not in an overtly negative way. Over the whole, and with the wording of some of the captions in mind, Pygmies are definitely infantized and the attitude is paternalizing. She repeatedly calls them 'little people', which initially may refer to their short stature, it is also a reference to their behavior and attitude. The images in this article show Pygmies engaging in activities which in the west are associated with youngsters such as playing games and joyful dancing without an occasion. Likewise, the photos also portray them as unchanged. Their nakedness, living in a forest, degradable huts, and primitive way of life are highlighted throughout the photographs. Making them seem ahistorical and stuck in time. Only in pictures with other (white) people or the car is the reader reminded that these are contemporary photos. The myth of the unrestrained is not very visible in the photos, neither the nature or the people element.

## Salopek

The article by Salopek does not only contain pictures of Pygmies but also of the other people he meets when he crosses the Ituri forest. These photographs too will be taken into account in this analysis since they can be compared to those taken of Pygmies. The contents of the text and the contents of the images do, on most occasions, not tell the same stories. Where the text is also heavily focused on those living around the Pygmies, the photographs, and their accompanying texts, are almost exclusively about Pygmy life and rituals which are not mentioned in the main text. In the individual photos the tropes of unchanged and uncivilized are most visible. However, over the whole of all images I argue that, especially in comparison to the images in Putnam's article, the trope of the unrestrained is most visible. Two binaries stand out in the images of this article: moving and standing still (in multiple forms) and that of victims and perpetrators. After discussing the individual photos, I will come back to these observations.

The first photograph we get to see is on the second page of the article next to the page that has the title "*Who rules the forest?*" (18). It is a full page photograph that shows two Pygmy boys in the forest. The first is out of focus but the boy behind him is in focus. Both have white painted bodies and are wearing skirts made from some sort of grass or bark. The out-of-focus first boy also seems to carry something in his mouth and hands (the thing in his mouth is leaves, which we learn later is to quiet talkative boys down). The scenery in which this takes place is the forest, although the plants are bright green, the photograph has a dark hue over it. The text that accompanies this picture is "*Though blind, young Apatite Vecant (foreground) must see*



with other senses as he endures rites of manhood alongside his peers, learning to survive in the Ituri forest". It is made clear the boys are going through a so-called 'rite of passage'. In the myth of the uncivilized the people are represented as having 'tribal features', exactly what is happening in this picture. Elaborate rites of passage are associated with non-Western cultures, especially those in Africa.<sup>146</sup> If this is the first impression a reader might get of Pygmies, he or she might perceive them as more tribal than they are as they might think Pygmies always walk around in elaborate body paint and plated skirts, since little to no further information is given about what these rites of passage entail. I find it interesting that the supposed focus of this photo, Apatite Vecant, is not actually 'focused' on in the photograph, it is the nameless boy in the background that is better visible. Indirectly this gives of that actually seeing or 'getting to know' those that are mentioned is not important, the boy just served as prop for an interesting caption that provides us little more information about these rites than that you need your senses.

Next follow three two page wide photographs. The first shows a group of boys following an older Pygmy man up a hill (19). All wear the same plated skirt as the boys in the first picture and they are also decorated with white paint. They are surrounded by bright green bushes and in comparison with the first picture, the dark hue is noticeably less. The text reads "*The thin whispers of skirts dissolves into the rain forest as boys trail their elders on their way to a hunting camp. The Mbuti are one of the several Pygmy groups still following semi-nomadic traditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo*". The next photo shows three Mbuti girls painting their body with white body paint in their village (20). There is little green, the huts are dark and smoke that covers half the page gives the image a blue hue. The text reads "*Girls daub each other with clay in solidarity with the boys' initiation into manhood. Pygmies often beautify their bodies with paint, scarification, even tooth chipping*". The last photo shows a group of adult Pygmy men standing in the village (21). The sun is setting in the background and there is little natural light. Because of the dark background (the huts) and the smoke that surround them, the men are not very detailed and a superficial glance could not estimate how many are in the picture. This image is accompanied by the text "*The sound of pipes fills an<sup>147</sup> Mbuti camp as men play by the fireside at dusk. Often whittled on the spot, each instrument is cut to play just one note; together they create the music of Mbuti life.*" Looking at the three photographs feels a bit voyeuristic as the scenes photographed feel intimate and private. The dark hue the photos

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<sup>146</sup> Amy E. Harth, "Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes", (2012), 19.

<sup>147</sup> This is a spelling mistake made in the original text.

have adds a mysterious atmosphere, as if the reader is witnessing a secret gathering, but is not supposed to be there. However, through the dark hues and smoke, it also feels as if the reader is let in on intimate rituals usually preserved for the eyes of Pygmies and Bantu alone, the close-up shots of the young girls and boys an invitation to look further, the fact that they do not look at the camera makes it appear as if it is not even there. Both types of feelings could be evocated in the reader.

For the first one both the myth of the ‘unchanged’ and ‘uncivilized’ are noticeable, not so much in the photo as in the text. They are there because Paul Salopek makes use of the word ‘still’ when he mentions that the Mbuti follow a semi-nomadic lifestyle. According to Merriam-Webster the word ‘still’ has different meanings but one of them is applicable to this instance, however, its meaning is ‘archaic’ according to Merriam-Webster: ‘always or continually’. This definition relates to the tropes ‘unchanged’ and ‘uncivilized’. ‘always or continually’ implies that something has not changed because it has been ‘always’, relating to the supposed unchanged ways of Pygmy life the Mbuti follow. Because Salopek mentions that there are Pygmy groups that do not follow this semi-nomadic lifestyle anymore, he indirectly implies that they are ‘uncivilized’. In the hierarchy of human lives, hunter-gatherer lifestyles are often, wrongly, seen as the least civilized form of living.<sup>148</sup> By mentioning how some Pygmy groups now lead other lifestyles it appears as if they can be changed, the Mbuti just choose not to change. The scene photographed does fit in with the myth of the unrestrained. The green of the shrubs looks lush and healthy, this is the place Pygmies belong, the whispers of their skirts dissolving in the forest. Literally, because they are walking away and the forest is not quiet, but also metaphorically, since it implies that the Pygmies are so intrinsically linked to the Ituri they have become one with it.

The second image - the one with the girls – leans heavily into the myth of the uncivilized. Here it is girls that apply the white mud to their bodies too in solidarity with the boys, making it look like they too are in a rite of passage now. It is only their upper body and, if you look closely, their linen, not grass, skirts that differentiate them from the boys. According to the text the Pygmies “*often beautify their bodies with paint, scarification, even tooth chipping.*” According to research done by Aiseng and Akpojivi about scarification in a NG documentary, NG fails to mention deeper meanings behind the process of scarification, presenting it as one-dimensional and archaic.<sup>149</sup> Here too, it might be presented too one-dimensional as Salopek

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<sup>148</sup> Kidd, “Inventing the Pygmy”, 402-403.

<sup>149</sup> Aiseng and Akpojivi, “Anthropological vs. orientalist representation”, 452-56.

only mentions the ‘beautifying’ aspect of scarification. Aforementioned Aiseng and Akpojivi conclude that there has been a long trend in Western media to portray Africa as backwards by means of comparing African culture to Western culture. Practices like scarification are seen as barbaric from a western perspective.<sup>150</sup> It also seems that Salopek is aware of this connotation because he only shortly mentions these practices by name. Compare this to an article from 1989 about the Efe Pygmy, here photos of several ‘scarification’ practices are shown, it not being controversial at that time apparently.<sup>151</sup> Salopek is probably aware of the negative impression photos of scarification and filing can have on his readers as some form of primitive child abuse. By mentioning it in the caption he does not deny this practice. However, the larger photo, which draws the reader’s attention, is that of more innocent mud painting, softening the blow that is scarification for the Western reader. For his readers scarification is often equal to mutilation. To negate that connotation Salopek uses the word ‘beautify’ instead. However, this can also imply something different to his readers. That Pygmy women and girls are incomplete as they are, not good enough as is. Jarring to read, especially if you remember that on page 82 he called a Pygmy of the male sex “Perfectly muscled”, apparently they do not need to beautify their body, not in their own opinion and not in that of Salopek. The man is perfect as he is, the woman needs customization.

In the third photo a group of men is seen playing instruments in the open air. Again, in this photo and the accompanying text the tropes of ‘unchanged’ and ‘uncivilized’ are noticeable. It is explained that the instrument are made on the spot and only play one note. For a western reader these instruments might seem simple and rudimentary. Just like they haven’t been able to move on from their ‘simple’ semi-nomadic lifestyle, they also haven’t moved on to more sophisticated forms of musical instruments. This photograph, just like the previous one, shows the people outside in a group. We are also not shown how the instruments look like, only that they are somewhat pipe-like, or what they are called in the native language. This to me shows that this photo has been chosen by editors not for its informative merit but because it suited the overachieving visual theme of mysticism. It reiterates what Keim observed in his book *Mistaking Africa*. He argued that NGM does not portray Africa in stereotypes on purpose. However, they fail or neglect to provide adequate context, leaving it up to the reader to fill the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 452-456.

<sup>151</sup> Robert C. Bailey, “The Efe: archers of the African rain forest”, *National Geographic Magazine* (November 1989); 683.

gaps, which is exoticism he claims. Exoticism portrays only a portion of a culture and allows the imagination to use stereotypes to fill in the missing pieces.<sup>152</sup>

A small photo adorns page 83 (22), it is a male Pygmy with a cloth over his head, on the cloth he is carrying his hunting net. For this analysis, the caption does not really matter. Although the man's face is in focus the net and background are more hazy, as if they are moving towards the photographer. This image is interesting because Salopek is visiting the same Pygmies Anne Putnam had contact with: the Mbuti. Compare this photo to image 11 (from Putnam's article) in the appendix. Here the man does not carry the hunting net on his head but on his shoulders and breast. Why did Salopek or the editors choose a photo on which the man carries it on his head? I think they did this to evoke more of an 'Africa feeling' in their readers. A common image of Africa is people, often women, carrying stuff on their head, more uncommon in the west than carrying stuff on your shoulders. By seeing somebody carry the net in this way, the reader is unconsciously reaffirmed that the story does indeed take place in Africa.

Pages 86-87 is a full page installation in the top right is written "*on the move*", it is three separate photographs and a text that connects them all (41). The text reads

*"Life is motion, fluid and free for the Mbuti, who ferry the portable details of their lives from camp to camp and fashion everything else from scratch. Since fire is always needed, the women haul smoldering logs (left) along with knives and perhaps a pot or two packed in a basket. At camp, women pull saplings from the forest to assemble shelters, called endu. Each hunting lodge houses a single family and shrugs of showers with walls of mongongo leaves (below left). The flow of life on the trails stops abruptly upon the discovery of a beehive, and all minds focus on honey. Hunters scale trees with makeshift smoker baskets (below), then descend with dripping combs"*.

The three photographs show (from l. to r.): a woman that is holding smoldering logs, the picture is taken in motion as if the photographer and woman were both running at the time it was taken. In the second image an *endu* is being made, a hand pats the leaves on the outside and a spear is resting against the hut. In the last image a Pygmy man is holding a smoldering basket and he is descending from or ascending up a tree. It appears as if he is tied to a rope or vine as he appears to be floating and not climbing the tree. "*On the move*" thus refers to a crucial aspect of Pygmy lifestyle: their semi-nomadic being.

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<sup>152</sup> Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 9-10.

These pictures, like the aforementioned ones from Salopek his article, all have that dark hue with green from the canopy being the main background. The background of the two pages is black and not white, like the background of the main text is, which adds to the dark ‘mysterious’ aesthetic. Nature is not wild or dangerous but pristine, its contents being just what the Pygmies need for their huts and providing them with the needed extra sustenance: honey. The first picture fits the theme ‘on the move’ as the woman is not clearly portrayed and is probably running, on her back the wicker basket with her family’s belongings. I suggest that they decided to add this photograph instead of a more focused one to convey the theme ‘on the move’ as she is clearly moving in the photo. Could it also imply more? Certainly, because the photo is not focused it looks hectic and fast-paced which could be an allegory to the pace of Pygmy life. A possible explanation on why she is running is because she is carrying smoldering logs that she wants to dispose of as soon as possible. This gives another dimension to the Pygmies as uncivilized trope because it implies they need to carry fire with them because they cannot create it on the spot.

The picture under it is more calm. It shows a hand padding leaves on the structure made from saplings so that the hut is covered. A spear is also shown on the picture. Again, this photograph also fits in the ‘on the move’ theme as it is here that the ‘simple’ structure of Pygmy dwellings is uncovered. Since they are made from all-natural material they are quickly build, but will also quickly waste away after abandonment, the pristine nature is bothered minimally by this lifestyle, since the houses will eventually decay. It fits the stereotype that ‘primitive’ people live more in harmony with nature.<sup>153</sup> The greyish spear is in clear contrast with the green of the hut and it looks ‘forced’ in the picture. I think it was added because it, once again, highlights the supposed uncivilized nature of Pygmy lifestyle. As in, not only are the huts old-fashioned, their weapons are also archaic. It can also evoke sympathy in the American reader, especially the more pro-weapon audience. The photo can then be read as just a weapon to protect the homestead, a reason many Americans keep guns at home. Here the American reader can get the feeling that protecting one’s home and family are shared values, lessening the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Lastly the man hovering above the ground with the smoking basket hunting for honey. Through the angle of the photo the reader is also introduced to the depth and height of the forest. The angle is upwards making it difficult to guess how far the man is up in the trees, the upwards angle also makes the reader feel little in the Ituri forest as if you were an animal on the ground.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 63.

With an eye on the stories Salopek will tell later in the article about the dangers of logging it can also give readers a sense of how important the trees are, they are vital for the Pygmies as without trees, there will be no honey. It can also impart them with a sense of urgency, the trees might be save now, but logging companies can soon start swooping in, the forest and its inhabitants must be protected against this violence.

Pages 88-89 is another collage called 'boys no more' (24). It features three pictures again and the accompanying text is:

*“Lessons of the lash fall on young backs during the nkumbi, the ritual passage into manhood. For several months Mbuti and Bantu boys, roughly nine to twelve years old, endure daily whippings (left) to toughen them up. Just one of the cultural knos binding Pygmy hunters and Bantu farmers, the nkumbi begins at the behest of a Bantu chief and starts with a festival and the circumcision of each boy. The forest then becomes both classroom and obstacle course (below left), where silence reigns. Normally chatty boys keep quiet by clamping stick-skewered leaves in their mouth (below). These trials don't dampen their spirits, says photographer Randy Olson, who noticed that humor often offsets their hardships. 'They laugh so hard they have to hold each other up', he says”.*

In the first picture a young boy, clad in a grass skirt and painted with white mud, is whipped by an adult (difficult to see whether it's a Bantu or Pygmy man) dressed in western clothing. The boy is looking towards the man and thus we cannot see his face. In his hands he also holds what appears to be a wooden stick. In the second smaller photo two boys wade through a river, one is further away and the boy closest stoops beneath a tree that fell over the river. In the last picture a group of boys (in skirts and painted with white mud) is seated in a row. One boys faces the camera whilst clamping the stick-skewered leaves in his mouth, the other boys are looking in front of them, not directly into the camera.

It is no coincidence that the first photo has the young boy looking away. If the reader were to see his face, which probably has a pained expression, the reader could easily sympathize with the boy and critique the ritual as savage and primal. Even though in some other instances NG actively tried to invoke this by portraying African rituals as painful, this is not the goal of Salopek his article, who's goal it is to make the reader sympathize with the Pygmy cause in general. The second photo portrays the 'obstacle course' that is the classroom. Again, something that might irk western readers, the boys not attending a normal school, is made to be not important. The boys learn in the forest, no other classroom is needed for them. In the last, and biggest photo of the three, a row of boys sits next on each other. They do not look at the camera, except for the boy that had his mouth closed by the leaves with sticks. At first glance

one would feel sympathy for him, however, the text makes it very clear that these ‘hardships’ do not dampen their spirits. Are they unchanged, still engaging in rituals people in the west might find ‘primitive’? Yes. Is it meant to portray them as uncivilized and negatively primitive? No. they must be seen as attempts to give a romanticized image of the ritual. The purpose of these photo’s is not to portray them as savage and bestial rituals in which children are hurt for simple rites of passage in to the next man-made life stage nor is it meant to give an objective presentation of the ritual since the caption is loaded with text that evoke or dampen emotions the reader might feel. It is the bonding that stands out, the feeling of togetherness that these pictures and the text provokes. Undergoing these harsh rituals makes the bond between boys, both Pygmy and Bantu stronger, friendship and camaraderie are seen as good vices in western society too.

On page 90 is a photograph of non-Pygmy traders carrying their bikes and goods over the unpaved highway through the Ituri forest (25). The text reads “*A human flood chokes the mud-slick remnants of a highway, the main vein for commerce through the Ituri. Rough and rutted during dry weather, the roads are nearly impassible in the wet season. But rain can’t stop the toleka traders, who push goods hundreds of miles by bicycle*”. The men in the picture are visibly having trouble moving their heavy loaden bicycles along the muddy path. The second-to-last picture on page 92 shows a group of three Pygmy woman standing on a street clearly outside the forest (26). Two are in front and we can only see their face and torso, the third girl is wholly visible. All three are wearing western clothes and are not looking into the camera. They come across as shy and not confident, as if they are unsure what to do. According to Salopek “*Mbuti girls seem lost in an alien world during a visit to a market near Beni. When plucked from its forest roots, Pygmy culture crumbles. ‘Without the forest, the Mbuti become a kind of pauper group’, says conservationist Terese hart. Some Pygmies work for poachers or loggers to survive.*” These two pictures that were taken outside the forest have a different hue to them. The photographs taken inside the forest have a dark atmosphere with black undertones, these photo’s do not have that. The aura of mysticism that surrounds the photographs of the Ituri forest is absent in these. This is not some mystified utopian forest, this is the real world: hard and dangerous.

The first picture of the tradesmen on bike shows them having great difficulty to move the bike along the mud, their clothes are dirty and their bike is old. If the NGM wanted to change readers opinions about Africa for the better, this picture certainly will not help. It is made clear in the text that this is supposed to be the ‘remnants of a highway’ making it look like Africans are incapable of maintain their roads or building them properly to begin with. I find it interesting

that the picture with traders is shown here because the story about the tradesmen is told on pages 82-84, ten pages before this picture. However, now the photo does align with a text about how overpopulation threatens the Ituri forest and its Pygmy inhabitants. It is indirectly implied that it is these people, just trying to survive in war-torn Congo, that threaten the status quo in the Ituri forest. They are the ones causing the “human flood” that “chokes” the roads in the Ituri forest. Here, Salopek choose words that have negative connotations, a flood is something that overwhelms, choking because the flood is too much for the roads. Without explicitly saying so, Salopek has passed judgment onto these non-Pygmyies trekking through the forest.

The second picture is of some Pygmy women outside of their trusted environment. They do not look confident, lost even. According to the commentary of a (western) conservationist that works in the Ituri forest they become a pauper group without the forest (interestingly, the conservationist from whom this quote is has also written an article for this special NGM issue). “*When plucked from its forest roots, Pygmy culture crumbles*” Salopek tells us, and this statement is made visible too in this photograph. In previous pictures of the Pygmies in this article they are in constant contact with each other, they follow each other, paint each other or are undergoing rites of passage together. In this picture there is no ‘togetherness’, the girls are standing apart from each other and are not even looking at one another, as if they do not form a group. Instead of being half naked like in the forest, the girls do wear western clothes in this picture, but their representation is still as unchanged and uncivilized, even if Salopek did not intend their representation as such. It could be implied that their looks of discomfort are not only there because they are out of their familiar environment but also because they are wearing clothes that are not familiar to them. They are so unchanged and uncivilized that western style clothes (and society) are described as ‘alien’ to them. This picture and the accompanying text make it clear that ‘modernity’ or living like their non-Pygmy neighbors is not something that should be heralded by the Pygmies – or readers - as the way forward. It becomes clear that Pygmies should ‘stay the way they are’, as without the forest they are a pauper group that cannot survive the modern world and could turn to poaching or logging in order to survive. This sentiment fits in the western trend of ‘glorifying’ African cultures and putting them on a pedestal by those critical of ‘modernity’.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Harry Wels, “About romance and reality: popular European imagery in postcolonial tourism in southern Africa”, *Tourism and Postcolonialism: contested discourses, identities and representations* edited by C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker (New York: Routledge, 2004), 91.



After the article has ended, there is one more two-page photograph (27). The accompanying text is “*Logging camps appear like lesions in the Ituri, through pervasive lawlessness and violence have kept big timber companies at bay. For the Ituri, the prospect of peace has a dark side: it could foster more cutting and attracting settlers.*” The photo shows three black men (unknown whether Pygmy, Bantu, or other) at, what I presume is, a logging camp. None of the men look at the camera although one is turned towards it, smoking a cigarette. They seem tired, the smoking man even emaciated judging by his bony hands. Why is this photograph placed here? At first glance it has little relation to the Pygmies. However, its implication has a huge impact on the Ituri forest and subsequently, it will have a big impact on the Pygmies living in the forest. It is placed here to predict a possible future of the Ituri forest and its inhabitants. If peace is reached big logging companies could see their chance to set up in the forest. More cutting and more settlers would be the negative effects of this as implicated by Salopek. It threatens the traditional livelihood of the Pygmies who could then be attracted to either work for these logging companies or turn to poaching. If the men in the picture are indeed Pygmies, this picture like the one before with the girls shows little cohesion between the men, a cohesion that is there in pictures that portray traditional Pygmy lifestyle. Here again, modernity, in the form of logging companies, threatens the Pygmy way of life. That these companies are almost always western companies Salopek is awfully quiet about.

About the whole of all images in the article, it is quite noticeable, as already mentioned, that those pictures taken in the forest have a different atmosphere than those taken outside the forest. They have a certain calmness, the bright green shrubs, intimate smoke, and dark hue all provide us with a certain warmth. It is meant that way, nature in the Ituri forest is seen as pristine, but there is danger, a threat to the pristine nature of the forest. The two pictures taken outside the forest are harsher, in the first the men are visibly struggling and in the second the Pygmy girls seem lost in the world outside the forest. The greenery that is the background in many pictures is pristine, any potential danger of forest life such as wild animals is not depicted. One last remark about the images as a whole, the abstract or introduction of the article on the first page (page 74) states “In Central Africa, war and innocence collide in a tale of Pygmies, rebels, sorcerers, and dreamers”. It is clear that the ‘innocent’ party in Salopek’s article are the Pygmies, victims of the instability around them. By far most of the pictures in the article feature children clad in white mud. Both children and the color white are symbols for innocence, a coincidence or did the editors do this on purpose? Either way, it adds another layer to the meaning behind the images.

## Conclusion

On the surface, travel writing and tourism marketing seem to not have much in common. One is meant to tell you, the reader, about what the traveler has gone through on adventures. The other is meant to lure the reader in to visiting a destination through attractive advertising. However, both have in common that they can entice the reader to actually visit or dream about visiting places that are written about. Both also have in common that they influence the reader in how they perceive the places represented in either travel writing or tourism marketing. For this thesis I have combined both fields by researching how Central African Pygmies have been represented in the NGM. I have chosen the NGM because it is a widely known popular magazine with international prestige that proclaims to be 'scientific' and objective'. For the tourism marketing side I have chosen a framework that is based on Echtner and Prasad's three 'third world' marketing myths: the myth of the unchanged, the myth of the unrestrained and the myth of the uncivilized. First I will give a short summary of my thesis, the research question will be answered and I will touch upon the limitations of this study and further research suggestions.

The first article was published in 1960 and written by Anne Eisner Putnam about her experiences living with Pygmies at Camp Putnam in the Ituri Forest, Belgian Congo. "My life with Africa's little people" chronicles Putnam witnessing and describing various activities Pygmies engage in to the American readers. Her journey, Camp Putnam, a short introduction on the Pygmies and some general remarks and information about them are followed by stories about hunts, witchcraft, a funeral, an attempted lynching, and a wedding. It ends with Anne Putnam celebrating Christmas with her white neighbors and reflecting on how Camp Putnam is truly her home. A condensing and paternalizing tone is present throughout the article, with language being used that would not be acceptable today such as using 'little people', 'midgets', and 'African dwarfs' to describe Pygmies. Overall I conclude that, out of all three tropes, the article by Putnam portrays Pygmies as uncivilized and unchanged the most, both textual and visual. Although, in text, she never makes any comparison to western or American culture, they are subtly present. One thread throughout her article is the superstition and witchcraft Pygmies believe in, by adding in the conclusion of her article that she is tired of their antics she hints at the reader that she finds them irrational and superstitious beliefs. Also the fact that she mentions how they almost never see white people and their excitement over the car makes them look uncivilized to the western reader. Visually, their primitive or uncivilized nature is highlighted through pictures of (almost) nude Pygmies of all genders and ages, supplemented by photos of

their primitive dwellings, and day-to-day activities. The people look generally happy or stoic, both of which were characteristics of the three tropes.

Paul Salopek his article was published in the September 2005 special issue about Africa, which dared its readers to see Africa in a ‘different’ – unspecified - light. In “Who rules the forest”, Salopek visits the Ituri forest and especially the areas around its main road. In between stories about a Pygmy hunt for meat and honey Salopek introduces the readers to other characters that life in the Ituri forest: an Italian priest trying to get attention of charities to fix the ‘impoverished’ main road of the Ituri forest, a Congolese warlord talking about his magic powers (and cannibalism), an American conservationist trying to save wildlife and Pygmies in the forest amidst growing immigration of refugees and others to the area, and an educated Congolese inventor unable to get work. Whereas Putnam her article read more like a diary or travelogue, Salopek writes as if he wanted to write a novel but got stuck with a ‘scientific’ magazine instead, his descriptions of the forest are sprinkled with figurative expressions and comparisons. Unlike the article by Putnam, in which the text and photographs quite matched to each other, in Salopek his article they tell a different story. Whereas the text is not only focused on Pygmies, the images, sans one or possible two, focus on Pygmies and their rituals that are not mentioned in the text.

Textual and visual both highlight the unrestrained nature of the Ituri forest and how well the Pygmies fit in their environment. No mention is made of dangerous animals, only the dangerous humans, like the warlord, are mentioned in text. The photos show the lush greenery and the introduction of is article is an ode to the ‘enigmatic color of empire only the Mbuti know’. Textual, Pygmies are represented as both unchanged and uncivilized, but in a romanticized way. It is the modern way of life and those ‘more civilized’ than the Pygmies that form a threat against the forest. Their supposed primitiveness is not seen as a bad vice, but as a way of living that should be preserved. The Mbuti are the innocent victims of the modern world around them. The Ituri being the ‘final frontier’ in Africa. Visually, the article is made up of several collages of pictures, each with a different theme. Most of the photos relate to the rite of passage boys have to go through. The photos are characterized by having the same dark, but cozy, and mysterious atmosphere. The two pictures taken outside lack these elements. Again, the myths of the unchanged and uncivilized are present. The captions of the photos only give the reader superficial information about what is happening, and some of the photos have definitely been included just for their artistic merit.

In this thesis I have discussed a subject that has received little to no attention in academic work yet: the contemporary representation of Pygmies in the NGM. By analyzing two articles

written in period 1960-2005 within a framework based on Echtner and Prasad's three tourism marketing tropes I have combined travel writing and tourist marketing research. The main research question was: how has the visual and textual representation of Central African Pygmies changed in National Geographic Magazine between 1960-2005? Based on my findings I conclude that representation of Pygmies in NGM has not shifted much. In both articles Pygmies as unchanged was still present but in different ways. However, whereas Putnam her 'unchanged' makes the Pygmies look like a romanticized infantile group of happy Pygmies, Salopek his unchanged is to highlight that the Mbuti way of life needs to be preserved as it is. In Putnam her article the myth of the unrestrained was more present in her portrayal of the people, whom help her navigate the forest. In Salopek his article this trait too is visible, but his unrestrained focuses more on the nature of the Ituri. This is logical considering his whole article seems to be a plea for the protection of the Ituri forest and also its wildlife and human inhabitants. The myth of the uncivilized also came back in both articles. Again, not meant in a negative way. It is noticeable that Putnam mentions more activities that portray the Pygmies as uncivilized than Salopek does. This is probably because in Putnam her time, it was more normal to see these people and being uncivilized as an objective fact instead of a subjective opinion.

Between the two articles elements of Pygmy lifestyle that could be deemed 'inappropriate' have also conveniently be left out. For example: whereas Putnam mentions elephant hunting, Salopek does not mention it at all. This shift in representation certainly has to do with the changing of time (colonial versus postcolonial setting) but it also has to do with shifts in editing policies. Over the years NGM began to publish articles that called for action against climate change and natural degradation. Furthermore, the NG is nowadays pretty well known for their nature conservation. Stories about elephant hunting would not fare well with twenty-first century readers. The sympathy Salopek tries to evoke in his reader for the Pygmies could be jeopardized if stories about hunting threatened animals or attempted lynching were to be included.

How does the representation of Pygmies fit in the broader discourse of representations of Africa? Some of the characteristics belonging to the (stereotypical) representation of Africa mentioned in the introduction also applied to the Pygmies. In both articles cannibalism is mentioned. Both article also focus on the Pygmy physique and how it is different from white and other black people. In Putnam her time it was even believed that the Pygmies formed their own separate race so different were they from their African neighbours, it was thought. More 'positive', but still harmful and stereotypical, tropes such as Africa as 'pure', 'primitive' and full of nature were also present. In the end, I conclude that the representation of Pygmies is

definitely more positive than the representation of Africa. In Salopek his article they are even portrayed as victims of the Africans around them.

### Limitations and further research

There are several limitations to this thesis. First of all, the conclusion of this article has been based on the qualitative analysis of only two articles. Which allowed more in-depth study of these two articles specific, but which has as a drawback that it neglects the analysis of other articles written in this time period about Pygmies, which could lead to a more precise and/or broader conclusion. For further research I would recommend larger qualitative or broader quantitative research like others have done in the past.

Secondly, this thesis only looked at the representation of Pygmies in the NGM, neglecting NG's online presence, television channel, and other magazines. Although I highly doubt it, these other NG media channels could represent Pygmies in a different way than their standard magazine does. However, a subscription to National Geographic, only gives access to the digital archive of NGM and not its sister magazines and in order to rewatch NG documentaries one would need a Disney+ subscription. However, looking up their online content is (mostly) free and would be a nice addition for further research since it might give a different perspective on the portrayal of Pygmies or the Ituri forest.

Thirdly, this thesis has both a textual and visual analysis. I choose to do both instead of one since Mendelson and Darling-Wolf have demonstrated that the textual and visual story in NGM are often different from each other. By discussing both I could see if this is true for the representation of Pygmies too. Furthermore, now the two conclusions can be compared to each other to see if where and how they are different, or the same. However, this approach has the drawback that, due to word limitations, both textual and visual analysis might not be as in-depth as they could be. Further research could focus on textual or visual analysis individually.

Lastly, by choosing to work with the three tropes of Echtner and Prasad specifically, information about the representation of Pygmies that did not relate directly to the three myths was not taken into account. By working with a framework like that of Echtner and Prasad, one is in danger of neglecting that which does not fit the framework. I have tried to counteract this by also showing when the tropes were not applicable. However, this is still working within the framework. I suggest that additional research could be done in which a different framework is applied to the same articles for a more in-depth conclusion from a different angle on the representation of Pygmies in NGM.

## APPENDIX

Images removed due to copyright

## Bibliography

Source image front page: “African pygmies and a European explorer”, 300 ppi scan of *Collier's New Encyclopedia*, Volume 1 (1921), opposite page 58, panel B. Accessed through Wikimedia commons, 24/6/2022.

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