CONFLICT TOURISM

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RISK IN CHOOSING A CONFLICT TOURISM DESTINATION

BSc Tourism Thesis 2018/2019

Author: Aafke Roelofs (980217000002)
Under supervision of: Jasper de Vries
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Author name: Aafke Roelofs
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Abstract

There is a general assumption that tourists tend to be risk averse, and peace and security are preconditions for tourism. However, dangerous places can deter but also attract people. Conflict tourism as touristic activities taking place at a destination that is somehow conflicted in terms of war and political instability is a relatively new phenomenon. This thesis aims to find out how perceived risks and uncertainties in conflict tourism destinations influence the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination. Risks and uncertainties, push and pull factors, the decision-making process and voluntary risk-taking were examined. The results demonstrate that perceived risks and uncertainties lead people to take certain actions in the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination. Visiting conflict tourism destinations was found not to necessarily be a form of voluntary risk-taking, rather there were contextual factors that influenced this decision such as timing and finding local contacts. Overall, tourists are aware of the risks that come with such travels and act on this before leaving for their journey, demonstrating the interaction between risks and uncertainties and choosing a conflict tourism destination. Nevertheless, the overall experience of participants was perceived very positively. Because in the end, risk is everywhere.

Keywords: _Conflict tourism, risk, travel motivation, decision-making_

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Aafke Roelofs   Wageningen, June 2019

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1. Introduction

Prologue:

> *The summer of 2018 took me to Mexico. Friends I have there, the climate, diverse culture and beautiful nature there all attracted me to the country, and so inclined me to choose this as a tourism destination. However, I mainly visited the South of Mexico due to the drug activity and conflict in the north of the country and the risks that would bring to our travels. It was simply safer to stay out of this risky area*.

This personal experience demonstrates a tendency towards safe tourism destinations and an avoidance of risk when travelling, which can be expected when looking for a holiday to relax and get away from the stressful daily life we all experience sometimes. This experience is also supported by an overall predominant discourse that tourists tend to choose safe places as tourism destinations because they need a sense of safety and security (Buda, 2016; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2004). There is a general assumption that tourists tend to be risk averse (Uriely, Maoz & Reichel, 2007). It also makes the statement of Pizam, Mansfeld & Hall (1996), saying that peace and security are preconditions for tourism to be able to take place, seem compelling.

However, there is also a possibility that tourists do not always look for safe and risk averse destinations for their holiday. According to Buda (2016), dangerous places can deter but also attract people. Vacationing for tourists can be seen as a 'license for thrill', giving tourists the opportunity to seek adventure, away from their everyday behavioural restraints (Uriely, 2006; Brin, 2006). The religious and/or spiritual importance of some destinations may attract tourists more than a conflict in the same area may deter them (Brin, 2006). Moreover, it can attract a new type of tourists that come because rather than despite of this reason (Brin, 2006). This raises questions like what causes people to make this choice, why do people potentially ignore risks and uncertainties in their travels and what influences this?

The objective of this research is to find an answer to the question how perceived risks and uncertainties in conflict tourism destinations influence the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination? The exploratory nature of the research will attempt to generate novel perspectives on this relatively unstudied topic in tourism, attempting to address the research gap in conflict tourism studies. This thesis will start with a literature review, delineating some theoretical considerations to be made as a basis for this research and to be able to derive the research questions in the analytical framework thereafter. Next, the methodology of the research will be described. The results of the research will be mentioned, after which the implications an limitations will be discussed. Finally, some concluding remarks will be delineated.

2. Literature review

In this literature review, some theoretical considerations regarding important concepts surrounding conflict tourism will be explored. First, tourist/travel motivation will introduce the emergence of push and pull factors. Next, decision-making is important to understand the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination, which connects to the importance of risk and uncertainty that have a role in this process. These concepts describe what can be of influence in this decision-making process and how these concepts are understood. Lastly, the tourism and conflict section will shed a light on the current connections between the two concepts and how this can be understood differently.

2.1. Travel motivation

The first concept of this literature review will have a focus on travel motivation. Travel motivation is a driving force for tourist behaviour and decision-making (Farmaki, Khalilzadeh & Altinay, 2019). In the context of politically unstable destinations, it is important to look at what encourages to or deters tourists from visiting such a place. Farmaki, Khalilzadeh & Altinay (2019) identify travel motivation and demotivation, but since the focus of this research is to understand the deliberate choice of a conflict tourism destination, there will be an aim for the motivation of tourists rather than demotivation. Farmaki et al. (2019) mention push and pull factors as the most predominant determinants in decision-making, which was first elaborately introduced by Dann (1977), delineating what really makes tourists travel.

Push factors are inner/internal desires to escape from stress, daily routines and environments that influence a person's decision-making as they try to deal with these factors (Dann, 1977; Farmaki et al., 2019; Sastre & Pakhdee-Auksorn, 2017). They are usually intangible (Mohammad & Som, 2010) and may direct to a particular destination. Push factors are attributes intertwined with pull factors (Su, Johnson & O'Mahony, 2018). Pull factors are outer/external destination attributes that spark interest in travel that are specific to the destination and used to attract tourists (Dann, 1977; Farmaki et al., 2019; Sastre & Pakhdee-Auksorn, 2017). These type of factors may be tangible resources as well as perception and expectation (Mohammad & Som, 2010). These two forces work together and interact to push and pull people to travel as internal desires compel them and external destination attributes attract them.

Additionally, push and pull factors can be determinants of tourists' perception as they build individual perceptions of a destination that might be different from the actual destination attributes (Mohammad & Som, 2010). These destination attributes themselves are determined by the way tourists receive and process information (Mohammad & Som, 2010), which refers back to perception. This could be connected to tourists' perception of risk and uncertainty at a conflict tourism destination, which will be further discussed later on in this literature review. However, this connection of push and pull factors that compel and attract tourists to visit conflict tourism destinations has not been a focus in past research. Rather, past literature has mostly focused on push and pull factors in general as determinants of a destination's attractiveness.

Farmaki et al. (2019) mention the importance of research towards travel to conflict areas and its effect on tourist perceptions of risk due to the narrow awareness of motivating (or discouraging) factors to visit conflict areas. Push and pull theory can be used to examine the motivating factors that make people choose conflict areas as their tourism destination. Since push and pull motivation theory is considered the most widely accepted theory behind tourist travel motivation, decision-making and

destination choice (Sastre & Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017), these concepts will be discussed in the next section of this literature review.

2.2. Decision-making

The next important concept in this literature reviews is decision-making (DM) in tourism. According to Ghaderi et al. (2017), things like terrorism, war and political unrest can affect the decision-making process of tourists since safety and security seem to be prerequisites for tourism to take place. In this context, safe places can be defined as places that have reached a certain level of peace and stability (Lisle, 2000, p. 92; Hall, Timothy & Duvall, 2004). Furthermore, Karl (2018) argues that there is an undeniable role for risk and uncertainty in destination choice (DC). However, it is not elaborated what factors influence DC and what or who has an influence on this. This needs to be considered since for example a negative travel advice, media, friends/family can influence the perception people have of a destination before making a DC. As Lovelock (2004) has found, advice given by travel agents on the safety of an area as tourist destination can be of importance in DC and still needs more research.

2.3. Risk and uncertainty in tourism

Risk and uncertainty have been widely researched in tourism studies, especially their important role in destination choice as has been mentioned previously. Although risk and uncertainty are often used interchangeably, risk can be defined as *"[an] assessment of possibilities that certain (negative) events occur"* (Karl, 2018, p. 131) whereas uncertainty is generally referred to as "*partial knowledge during the decision-making process*" (Karl, 2018, p. 131). Risk in the context of tourism however, can be understood in different forms, most commonly either in the form of war/political instability, health, crime/accidents, legal, financial or natural disasters (Bianchi, 2006; Floyd et al., 2004; Law, 2006; Uriely et al., 2006). Williams & Baláž (2015) theorize risk as something potential in the future and explains it as a lack of knowledge or experience, linking to the description of uncertainty by Karl (2018). However, this does not include the potential that tourists can also purposely look for risk.

Risk can be either absolute or perceived (Adam, 2015). Absolute or real risk is commonly used as "*an objective assessment of the potential of achieving an undesirable outcome*" (Adam, 2015, p. 100). On the other hand, perceived or subjective risk is an expectation of a potential undesirable outcome that is personally determined and can be attached to a possible outcome (Adam, 2015). While previous studies have focused mainly on the latter, this study will combine the two and give more attention to absolute risk of a destination in combination with tourists' perception of this risk. Previous studies have shown the importance of risk perception in DC, arguing that safety and security are considered a great influence on DC (Floyd et al., 2004), especially when including the risk factors mentioned above.

Previous research has focused mainly on risk in terms of adventure (Adam, 2015), drugs (Uriely et al., 2006) and terrorism (Cochrane, 2015; Tujan, Gaughran & Mollett, 2007; Ghaderi, Saboori & Khoshkam, 2017). Furthermore, travel related risk and risk perception are understood differently for every individual, since the risk tolerance level differs depending on personal characteristics and experiences (Adam, 2015; Leggat & Franklin, 2012). The focus in this study will be on war and political instability and the conscious choice of putting safety at risk. This type of risk-seeking will be further elaborated in the next section about tourism and conflict.

2.4. Tourism and conflict

The connection between tourism and conflict is generally understood as poor/conflicted areas' dependence on tourism as well as the economic and socio-political role of tourism in post-conflict recovery (Novelli, Morgan & Nibigira, 2012; Buda, 2016; Lisle, 2000; Raj & Griffin, 2017). In the context

of post-conflict recovery, tourism has a re-branding role for destinations and enforces development of infrastructure and economical growth (Novelli et al., 2012). Besides this connection, the danger that comes with conflict has typically been considered to be undesirable and having a negative influence on the travel experience (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Floyd et al., 2004). Thus, a general understanding of the connection between tourism and conflict can be understood as conflict deterring tourism from a destination.

However, as mentioned previously, recent studies have found that danger can also attract tourists, competing the general discourse of safety in travelling (Buda, 2016; Brin, 2006). This phenomenon has been described as sensation-seeking, adventure travel (Lisle, 2000), novelty-seeking (Karl, 2018; Adam, 2015) and (voluntary) risk-taking (Uriely, Maoz & Reichel, 2007; Uriely & Belhassen, 2006; Williams & Baláž, 2015; Pizam et al., 2004; Karl, 2018). This shows that there is such a thing as seeking risk and taking risks being experienced as a positive aspect of travel, providing a novel interest for research. This will be further elaborated in the next section.

2.5.   Types of conflict tourism

In tourism literature, conflict tourism has been subject of research for some time. However, it has been associated with different concepts and developments. The most researched topic in this area is the development of dark tourism, which can be described as established commodities of death, tragedy and horror sold to tourists (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Cochrane, 2015). Another related concept is post-conflict tourism, ensuring the safety discourse for tourists while at the same time being able to commemorate war and conflict (Lisle, 2000). This would also encompass the post-conflict recovery role of tourism specified earlier (Lisle, 2000).

Nevertheless, these types of conflict tourism mentioned above will not be the focus in this research. Conflict tourism as a form of voluntary risk-taking as described by Uriely et al. (2006), Uriely et al. (2007) and Williams and Baláž (2015) by actively choosing a conflict tourism destination will be adopted in this paper. Throughout this thesis, voluntary conflict tourism can be understood as touristic activities taking place at a destination that is somehow conflicted in terms of war and political instability. This is also related to the OECD (2013) definition of a conflict area; *"[areas] identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people [and] may include areas of political instability or repression, institutional weakness, insecurity, collapse of civil infrastructure and widespread violence*" (p.13). Seeing as this study takes sees tourists choosing conflict tourism destinations as voluntary risk-takers, they can be defined as tourists that see risk as a positive aspect in travelling, seeking risky environments and deliberately participating in dangerous behaviour (Karl, 2018; Uriely et al., 2006; Pizam et al., 2004). Whether there are people that actually participate in this type of travel will also be discussed in this thesis.

3. Analytical framework

From the literature review, a lack of research has been identified in the role of push and pull factors in conflict tourism, conflict tourism as a form of voluntary risk-taking, a general understanding of conflict tourism destinations (CTD), the role of risk and uncertainty in DC, what influences risk perception and the considerations made in DC.

Several concepts and relations were made clear. For example, the relation between decision-making and destination choice was determined. It was also made clear that there has been some attention to conflict tourism in the past, but it has not received a deeper understanding of its underlying factors.

3.1. Research questions

In this research, I will attempt to fill the research gaps determined in the literature review by asking some specific questions, based on the analytical framework presented in figure 1. First, it is important to determine what risks and uncertainties are considered in choosing a CTD. Second, it will be examined how people deal with these risks and uncertainties, which will include an examination of voluntary risk-taking. Next, it is questioned what push and pull factors are determined by risks and uncertainties that are related to conflict tourism destinations. The following part in the analytical framework relates to the interaction between the decision-making process and destination choice. Combining all of these elements, the framework represents the main research question, which is:
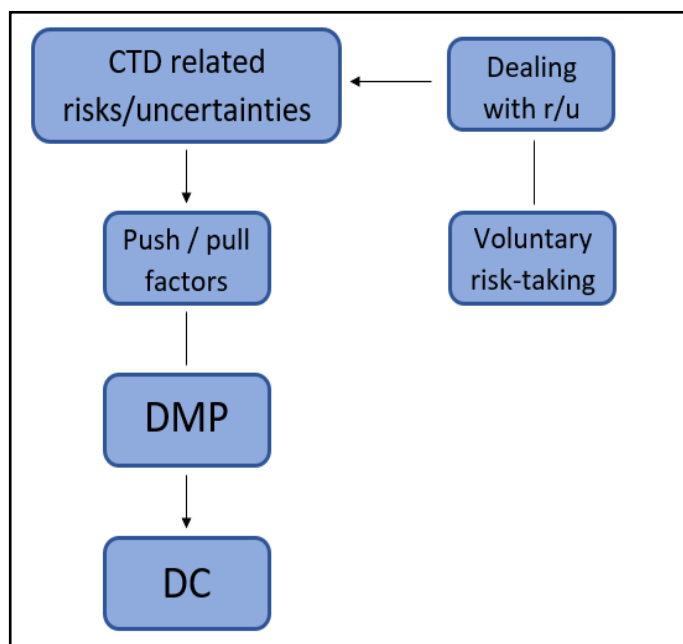

Figure 1: Analytical framework

How do perceived risks and uncertainties in CTD influence the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination?

To help find an answer to this question, the following specific research questions were determined based on the framework above:

- What risks and uncertainties are considered in choosing a CTD?
- How do people deal with risks and uncertainties and voluntary risk-taking related to CTD?
- What push and pull factors are determined by risks/uncertainties related to CTD?
- What is the interaction between DMP and DC?

These specific research questions will be the focus of this study to find an answer to the main research question by using an interpretive approach. This approach will allow the research to explore and get an understanding of conflict tourism and risks and uncertainties in tourism. How this will be achieved will be explained in the next section.

4. Methodology

Past research addressing risk in tourism studies have carried out either 1) qualitative analyses that try to explain voluntary risk-taking in tourism or 2) quantitative studies on tourists avoiding risky destinations due to their assumed risk averse nature (Uriely, Maoz & Reichel, 2007). The research design of this study uses an interpretive approach to gain an understanding of conflict tourism and voluntary risk-taking in tourism, contributing to qualitative analyses in tourism behaviour (Decrop, 1999b). This will be done by carrying out exploratory research on conflict tourism and its underlying elements by combining desk research, a thorough literature review and interviews. This approach and research design were chosen because of the novel nature of the topic and the opportunity to gain in-depth information on the research topic (Decrop, 1999b).

4.1. Desk research and literature

The first step of the research was an initial web search on conflict tourism, which included the examination of travel blogs such as 'live and let's fly' (Klint, 2017) and 'star2.com Travel' (Agency, 2019) that write about people travelling to conflict areas. This was used to gather general information on the topic and to find potential interviewees for the data collection. Following this desk research, a literature review was conducted considering different aspects surrounding conflict tourism. When initially entering 'conflict tourism' in a search engine, about 6000 results came up ranging from different topics. This meant that were many results that were not relevant for this research. A snowball approach of selecting articles was used. Articles were found appropriate when travel motivation, decision-making in tourism, risk and uncertainty in tourism or a connection between tourism and conflict was suggested in the title and/or abstract. By doing so, the research process was continued with approximately 30 articles. This process was conducted by using different search engines such as the Wageningen Library, Google Scholar, WebOfScience and the University of Guelph Library.

4.2. Sampling

To get a comprehensive insight on the push and pull factors that influence tourists in choosing a conflict tourism destination and finding an answer to the specific research questions, interviews were used as a method of data collection. Appropriate participants for this research are quite uncommon and limited, which means that the target population (people travelling to conflict areas) is very specific and difficult to access. Thus, the selection of participants for interviews required non-random sampling, more specifically snowball sampling.

To determine the appropriateness of participants, their destination(s) must be marked either red (don't travel) or orange (only necessary travel) on the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BuZa) map of travel advise at the time of travel. This map can be found in figure 2 on a
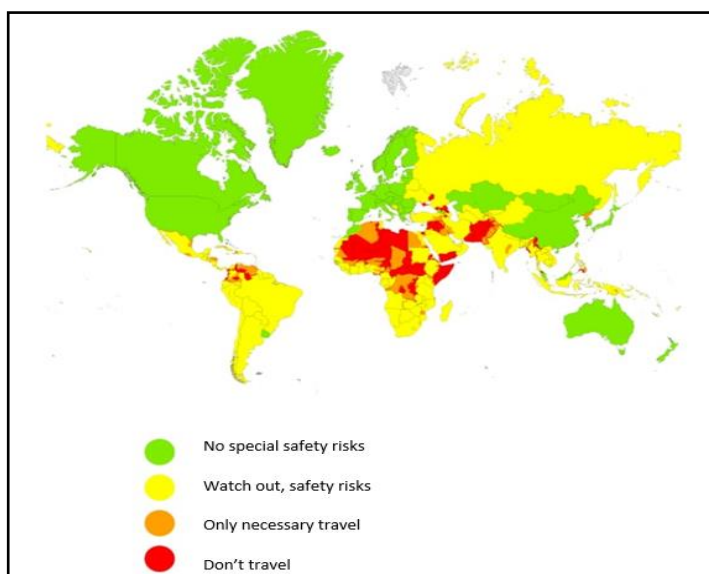

Figure 2: Global travel advise map
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

global level. When discussing the results of the study, some of the respondents' conflict destinations will be displayed on a more detailed map. Furthermore, maps of the travel advice of each of the countries mentioned by participants can be found in appendix II. These more detailed maps enabled the opportunity to determine the extent of the conflict area that respondents have visited and their appropriateness for the study.

The sampling process was started by contacting a few personal contacts that were known to have done this type of travel. Additionally, some people found during the desk research on forums done beforehand were contacted to use as starting point for determining research participants (targeted sampling). On one of the forums, a community of travellers that have the goal of visiting every country in the world were mentioned, which also includes travelling to areas of conflict and made them an appropriate group of people to interview. Here, snowball sampling was used to get from one person to the next that they knew in the community.

4.3. Data collection

To gather as much information from these interviews as possible, the interviews were semi-structured, and the questions open ended (Emans, 2004). Following the literature review, the topics that were talked about in the interviews were decision-making, risk and uncertainty and conflict tourism itself. Besides this, some general questions such as what conflict areas have been visited and when were asked. The questions were provided to the research participants beforehand to ensure accurate and precise answers. The data gathered from the interviews was recorded after gaining permission from the interviewees. In the end, seven interviews were conducted, of which six over skype with an average duration of approximately 20 minutes and one over email, where the same questions were asked and responded to in writing as elaborate as possible. All the data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and anonymised for privacy reasons (see appendix I).

4.4. Data analysis

The data was analysed with focused coding regarding the different topics that needed to be examined. First of all, the participants were asked which conflict countries they had visited and when. The different countries were listed under the label 'country' to determine the appropriateness of the participants' visit to the study regarding conflict tourism (this code is not included in the coding table).

Labels used during coding were based on both the theoretical considerations from the literature review and the specific research questions that were determined. Thus, since there were a set number of topics that needed to be deducted from the interviews, deductive/closed coding was the primary coding method. The predetermined themes that had to be deducted from the interviews were: types of conflict tourism, risks and uncertainties, travel motivation and decision-making. To find an answer to the specific research questions, sub-categories were made based on findings from the literature reviews for each theme, being the deductive part of the data analysis (see table 1). However, inductive/open coding was used for topics that came up multiple times with different research participants that were not yet integrated in the existing themes or codes. These were then integrated as sub-categories of themes or made a new theme, which can be found in table 1 in the results chapter.

5. Results

Based on the description regarding the data collection and analysis given in the last chapter, this chapter will discuss the results of the data. First, there will be a description of some countries visited by participants to give some context to the results. Following that, a table will be given that presents the coding of the interviews (table 1). The table gives each theme, its sub-categories and the answers that were given by participants. The table also shows the amount of times each code was mentioned by participants (not how many participants mentioned it). After this overview of the results, each of the themes will be discussed separately to go deeper into the findings that were drawn from the data.

5.1. Context

To give some context and determine the appropriateness of their participation in the research, it was important to determine the conflict countries that respondents had visited. Altogether, the participants have visited 24 different conflict countries. There were various countries that were visited by multiple respondents such as for example the Central African Republic (3), Iraq (3), Mali (3) and Syria (3). Figure 3 below shows the maps of these countries' travel advise to demonstrate their appropriateness for the study. All the other conflict countries mentioned in the interviews and their travel advice maps can be found in appendix II. All the countries fit the criteria of being either orange (only necessary travel) or red (don't travel) during the time of the participants' visit.
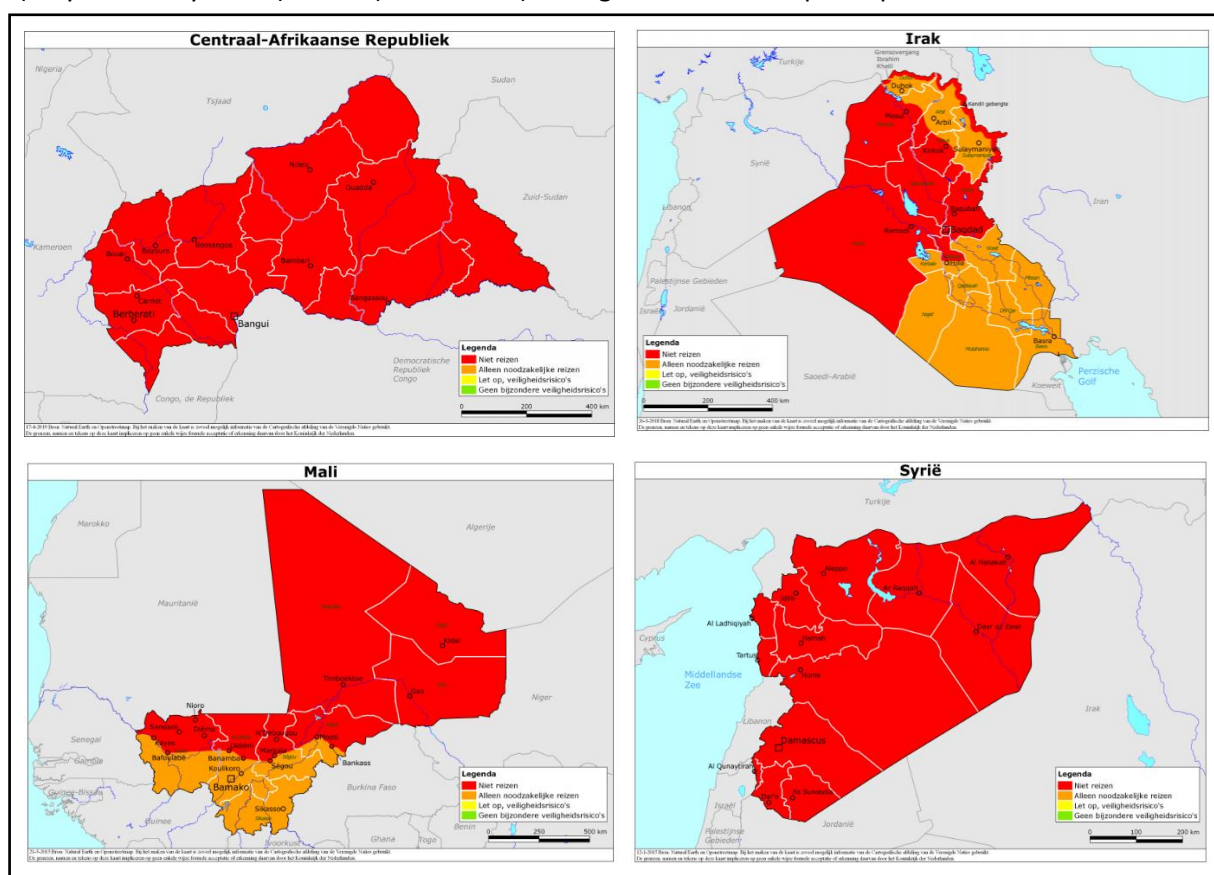

Figure 3: A sample of conflict countries visited by respondents
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

5.2. Coding table

Sub-categories			Code mentioned
Types of conflict tourism			
Area visited meets definition of 'conflict area'	Yes		7
	No		0
Definition attributes	Political instability		20
	Repression		5
	Armed conflict		13
	Widespread violence		7
	Infrastructure collapse		4
Risks & uncertainties			
Risk aware	Yes		5
	No		4
Specific risks	Terrorism (attacks)		10
	Bombing		6
	Kidnapping		9
	Organized crime		5
	Killings / murder		8
	Health		1
	General violence		11
Alternatives considered	Yes		2
	No		5
Travel motivation			
Pull factors	Nature		7
	Culture		12
	Unique experience		12
	Family		2
	Local people		4
Push factors	Away from everyday life		4
	Finding balance / peace		2
	Seeking adventure		5
Contextual	Visiting every country in the world		5
Decision-making			
Considered risks but still went	Yes		4
		Not part of the conflict	3
		Timing	10
		Risk is everywhere	6
		Young and naïve	3
	No		3
		Not before completing task	1
		Not with kids (later on)	3
Precautions taken	Risk evaluation / assessment		8
	Money		2
	(Local) contacts		15
	Security		1
	Staying lowkey		1

	Transport	3
	Travel advice (ministry)	4
	Insurance	2
	Support system	3
	Media / experts info	13
Risk influenced DC	Yes	4
	No	4
	Going to a safe area within conflict country	16
	Would do it again	4

Table 1: Coding themes, sub-categories and answers

5.3. Types of conflict tourism

For the theme 'types for conflict tourism', participants' view on what a conflict area is was discussed. Determinants of the definition of a conflict area were explored and it was established how these fit the responses of the participants. By doing so, as can be seen in table 1, it was determined that all seven participants found that their destination fit the description of a conflict area as defined in the literature review. The definition determinants specifically were sometimes mentioned directly, but also in an indirect way which can be seen in a comment like "*when I came into Israel, there were soldiers walking around everywhere, no matter what time it was in the day*", which refers to armed conflict being present in the area. Furthermore, one participant mentioned that he had "*seen many countries which we can say horrible infrastructure*" in addition to "*if you take a country like Central African Republic there was so much political unrest*". Overall, 'political instability' (20) and 'armed conflict' (13) were the most mentioned determinants and confirmed the view of the participants that their destinations meet the description of a conflict area.

However, one of the participants who has visited all the countries in the world also made a clear distinction between a 'conflict area' and a 'war zone'. He said that "*for me there is a difference between war zones and conflict areas (…), when I was in Aleppo over Christmas, there was bombing in the east and we could see and hear that when we were in Aleppo but it was far away. So It was not really a war zone, but it was definitely a conflict area*". Another participant did not mention this specific differentiation between the two descriptions, but described something that can be linked to this: "*I obviously did not go into areas where there was actually bombings because that I would not have done*". The above quotes show that there is a distinction between different types of conflict areas and even though some people visit conflict countries, they do not necessarily go to the most dangerous areas. This will also be discussed in the decision-making section. Additionally, one of the participants expressed that even though an area is marked as a conflict area, this does not necessarily mean he is in imminent risk: "*while the conflict here was more political rather than daily (i.e. the risk of an attack was minimal or zero), these are still 'conflict' zones in the general sense of the word*". These statements all show that the demarcation of an area being a 'conflict area' does not necessarily mean that you are undoubtedly getting into a dangerous situation.

5.4. Risks & uncertainties

Results regarding the consideration of risk an uncertainty and awareness of a country being marked as a conflict country were mixed (see table 1). Nevertheless, almost every participant realized that their travels were risky in some way. One participant mentioned that "*you cannot travel without being aware of the risks that you get into*", even though the same person at some point went to a conflict area, tried to get informed about it, but still arrived there asking himself "*what is going on here*". This also shows that risks are not always as apparent for travellers going to conflict areas as one might

think. Affirmatively, another participant mentioned about travelling to Israel: "*at that time, I did not realize that I might have ended up in a dangerous country*". This means that they did not always consider their travels as being risky although their description of the destination meets the definition of a conflict area.

Regarding specific risks that were experienced in these areas, there were several different aspects mentioned such as "*I can't say that it's safe, there are suicide bombings going on regularly in Kabul*" or "*people who in some way started to interfere with situations had simply been liquidated*", and even more specific "*Isis and (…) obviously more involved in criminal activities, some kidnappings*". The most important outcomes on specific risks were 'general violence' (11), 'terrorism attacks' (10) and 'kidnappings' (9), being described as most substantial for travellers in conflict destinations.

Lastly, five respondents mentioned that they had not considered any alternative destinations and two that they did. One person addressed even that he "*would consider travelling even deeper into conflict zones if this were possible*", which is a remarkable comment considering only one person mentioned this when most of the other participants appeared to avoid the most dangerous areas in a conflict country. However, there are also specific reasons that participants mentioned they did not consider any alternatives. For example because of visiting family that simply lives where they live, regardless of the state of the area. Additionally, many of the participants had a goal of visiting every country in the world. As one of these participants mentioned in the interview; "*I had decided that I wanted to visit every country and knew that this would include going to conflict areas*". This means that conflict areas are simply a part of their quest and risks may not always be a deterring factor. However, in some occasions they did consider going to safer areas within a conflict country, which will be further elaborated in the decision-making section.

5.5. Travel motivation

When discussing participants' travel motivation behind visiting conflict tourism destinations, there was a focus on the mentioning of destination attributes that pulled them to the destination and internal desires that pushed them away from home. For the pull factors, 'culture' (12) and the fact that it was a 'unique experience' (12) were the most important factors. The uniqueness of such an experience was described as "*all of the countries have something to contribute and especially these conflict areas, you can get a different angle, you can get a unique insight by going there yourself*". Push factors were less apparent and not the most important determinant in choosing a conflict tourism destination. However, 'seeking adventure' (5) and 'getting away from everyday life' (4) were factors that did come up. Although 'adventure seeking' was mentioned five times, this was done so by the same participant. This means that out of seven people, only one was looking for adventure in some way. He described that "*when travelling to a conflict zone, the general feeling is an extreme adrenalin high which is constant and relentless, and which makes visits to such places unique in a sense that other places are not*".

Besides these regular push and pull factors, there was a sub-category that was inducted from the interviews that came up in multiple interviews. As mentioned earlier, many participants had a quest of visiting every country in the world; "*I was getting towards the end of my project of visiting all countries, so I decided just to go because I wanted to complete my project*". This specific factor does not fit with either push or pull factors, since it is related to both but is more a contextual factor for travel motivation overall. 'Visiting every country in the world' gives people travel motivation to visit conflict areas since they have to, so to say, 'tick off' conflict countries off this list as well as non-conflict areas. This will be further elaborated in the discussion. This phenomenon was labelled 'contextual' under travel motivation.

5.6. Decision-making

Results referring to the decision-making process showed that there is a mixed response on whether participants had considered the risks of going to a conflict tourism destination and whether they still went through with their travels. Due to the nature of their travels to conflict areas, all participants have done so at one point, but it is important to examine to what extent they considered the risks that came with these travels. Some participants mentioned that they considered the risks but still went to the destination anyways (4). The most important factor as to why they made this decision was 'timing' (10), meaning for example going after a war has ended instead of when it is still going on, or as one of the participants mentioned "*there are many places that I would like to go that are completely safe to visit, so why not visit those now. I mean, in the future, those might be risky, so it's all about timing, about going at the right time*". Additionally, multiple participants mentioned that 'risk is everywhere' (6), referring to the fact that if you go to a so called 'dangerous' area, there is still a big chance nothing will happen while there are also things that could happen at home; "*any place that you go to can be a risky travel*", "*there is poor advice in so many countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso or Ivory Coast even, where there have been terror attacks, but these terror attacks also happen in cities like Paris*". Another participant even said: "*you know that there is more chance of you dying in your home than while travelling*". However, some participants had mentioned that in some other cases they considered the risks and made the decision not to go (3). One reason for this was that they did not want to take a risk with their children, but only for themselves: "*it is not something that would stop me, what I wouldn't do is go with my family, my kids. That is something I would never do*". Another reason for one participant was that he had already completed his task of visiting every country in the world and decided from there on he would take less risk, skipping the most risky areas. When he was asked whether travel advice influences his destination choice, he said that "*nowadays it does, because I have completed my quest of visiting every country*".

Multiple different precautions to act on potential risks and uncertainties came up that are related to how people deal with risks and uncertainties and how these influence the decision-making process. Having '(local) contacts' (15) was an important precaution that many travellers made; "*I think that if you have the right contacts, you can make yourself have a much lower risk of something happening*" and even beforehand "*try and reach out to any locals in that area that are visiting to get their insights*". Furthermore, using 'media/expert info' (13), making a 'risk evaluation/assessment' (8) and looking at 'travel advice' (5) were important measures that were taken before going to a conflict area. Nevertheless, some participants mentioned that they use media and travel advice as an indication of the situation in a country and not as a decisive tool. One of the participants explained the following about government travel advice: "*I understand why government warnings have to be a bit conservative. Because of course they don't want anyone to go to these countries, things can happen. But if you get your mind into this situation, if you have an understanding of relationships, if you go there with certain attitudes you can actually visit every country safely*". Regardless, when a risk evaluation/assessment was used as a precautionary measure, these information sources were still used as indicators on the safety situation in their potential destination(s).

Answers whether risks had influenced their destination choice were split. This is because for many of the participants, the decision of going to a certain country was not much affected by risk, but mainly because of their quest to visit every country in the world. However, risk did influence the area within the country that they visited; "*I tried to go to the areas that is the most safe for the purpose of my trip. So when I visited every country, it was to visit every country, it was not to visit every area within that country, like every region. So, for example if you go to Somalia, you can go to Somaliland, which is in United Nations part of Somalia. So if you visit Somaliland, it is much, much safer than visiting Somalia*".

This demonstrates that even though some participants were not influenced by the fact that they were visiting a conflict country, they did not go the most dangerous areas. Rather, they tried to be as safe as possible by avoiding the most dangerous areas, referring back to the distinction between a 'conflict zone' and a 'war zone' mentioned earlier in the section on types of conflict tourism.

Finally, the overall experience looking back at their travels referred back to the pull factors of a destination ('unique experience', getting to know 'local people' etc.) that came forward. The overall experience of these people was very good as one participant said: "*I have lived a life that normally would take 5 people to live, so I am very fortunate and if you would ask me 'would you do it again?' I would do it again.. tomorrow*". Other answers were that their experiences were "*excellent*", "*surprising*", "*amazing*", and one person was "*in awe*". This demonstrates that even though these people went to conflict areas for their travels (not seeking the risk necessarily) they do not experience this type of travel as a negative experience.

6. Discussion

6.1.   Implications for existing literature

This research started with a literature review that provided a basis for the analytical framework and research questions. Looking back at this literature, there was a general discourse that tourists need a sense of safety and security (Buda, 2016; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2004) and that tourists are risk averse (Uriely, Maoz & Reichel, 2007). Another side of the literature mentioned that dangerous places could also attract people (Buda, 2016) because of the opportunity it gives to seek adventure and get away from everyday life (Uriely, 2006; Brin, 2006). The data analysis of this thesis shows a mixed picture on conflict tourism rather than risk being either attracting or deterring. It revealed that only one person travelling to conflict areas was doing so to look for adventure and even mentioned going deeper into conflict zones. This shows the risk attracting factor that had been mentioned in some literature (Brin, 2006; Uriely, 2006), where risk is a positive factor in travel. Nevertheless, many of the other travellers made clear they do travel to these kind of areas, but mostly because of a contextual factor (visiting every country in the world) that made considering an alternative country impossible. However, even in this situation, these travellers expressed that they would find safer areas to go to within a conflict country. Moreover, some participants did not even consider their travels as being risky, implicating further that risk is not necessarily an attracting factor. Overall, people travelling to conflict areas are not really seen as risk-seekers, which is a misconception when looking at literature that says that conflict areas can attract a new type of tourists that come because rather than despite of this reason (Brin, 2006). There are several factors that are taken into account by these travellers, but they are not as critical as they may sound since they mention that risk is everywhere, which shows that they are willing to take that risk on a daily basis. They do not seek this risk but rather downplay it by using strategies to decrease risk. Thus, the analysis shows that the reality fits in between two extremes and demonstrates a need to nuance the two ends found in existing literature. Findings are not contradictory to literature, rather it is more complex than has been described in the past.

Regarding push and pull theory, the data aligns with what is mentioned in the literature. Particular destinations had their own specific pull factors that attracted people to visit these destinations (Dann, 1977; Farmaki et al., 2019; Sastre & Pakhdee-Auksorn, 2017). These were indeed intertwined with push factors (Su, Johnson & O'Mahony, 2018), which were some general internal and intangible desires (Mohammad & Som, 2010) that pushed them away from home to escape from home and everyday life (Dann, 1977; Farmaki et al., 2019; Sastre & Pakhdee-Auksorn, 2017). However, there was also a contextual factor that is related to both push and pull factors but is a more independent contextual factor for travel motivation overall. This factor was a community that were on a quest to visit every country in the world. This objective gives people travel motivation to visit conflict areas since they have to 'tick off' conflict countries off their list and forces them to visit risky countries. This links to social psychology in such a way that these people might feel some kind of peer pressure in a sense that they have to put themselves in risk to complete this task that people are completing. In literature, this type of behaviour is described as self-destructing or self-defeating behaviour and can be understood as behaviour that deliberately or intentionally has definite or probable negative effects on oneself (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

Lastly, a distinction between a 'war zone' and 'conflict zone' that has been made by one of the participants but came forward with other participants as well in other words, is something that was not mentioned before in existing literature. This can also explain the nuance made above, where

people might not visit a war zone, but rather a conflict zone that has less apparent and direct risks to travellers. Moreover, one of the participants mentioned the phenomenon 'availability bias', which he described as *"a psychological expression which says that people will notice or search for information that confirms something that you believe in from before"*. This description is equivalent to confirmation bias in literature that describes this term as "*the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations or a hypothesis in hand*" (Nickerson, 1998, p. 175). The use of confirmation or availability bias by this participant in this specific context implied that even countries that do have a negative travel advice, and are described as such in media and other sources, might not necessarily be so as they give a wrong view on the situation in reality. This has become clear from the data since several participants said that by taking the right measures, it is still safe to visit such an area even though many sources say that it is not.

6.2. Limitations and future research

There are also some limitations to this research that have to be considered when looking at the results of this research, since these could have had an influence on the outcomes. First, the definition of a conflict area that has been used in this paper is based on an OECD (2013) due diligence guidance that did not focus on (conflict) tourism. Although OECD is a reliable source, this definition is still quite subjective and might not be entirely applicable in the case of conflict tourism.

Additionally, this study has made use of the Dutch national travel advise maps (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2019) to determine the appropriateness of countries visited by participants. There are some issues with the use with these maps. First, these maps do not always correlate with the situation in the country participants have visited at the exact time of their visit. The maps have been withdrawn from this app when the advice was valid from May 2019 to June 2019. Nevertheless, some cases were very apparent as being a conflict area at the time of travel, as participants were also asked when their visit took place. Furthermore, the travel advice maps might have a political purpose. This means that when a country would give a negative travel advice to another country, it could influence the relation between these two countries. This also might implicate that certain countries who have a positive travel advice might in reality not be as safe as said, to safeguard this relationship.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the fact that non-random, specifically targeted and snowball, sampling has been used to find participants. This means that the data collection process lacks randomness and thus influences the outcomes. Moreover, using snowball sampling within a community of travellers visiting every country in the world meant that these travellers had a specific reason for visiting conflict areas. They had a goal that somewhat forced the to visit conflict areas, meaning they had to accept the risks they were taken whether they were looking for risks or not. Moreover, the data collection has resulted in a limited number of participants that were willing to conduct an interview and contribute to the research. This is partly due to a lack of time to contact more people. These factors will probably have the most influence on the external validity of the research since this influences the ability to represent the entire community of travellers taking part in conflict tourism and export conclusions to this setting.

The above comments suggest that improving these limitations could advance future research on conflict tourism. Enhancing the randomization process and representability of research participants that have travelled to conflict areas could improve the validity and representability of conclusions. Additionally, since this research only found one participant that confirmed an attracting side of risk, it would be interesting to find solely participants that participate in voluntary risk-taking and find out what motivations they have for this and what their view of risk is. This will go deeper into the phenomenon of voluntary risk-taking, which has not been confirmed in this research. Questions for

future research in this area are how do voluntary risk-takers in conflict tourism view risk, what is the motivations of certain tourists to participate in voluntary risk-taking and what influences risk perception in the context of conflict tourism? Additionally, linking back to confirmation bias, it would be interesting to look at questions such as what is the role of media and other sources in risk perception and to what extent are images that media and other sources present of conflict countries consistent with reality?

Furthermore, a the relation between the social environment of tourists and destination choice was touched upon earlier and could be a new direction for future research. Group behaviour in travel has been researched in the past (Meng, 2010; Thornton, Shaw & Williams, 1997), but not in the context of peer pressure related to risky travel. In future research, it is interesting to look at questions such as how does a social phenomenon like self-destructing behaviour influence the type of travel people participate in and to what extent does peer pressure influence the risk people take in travel?

7. Conclusion

In the discussion, several implications of the study were considered and already referred to the main goal of this research, which is to find an answer to the question how do perceived risks and uncertainties in CTD influence the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination? To complement the discussion of results, this concluding chapter will give answers to the specific research questions that were established. Based on these answers and the overall research, a final answer to the main question will be explored to finalize this thesis.

What risks and uncertainties are considered in choosing a CTD?

Risks and uncertainties were found to be something that is very much considered by travellers visiting conflict destinations and they were mostly aware of this. Because of this, the answer to this question became very apparent during the analysis. The specific risks that came forward from the data analysis that are considered by travellers visiting conflict tourism destinations were general violence, terrorism attacks, kidnappings, killings/murder, bombings, organized crime and health risks. While choosing a conflict tourism destination, these were clearly considered in the process.

How do people deal with risks and uncertainties and voluntary risk-taking related to CTD?

Participants were predominantly aware of the risks they were taking. In some situations, they acted on these as well as they mentioned several precautions that were taken to decrease the risks and uncertainties that came with their travels. Examples are (local) contacts, gaining info from media or experts, a risk evaluation or assessment and using travel advisory prior to their departure. These were the most important factors as to how people dealt with the risks and uncertainties in a conflict tourism destination. This demonstrates that people deal with risks and are aware of them. However, it became apparent that risk is also seen as a part of travel that is unavoidable regardless of the type of destination you might be visiting.

Additionally, regarding risks and uncertainties, there was a focus on voluntary risk-taking. In the literature review about types of conflict tourism, adventure-seeking and voluntary risk-taking came forward. However, it is remarkable that the data analysis of this research does not support this concept. The analysis found that only one participant found adventure seeking a motivation to travel to conflict areas and expressed that "*when travelling to a conflict zone, the general feeling is an extreme adrenalin high which is constant and relentless, and which makes visits to such places unique in a sense that other places are not*". Every other participant has made clear that even though they were travelling to a conflict country, they would try and pick out the safest areas within these countries to visit. Furthermore, several precautions were taken to prevent any risks or uncertainties to influence their travels in a negative way. So, even though all the participants have travelled to conflict destinations, the majority were aware that this was a risky undertake and took measures to decrease the risk of anything happening to them. As described in the discussion, people travelling to conflict areas are not necessarily seen as risk-seekers. Rather, this is much more complex since it has been mentioned that risk is everywhere and they are willing to take that risk. They do not seek this risk but rather downplay it by using strategies to decrease risk. Consequently, it can be said that tourists travelling to a CTD do not necessarily participate in voluntary risk-taking.

What push and pull factors are determined by risks/uncertainties related to CTD?

When looking at what pulled tourists to a conflict tourism destination, participating in a unique experience, culture, nature, local people and family living in the area were destination attributes and thus pull factors that came forward. These are reasonably customary attributes that are not too dissimilar from regular tourism destinations. What pushed them away from home was seeking adventure, getting away from their everyday life and finding a certain balance or peace. These are the internal desires and thus push factors that were determined, which are more distinctive from regular tourism destinations. Nevertheless, pull factors were found to be of greater importance for choosing a conflict tourism destination. Additionally, there was a contextual factor of visiting every country in the world that was found to be a more independent contextual factor for travel motivation. In the discussion, it has been touched upon this possibly being behaviour that deliberately or intentionally has definite or probable negative effects on oneself, which would need more research.

What is the interaction between DMP and DC?

Risks and uncertainties have been found to have a great role in destination choice (Karl, 2018). This has been confirmed in the analysis since several participants mentioned their decision of choosing an alternative destination or choosing a safer area within a conflict area to lower the risk they would be in. Consequently, the decision-making process in this case has been influenced in such a way that during this process, there were several factors considered that led to a different destination choice. These factors were not only risks and uncertainties itself but also precautions that were taken to act on these as people try to deal with risks and uncertainties. Thus, the interaction between DMP and DC has been found to be apparent in different ways.

How do perceived risks and uncertainties in CTD influence the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination?

Based on the discussion and the combination of all the answers given to the questions above, it can be concluded that perceived risks and uncertainties that were taken into account by people travelling to conflict counties influenced the specific area that people visit within this country. There was a distinction made between 'conflict zones' and 'war zones', where usually war zones were avoided to assure safety during their travels. Nevertheless, these risks and uncertainties lead people to take certain actions in the process of choosing a conflict tourism destination such as making sure that they have (local) contacts, gaining info from media or experts, conducting a risk evaluation or assessment and using travel advisory prior to the travel. Additionally, there was a contextual factor that influenced the decision-making process of participants which implied that visiting conflict tourism destinations is not necessarily a form of voluntary risk-taking, although this should be researched more in depth. Overall, participants were very much aware of the risks that come with travelling to conflict tourism destinations and acted on these even before leaving for their journey. This demonstrates the interaction between risks and uncertainties and choosing a CTD even more. Nevertheless, the overall experience of participants was perceived very positively. Because in the end, risk is everywhere.

8. References

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Appendix I: Interview transcripts

So, my first question is just simply; what are the conflict destinations that you have visited?

Uhm, I would say Central African Republic and Libya would be conflict areas. That's pretty much rock bottom, Yemen and Somalia too are conflict areas but I just visited parts that were not much affected by the war. I went to Somaliland, which is eh.. It's almost like an independent state where there has been a (…) with tourists and the many attacks or anything. But in Central African Republic and Libya, there is no… not much of a central government. It's basically militias ruling or coalitions of rebel groups.

So you would say then that the conflict is based on political instability there?

Yeah.

When did you visit these countries?

Uhm, Libya in.. I have it here.. Libya in August 2018 and then Central African Republic in uhm... yeah around the same time, so probably June 2018.

Okay. When you went there, did you consider your travels as being risky?

If I considered it risky?

Yeah.

Uhm, yes. I was a bit worried because I was coming from Sudan to Central African Republic and there was the Norwegian Embassy, people working there supposed to be going but it had escalated.. the situation. So, (…) in the Central African Republic they were just in a mass killing in a church and all of the following days, there were killings from both sides. It's two rebel groups; one Muslim and one Christian called Anti-Balaka and Seleka rebels and uhm.. Yeah this was going on in the capital every day when I was there.

Okay, so I sent you the definition of a conflict area, do you think that the areas that you went to meet this definition?

Yes. Absolutely.

Okay. So, were you… yeah you were aware before you went there that where you were going was a conflict area right?

Yep.

Did you consider any alternative destinations?

No. I had decided that I wanted to visit every country and knew that this would include going to conflict areas. So, for me there is a difference between war zones and conflict areas. War zone are probably just.. not even directly.. I mean when I was in Aleppo over Christmas, there was bombing in the east and we could see and hear that when we were in Aleppo but it was far away. So It was not really a war zone, but it was definitely a conflict area.

So, what made you decide you want to go to this destination or these destinations?

Same as last question, visiting every country. I think that all of the countries have something to contribute and especially these conflict areas, you can get a different angle, you can get a unique insight by going there yourself. Well, when I travel I always stay with local people and hearing it from their side is always different than the information you get from the media.

Yeah, so those are the kind of things that pulled you to the destination?

Yes.

Are there also any internal desires that pushed you to go there? Besides from visiting all the countries in the world?

Not really.

Okay. So, what are some considerations that you made before travelling to these destinations?

Uhm.. So, I beforehand did kind of a risk evaluation. But uhm, you know that there are living in all the capitals in the world obviously. Like, Kabul is a city with 7 million people and people there they go to school, they go to work, they live their normal lives. So if you manage to stay lowkey, then I think that is the safest way, just staying with locals, not having security with flashy guns. That's just draws attention. Of course it's hard, you will always stand out as a white guy in Central Africa, but having someone local who speaks the language.. in my case it was a directory of a newspaper with 14 employees so he knew you know the (…) he knew a lot of people. Even when we were stopped at checkpoints he… and they wanted bribes of us, he knew someone he could call and.. in Africa it's always who you know.. you know and who you are. So then it was definitely a lot safer. If I wasn't staying in a fancy hotel with guards and.. it wouldn't have been as safe.

Yeah. So, how did you weigh the pros and cons of going to there?

So, there is not much cons. Uhm.. I mean I'm going there to go out again, I wasn't going to death or anything like this. It's not uhm.. So, what I believe is that it's sometimes warning.. they are.. I don't want to say it because I have been quoted with this before in a hundred newspapers, you have maybe read about the Afghanistan case?

Yeah I have.

Yeah, if you look up my name on Wikipedia too it says that I am considered reckless and naïve for going to warzones and that's not true. But I understand why government warnings have to be a bit conservative. Because of course they don't want anyone to go to these countries, things can happen. But if you get your mind into this situation, if you have an understanding of relationships, if you go there with certain attitudes you can actually visit every country safely.

Yeah. So you acted on the potential risks by for example these local people that you went with and more secured accommodations?

Yeah. And if I wasn't going to these kind of countries I would have missed out on some of my best.. I mean most rewarding travel experiences. You get much deeper understanding from a place by going there yourself.

Yeah. Did the risks and uncertainties that there were have an influence on the factors that influenced your destination choice?

One more time please?

Did risks and uncertainties influence your destination choice?

Yes, absolutely. When I was going to Mali for example, I wouldn't go up to Timbuktu, because at that time it was under control of Muslim extremist groups and it's the same with every country. When I went to Venezuela which is also a conflict zone, or Syria or Afghanistan or Iraq, of course I only went to the cities where I believed that I would be safe. So you think yeah… But a lot of places are actually.. I mean a lot of unstable countries are somehow stable as well. In Iraq, there is the autonomous region of Kurdistan, in Somalia there is the autonomous region of Somaliland. And countries like Yemen, they have a island called Socotra that has been fairly peaceful. So yeah I chose my destinations within those countries somehow based on security. And, I don't know if you're updated on the Venezuela situation?

Yeah, I am.

I was there February last year and it was quite intense there as well. Last night, they had a coup attempt and it's very, very violent. So they have a government there. I mean.. like, it's yeah.. it's different to all the other conflict zones that I have visited. But probably like in most.. in a lot of African countries there can be protests breaking out that are very.. that are violent. (…) even though it's a safe country, it can turn unsafe you know.. by the situation.

So, your overall experience looking back, how was that?

Good haha. So, when I'm writing my book, I realize that it's mostly a lot of these destinations that have left the strongest imprint. There is a phenomenon called… One second here.. It's called the availability bias.

Availability bias?

Yeah. It's like a psychological expression which says that people will notice or search for information that confirms something that you believe in from before. I mean, if you're a Christian or a Muslim, your world revolves around that. It's a little bit dangerous because you see something, say North Korea, we have a game here (…) it's called the reputation is going (?), so it's like you spread rumours and the rumours have just turned so strong that you will believe whatever comes out of North Korea now. Because it leaves that imprint. And it's also idiotic because of risk assessment because people will hear about plane crashes, they will hear about terror attacks, they will hear about shar attacks… Like in South Africa people wouldn't swim at the beach because there were sharks, but in fact there is only one attack or one killing every second year. The same in the US, only one every second year but still people are really afraid of sharks.. or plane crashes. You know that there is more chance of you dying in your home than while travelling. And you know, planes are actually the second most safe transport methods. But still people, you know… They listen to the media from these countries and they just automatically think terror or these kind of things, but it is so much more. I mean, going to Mali, you can stay in Bamako and it is fairly safe. Or in.. yeah these countries that have these autonomous regions and so.

Yeah, I have.. not exactly the same because I have not been to these destinations, but yeah I always try to explain people that.. because people say 'isn't it dangerous to travel so much to these places', because I have been to like quite remote places, but I also try to explain to them that there is so much other things that could go wrong in your daily life and you're missing out so much if you don't do it because of those reasons so…

Yeah. It also has to do with… yeah yeah… Also I believe that a lot of the views are outdated because of this availability bias, people stick to the stories from before you know. When I was working as a

travel agent and the kids would you know call their parents they are going to Cambodia or Colombia and you know they will say to them you know 'don't go to Colombia or Cambodia because you know it's violent', but that's the past.

Yeah exactly.

I mean, the war in Afghanistan has been going on for almost 18 years and uhm.. There is just heavily armed presence and I was expecting it to be… I mean, coming there and almost being paranoid, but I was quite comfortable walking around in the streets and talking to local people. But I can't say that it's safe, there are suicide bombings going on regularly in Kabul. But yeah, life goes on, there is still a lot of joy and a lot of yeah beautiful culture, really welcoming.

So that were the in depth questions. Is there anything else you would like to add to this?

Let's just go through the countries that I would consider you know.. there is a difference between war zone and what's your definition or expression?

Yeah, conflict areas.

Yeah, so right now like Sudan is a conflict area now. When I was there, it was building up to protests but now it is getting really bad, like people are fleeing the country. And yeah, I don't know if.. You wouldn't count I guess Iraq and Somalia the way that I went or the places that I went, but definitely Venezuela, definitely Syria, definitely Afghanistan, Libya, Central African Republic. But I would say that Central African Republic and Libya and Yemen are rock bottom.

Why?

Because it's so unstable. And Venezuela, but in a different way. So there is poor advice in so many countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso or Ivory Coast even, where there have been terror attacks, but these terror attacks also happen in cities like Paris. I can show you a really good map from this… you know, where the terror attacks happen and you can see you know (…) and Europe. And other ones in these countries that I just told you that they have foreign advice against.

Yeah, that would be perfect, that would be helpful. That's it for the questions I think then.

(…)

It's been a lot of people contacting me since I visited every country like every day. And sometimes you're just spending so much money and time and you have other things that you care about but ehm..

If you have anything else just contact me and I will send the report to you.

Perfect. I can share this link. You can also contact my (…) in Afghanistan, the guy who was on (…). He was on Fox News, CNN in Hindu Arab you know… more than a 100 articles and video on tv from that and I was really becoming part of the propaganda. Because you know, because of this availability bias then the media will sell stories than kind of confirm the view. So after travelling to Syria, when I tried to reach out to news stations to explain my story from Syria they (…). You know, they can't have different conflicting angles on the situation. And the conflicts are much more complex than most people think you know. In Syria they think it's you know, black and white or good against evil and it's not. So sometimes, you know going to Lebanon and the Hezbollah, the ones who are defending you, but they are classified as a terrorist organization by the US.

Yeah it's really interesting.

And in Norway, like you can describe some of these conflict areas, even killing in Central African Republic as almost like political parties. Same in Mozambique, same if you have a right wing party in The Netherlands and you have a left wing party but they have (…) guns. (…) and they think they are doing the right thing, liberating the country. So, both good sides.

Yeah, exactly. It's everywhere but just in a different way.

Yeah, but news always portions. Unfortunately. They have done one angle in a hundred.

Yeah. Okay, well thank you, I will leave you to it for your day and I will contact you when it's finished.

Yeah, perfect.

Thankyou, bye!

Ik heb de vragen in het Nederlands vertaald voor nu, dus voor de makkelijkheid doen we het gewoon nu in het Nederlands. Dus welke conflict bestemmingen heb je precies bezocht?

Nou, ik heb gewoond natuurlijk in Rwanda, dat was het beruchte conflict tussen de Hutu's en de Tutsi's wat helemaal explodeerde in april precies 25 jaar geleden. En even kijken, ik ben in Chiapas geweest in 1994 toen de Zapatista's San Cristóbal binnenvielen. Eh, ik ben in Sudan geweest en het zuiden van Ethiopië, dat was half toeristisch, half voor mijn werk, samen met een paar andere mensen van andere organisaties. Het conflict was tussen clans zal ik maar zeggen. En ik moet nog steeds conflict regio's bezoeken nu eigenlijk. Ook in Guerrero in Oaxaca hier in Mexico. Dus het is een constant onderdeel van mijn leven, laat ik het zo zeggen.

Ja precies. Wat voor conflictgebieden waren het?

Het zijn meestal gewapende conflicten. Dus het is echt.. ja Rwanda was heel duidelijk natuurlijk, dat was genocide in optima forma. Sudan is een gewapend conflict tussen tribes en het gaat meestal om vee, he dus nomaden versus agricultural mensen. En in Guerrero, Oaxaca dat zijn ook gewapende conflicten, meestal met het organized crime. Even kijken, wat nog meer… Chiapas eh.. In Chiapas is een heel toeristisch gebied he, je kent het, je bent er met je moeder geweest, met je broer. En ondanks het feit dat het een conflict was, een conflict zone, met geringe informatie kun je wel weten dat je daar gewoon prima kunt rondwandelen, dat je daar rond kunt kijken, je kan gewoon naar San Cristóbal de Las Casas, je kan gewoon naar La Selba Negra, maar je moet gewoon oppassen hoe laat je dat doet en in welke vorm van transport je dat doet. En het liefste nog met iemand.. een Mexicaan die erbij zit he, dus als je geen Mexicaan bent of je bent niet Spaans sprekend, dan is het heel erg handig om iemand erbij te hebben die dat wel is. Dat is voor mij onder alle omstandigheden, dus niet alleen in Chiapas, dat is gewoon wereldwijd heel erg aan te raden.

Ja inderdaad. En nog heel algemeen, wanneer heb je deze bezoeken gemaakt?

Ja, in 1994.. in 1992 begon ik al in Rwanda veel rond te reizen. We moesten daar redelijk wat militaire barricades doorheen en ook als je bij kampen in de buurt komt, dan zijn er continu controles. In principe loop je al als buitenlander geen gevaar. Ja, dat is echt een van de punten die ik overal kan onderstrepen in mijn ervaringen tot nu toe. Ik heb nooit het gevaar gevoeld die je als buitenlander loopt omdat je niet onderdeel bent van een.. of van een religieus conflict of van een kasten conflict of van een tribe conflict of dat soort dingen, je staat er gewoon buiten. En dat was ook hetzelfde voor Chiapas en voor Oaxaca en Sudan ook.. ja. In Afrika.. sterker nog in Afrika heb ik me altijd nog veiliger gevoeld dan hier in Latijns Amerika. Ja, beter beschermd. Dus ja, alle… 1994 ehm even kijken.. was zowel Rwanda als in Chiapas, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. En nu is het gewoon vanuit mijn werk. Ik bedoel, ik heb heel veel vanuit conflict regio's bezocht en dat doe ik nog steeds. En bijvoorbeeld ook het migratie probleem nou, van heel Centraal Amerika tot aan de grens met de Verenigde Staten is eigenlijk een conflict gebied omdat je dus heel veel conflicten hebt tussen de gewone bevolking en de migranten. En dat zul je niet alleen zien in Mexico, dat zie je in het Midden-Oosten, dat zie je overal.

Ja, precies. Ik gebruik voor mijn onderzoek ook van die kaarten van de Nederlandse overheid van het reisadvies weetjewel. Die zijn dan groen, geel, oranje en rood. Ik focus in mijn onderzoek vooral op oranje en rood omdat dat dus ook echt conflict gebieden zijn en het is heel interessant om te kijken naar de kaart van Mexico. Het zijn inderdaad een paar oranje vlekjes en de hele grenslijn met de Verenigde Staten is ook oranje.

Ja, en daar dat is echt wel heel gevaarlijk. Daar moet je wel echt heel erg uitkijken, omdat eh.. omdat heel veel wordt gedomineerd door de organized crime, de maffia en de Mara's en al die lokale groepen, de Zeta's… noem maar op. Dat is heel erg link. Dus bijvoorbeeld, je kunt wel naar Baja California gaan, wat een heel toeristisch gebied is, maar als je daarnaast gaat, naar Sonora en dat soort… dat is minder toeristisch en daar opereert echt de maffia. Sterker nog, als jij door Sonora wilt reizen, moet je toestemming vragen aan de maffia om dat te kunnen doen en dan laten ze je met rust. Ja, het is echt ongelooflijk…

Ja, echt bizar. En toen je deze reizen hebt gemaakt, beschouwde je dat toen zelf ook als riskant?

Ja. Jaa, je moet… Je kan niet reizen Aafke zonder je bewust te zijn van de risico's die je kunt lopen. Want je neemt ook maatregelen om risico's te vermijden, dus he.. Ja, tuurlijk. Maar laat ik het zo zeggen, in Rwanda was ik nog het minst voorbereid. Ik had informatie opgevraagd bij het ministerie van buitenlandse zaken en ik kreeg alleen maar over het klimaat, waar de mooie woonwijken liggen, wat een mooi park is om te bezoeken, weet je.. dat soort dingen. Maar er was niks over het conflict, het stammen conflict tussen de Hutu's en de Tutsi's, echt helemaal niks. Dus ik kwam daar aan en toen zeiden ze tegen mij, "goh [name] over twee dagen moet je naar een kamp in het noorden om een assessment te maken om te kijken hoe de situatie daar is" en ik "een kamp in het noorden?" ik bedoel, "wat is er aan de hand hier?", weet je wel. Was goed bedoeld hoor, weet je. Maar alle andere, totaal voorbereid ja.

Oke. Ik had je ook de definitie gestuurd van conflict gebieden, vind jij ook dat die gebieden dan voldoen aan de karakteristieken die in die definitie staan?

Oei, Aafke.. moet je even eh..

Ik kan hem oplezen hoor, ik heb hem hier voor me. Het zijn "Gebieden geïdentificeerd door de aanwezigheid van gewapend conflict, wijdverspreid geweld, of andere risico's van kwaad voor mensen inclusief gebieden van politieke instabiliteit of repressie, institutionele zwakte, onzekerheid, instorting van civiele infrastructuur en wijdverspreid geweld".

Ja, ja. En ik zou daar nog, 'gedomineerd door criminele groeperingen'… hier heb je al.. in Mexico bijvoorbeeld heb je al 12 of 14 staten en dat zijn, dat heten Narco staten. Het wordt gewoon gereguleerd door organized crime.. die zou ik er dan aan toevoegen. Al het andere, de definitie vind ik heel volledig, ja.

Oke, ja. Nou ja en we zijn er al een beetje op gekomen, maar was jij je er op dat moment van bewust dat je toen je naar die bestemmingen ging in een conflict gebied terecht zou komen?

Nou, die eerste niet he, totaal niet, geen idee echt… En zelfs dan heb ik me niet onzeker gevoeld, maar het was heel fijn geweest als iemand mij van tevoren had ingelicht. Ik kreeg voor Chiapas in 1994, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, met 'Comandante Marcos', ik weet niet of je dat thema kent, maar daar werd ik wel over gebriefd. Maar ja, ik kwam toen net uit Afrika waar ik echt de hel heb meegemaakt, dus toen ze tegen mij zeiden "nou Dirk, het kan zijn dat je tanks ziet en wat militairen" toen zei ik ohh…

Hahaha

Ja, en in andere gebieden… ik ben ook een keer in Guerero geweest, toen was er een soort clan strijd tussen lokale producers van marihuana en daar werd ik ook uit de auto getild en op de grond gelegd en met mensen waarmee ik was enzo.. met zo'n mitrailleur op je hoofd. En ze vroegen helemaal niks he.. liggen.. Maar toen hoorde ik ze praten onderling en eentje die zei van "hé, dat is die gast van

UNICEF, die bouwt hier allemaal watersystemen en weet ik het allemaal", en toen mocht ik doorlopen. En toen zei ik, "ik loop alleen maar door als ik mijn mede reizigers mee kan nemen" en dat gebeurde gewoon toen. Dus dat was ook, daar was ik redelijk op voorbereid. Maar ja.. je kan je wel er heel goed uit lullen hoor moet ik zeggen. Ja.. dat lukt wel, ik bedoel als ze je pijn willen doen, dan doen ze dat toch, begrijp je?

Ja, precies.

En voor de rest wel, voor de rest was ik voorbereid.

Ja. En het meeste was voor je werk, maar ik ga toch de vraag stellen; heb je ook alternatieve bestemmingen overwogen?

Jaaa. En zelf voor je werk kun je alternatieve bestemmingen overwegen. Maar kijk, aan mijn werk gerelateerd is natuurlijk extreme armoede en politieke instabiliteit en dat soort dingen, dus het is eigenlijk per definitie al dat je daarheen gaat. Ehm.. maar ik moet wel zeggen, toen ik naar het zuiden van Ethiopië ging, dus de grens met Sudan, toen zat ik er wel over te denken om het niet te doen en om naar een andere bestemming te gaan. Waarom ik het uiteindelijk toch heb gedaan is omdat mij werd verteld dat "ja, nou oké het is niet heel erg onzeker, je maakt geen onderdeel van…" het is een clan strijd, dus dat heeft te maken met dat zij zien dat je bij een bepaalde clan hoort. Nou, ze zien duidelijk dat ik dat niet hoor dus dat is verder geen probleem. Eh, het is wel het overwegen… Chiapas is wel het overwegen waard en ik zou in mijn ervaring ook het noorden van Mexico, als je dat kaartje van jou erbij pakt en je ziet… omdat dat.. het zijn criminele groepen die voor een conflict situatie zorgen en die hebben nergens ontzag voor… Die hebben hun ethisch gen uitgeschakeld en ze maken je zo af…

Ja… inderdaad.

Dus ik denk dat je heel erg een onderscheid moet maken, wat voor conflict is het precies, ja? Wat voor conflict is het precies, door crimineel geweld? Dan zou ik het niet doen. Is het een conflict tussen tribes, dan kun je het doen want je behoort simpelweg niet tot de tribes. Is het zo'n massief conflict als wat gebeurde in Rwanda, dan moet je er sowieso niet heen gaan want je komt er gewoon niet in. Bijvoorbeeld nou heb je Burundi, daar kun je wel in maar Burundi broeit tussen die Hutu's en die Tutsi's. Daar kun je heengaan, je kunt rustig Burundi bezoeken, volgens mij. Omdat je niet onderdeel bent van een tribal conflict, omdat je daar gewoon buiten staat. Als je ziet wat voor mensen, hé, buitenlanders er ooit zijn vermoord in dat soort situaties, dat zijn mensen die op de een of andere manier zich daarmee gingen bemoeien en die zijn gewoon geliquideerd. Maar echt, met crimineel geweld denk ik echt wel… dat is echt wel een probleem. Of als je heel veel ontvoeringen hebt. Bijvoorbeeld Mali, ik ben ook in Mali geweest, grenst met Burkina Faso, dat was ook complex zullen we maar zeggen. Daar moet je wel heel erg uitkijken. Dus als je weet, die ontvoeren blanken of hulp medewerkers of mensen van organisaties en toeristen hé… Want er is heel veel informatie die jij niet ziet hoor, trouwens. Er is heel veel informatie over dit soort… die niet gepubliceerd wordt. En daarbij moet je wel afgaan op de informatie die je krijgt van ambassades. Ik zou sowieso ambassades doen en ik zou het checken.. je kunt altijd de ambassade bellen, je hebt 1) de informatie via buitenlandse zaken, maar 2) is de informatie die je ook kunt krijgen door direct communicatie op te nemen met iemand van de ambassade.

Ja, precies. Mijn volgende vraag is waarom je deze bestemmingen hebt bezocht. Dus of er bestemmingseigenschappen zijn die jou hebben getrokken naar die bestemming.

Het zijn gebieden waar weinig mensen komen. Ik denk als je mij specifiek neemt, zou mijn volgende bestemming bijvoorbeeld Mongolië zijn. Omdat.. wie gaat er nou naar Mongolië?? Ik ben niet het type voor massa bestemmingen, ja. En daar gaat het mij om. Je gaat niet een conflict uitkiezen omdat je denkt van "hé, daar komen maar heel weinig mensen", maar het is niet voor mij iets… ik zou het wel analyseren, maar het is niet iets wat mij zou tegenhouden. Wat ik wel zou doen, ik zou niet met mijn familie gaan, met mijn kids. Dat zou ik echt niet doen hahaha.

Nee, hahaha.

Dus ik.. ehm.. Ja, ik denk wel dat je rustig kunt kiezen voor een regio waar een… Venezuela, volgens mij kun je daar gewoon heen, maar het is heel onzeker omdat het heel arm is, dus je hebt heel veel lokale criminaliteit. Bolivia, Nicaragua, dat zijn allemaal… dat is heel complex… maar daar kun je gewoon heen, dat is verder geen punt. Guatemala ook, daar kun je gewoon heen, maar je moet gewoon uitkijken. Je moet gewoon je 'sentrio común', je common sense goed gebruiken. Ik weet niet of ik je vraag heb beantwoord, maar…

Jawel. Het volgende is dan wat waren innerlijk verlangens die je dreven om daarheen te gaan?

Jaa, echt het onbekende. Echt iets wat totaal uit je comfort zone is, waar je geen weet van hebt, wat een andere geur, andere kleur, andere taal, andere muziek… weetje wel. Dat zijn voor mij de triggers echt om ergens heen te gaan. Ik kijk nog eerder daarnaar als wat de lokale situatie is. Dus echt geen massa toerisme, waar weinig mensen komen. Hoog op min lijst staan vulkanen, ik vind het ook ontzettend leuk om in alle continenten waar ik ben om vulkanen te beklimmen. En dat lukt ook. En nou, het moet echt wel een heftig conflict zijn wil mij dat tegenhouden, laat ik het zo zeggen. Maar, ik ben gewend aan conflicten Aafke, ik ben niet een normale op dat gebied…

Hahaha ja.. Uhm, welke overwegingen heb je gemaakt dan voor je vertrek? Dus met risico's, kosten-baten die je eventueel hebt afgewogen…

Ja. Een goeie verzekering sowieso. En een ticket wat je kunt veranderen. Infrastructuur van het land, dus hoe je er kunt komen. Want dat moet… het moet niet, weetje wel, als je ergens weg moet opeens, dan moet je niet 5 uur wachten op… Dus dat zijn wel criteria die ik eh… En lokaal geld, altijd meenemen en altijd ook cash dollars bij je hebben. Eerder dollar dan euro, volgens mij wereldwijd nog steeds. Ik zou geen creditcards meenemen en het is heel erg aan te raden om cash bij je te hebben, want als je op straat overvallen wordt, kun je gewoon.. geef je het cash, en dankuwel. En geen ringetingeling in je oren en dat soort dingen, juweeltjes… Hoe heb ik me nog meer voorbereid? Ja, uhm.. geïnformeerd he, over de situatie, over de veiligheid, over transport, over gebieden, regio's en buurten waar je niet heen moet gaan, waar je uit moet blijven. En de lokale contact punten en een uitval moet je hebben. Iemand die je kent of een organisatie of weten waar de ambassade.. een telefoonnummer moet je altijd bij je hebben. En een mobiel die werkt, een regiovrije mobiel.

Ja, precies. En we hebben het al een beetje hierover gehad, hoe de risico's en onzekerheden invloed hebben gehad op je bestemming keuze. Nou ja, met die dingen die dingen die je dan van tevoren deed.

Ja, goede voorbereidingen.

Even kijken. En heeft dit ook invloed gehad op de factoren die je had genoemd die jou geleid hebben om naar die bestemming te gaan? Dus die factoren als bestemmingseigenschappen en innerlijke verlangens, heeft dat je keuze beïnvloed?

Ik heb mij wel laten leiden door mijn eigen criteria, maar dat is heel persoonlijk. Ik denk dat… misschien jouw moeder zou ook wel een beetje die richting opgaan, die heeft op z'n minst net zoveel gereisd als ik en waar jij nu ook mee bezig bent. Als ik zo om mij heen kijk, mijn familie en zo die zouden veel voorzichtiger zijn en veel meer criteria op papier hebben staan wat hun keuze beïnvloedt. Dus ik denk sowieso, de landen situatie of de lokale situatie in relatie tot mijn criteria, mijn keuze criteria, die hebben duidelijk wel mijn bestemmingen beïnvloed. Niet alleen mijn toeristische bestemmingen maar ook mijn professionele bestemmingen. Dus ik weet niet of ik jouw vraag heb beantwoord, maar… dat wel.

En wat was je algemene ervaring als je op die reizen terugkijkt?

Ja, Aafke ik heb een level geleid wat normaal gesproken vijf mensen daarover zouden doen. Dus ik ben zeer fortunate en ik… als je mij "vraagt zou je het weer doen?", ik zou het zo weer doen, dat doe ik morgen weer. "Ga je weer in Rwanda werken?", ja, ik ga in Rwanda werken. "Ga je weer naar een conflict gebied om te kijken wat je kunt doen?", ja. Er is een heel mooi.. dat is van een van mijn vrienden, die ken je wel denk ik. Die zijn met zij allen naar Venezuela gegaan, in een tropisch woud met d hoogste waterval ter wereld daar. Die zijn ook gewoon gegaan, ondanks het feit wat er allemaal aan de hand is in Venezuela. En waarom? Omdat dat.. het is een unieke ervaring en je hebt dat alleen maar daar. Dus daarom ga je erheen en daarom neem je de risico's. Je bereid je wel voor, maar je neemt gewoon de risico's. En ik heb eigenlijk alleen maar, als je nu aan mij vraagt "zou je iets, nu je het weet, zou je dat dan niet hebben gedaan, met voorkennis?", nee, ik zou alles wel hebben gedaan en ik zou het zo over doen, absoluut. Dus ik heb het allemaal echt heel erg geweldig gevonden. Ik kwam wel totaal getraumatiseerd terug uit Rwanda, maar nu kijk ik daar heel objectief tegenaan en ik zou het zo weer doen want het was een geweldige ervaring en ik heb.. jemig, we hebben daar zoveel gedaan, zoveel gezien, zoveel meegemaakt, lokale taal gesproken, ik heb in de raarste situaties gezeten, nou dat.. niet iedereen heeft dat geluk gehad. Ik zie dat echt als een geluk in mijn leven en ik hoop dat mijn kinderen ook dat soort momenten hebben, wat je vult met adrenaline, maar waar je daarna op terugkijkt "jemig, wauw zeg".

Jaa, dat wil ik dus ook gaan doen (…).

Jaa, je bent heel jong. Een tussenjaar, dan een jaar masters nog. Ik begon met werken op mijn 30[e]. Slecht voorbeeld he, moet je niet doen. Maar jemig ja, je kunt overal heen. En dat is ook wel zo he, de globalisering helpt natuurlijk ook om uiteindelijk toch te kunnen kiezen om naar een conflict of een potentieel conflict regio te gaan.

Ja, precies. Ik begon met dit onderzoek en allemaal studie mensen waren in paniek dat ik naar een conflict gebied wilde voor mijn onderzoek haha.

Ja, maar goed dat kan. Met goeie begeleiding. Want je moet… in het Spaans zeggen ze 'busca el colchón', he je moet een matras hebben waar je op terug kunt vallen, maar dan kun je het gewoon doen. Tuurlijk, absoluut. He, dus bijvoorbeeld als jij wilt gaan naar Syrië, nou ik heb contacten in Syrië, "Dirk, kun je mij in contact brengen met", al is het alleen al om een uitvalsbasis te hebben in het geval je.. En je moet ook heel goed bestuderen wat de uitval routes zijn, überhaupt, van daar waar je heen wilt. Maar het is zeker niet onmogelijk. En je kan het altijd doen via een organisatie, absoluut.

Ja, degene die ik hiervoor heb gesproken die alle landen in de wereld heeft bezocht, dus ook landen als Syrië inderdaad en Afghanistan, die zei hetzelfde inderdaad. Hij heeft lokale mensen opgezocht en met hen is hij gaan rondreizen omdat zij weten wat veilig is en zo.

Juist, ja. Dat is echt een van mijn aanbevelingen. Ook alleen al is het om de lokale taal te spreken, weet je dat is altijd heel erg raadzaam in dit soort situaties.

Ja, nou dat waren mijn inhoudelijke vragen, is er nog iets wat je wilt toevoegen verder?

Ik denk dat ik.. nee, het is een heel typisch onderwerp. Ik schreef het al, ik zou conflict gebieden nooit aanbevelen als een toeristische bestemming, maar het is zeker niet een reden om iets niet te doen. Maar je moet wel goed voorbereiden, goed informeren weet je wel. En het type conflict moet je ook bekijken, waar gaat het om. En er zijn conflicten in… de conflicten zijn alleen maar toegenomen Aafke, dus ik bedoel… je reisgebied wordt steeds kleiner? Nee. Dat is het enige gewoon. Het zijn gebieden waar heel weinig mensen komen.

Precies, dat is zeker waar. Je weet nooit wat er gebeurt, er kan net zo goed hier ook iets gebeuren. Want het gaat ook over terroristische dreigingen, dat kan ook overal zomaar gebeuren.

Ja, tuurlijk. En bijvoorbeeld, neem Colombia. Colombia dat heeft natuurlijk met die Farc dat hele conflict. Je kan gewoon met alle precautions door Colombia reizen hoor, geen probleem. En ik heb een kantoor in Colombia dus ik kan je altijd in contact brengen met een paar mensen.

Komt helemaal goed. Heel erg bedankt hiervoor!

So, what conflict destinations have you visited?

Uhm, Pakistan, that's the only one I can really think of that I've been to.

What kind of conflict area is there?

Uhm, well depending on what kind of region you go to.. like the upper Kashmir is more of a territorial conflict I would say. And whereas like maybe just down south from that I would say is more of a like civil war. Like a war inside the country more like. That's all I can think of.

And when did you make this visit?

Oh.. uhm, well I was very, very young the first time I visited and I don't know the exact year. But then I went to go live there for three years which was from 2008 to 2011. And then I've been going back regularly for like visits so…

Yeah okay. And do you consider these travels as being risky?

Uhm, honestly I don't think so. Maybe that's me being biased because I've obviously lived there, I have family already living there. But I think also from an outsiders perspective, that any place that you go to can be a risky travel. But obviously there are some parts that might be more dangerous than other parts. But I don't think Pakistan as a whole is a dangerous place to go to.

Yeah. So, you got the definition of a conflict area. Do you think that the area that you went to meets these characteristics?

Sorry I'm just reading it haha.

Haha, that's okay.

Uhm, yes I do. I do.. yeah I do.

Why?

Because it says here, like 'widespread violence or risks to people.. or other risks of harm to people', which is true, but only like.. so obviously everyone knows about the Taliban, which was in Swat Valley, which is north of Punjab from where I lived. So I would say that's pretty harmful to people because they weren't the nicest people… And then obviously.. they're not.. political instability, they're not very good… haha, I'm sorry they're just not very politically stable at the moment. So that's why I would say; yeah it is.

Yeah haha. So, were you aware that the destination that you went to was located in a conflict area?

Uhm, not at first because I was very young. But as I grew up and obviously heard more stuff that's been happening over the news and stuff, yeah I did. But I never thought that would be any harm to me, because of where I lived in Pakistan.. yeah.

So, yeah maybe this question is less applicable to you, but did you consider any alternative destinations?

No haha, not really.

Haha yeah.. Because that relates to the next question, what made you decide that you wanted to go to this destination? Like, destination attributes that pulled you there and internal desires that pushed you from home.

Well, obviously at first it was.. like I told you, it was because obviously my dad's side of the family all lives there. So, first it was for family reasons, but then as I grew older, like I was very… intrigued of seeing new places of Pakistan as well, which I think made me want to go to Pakistan more regularly like I have been ever since I came back from living there for three years. I think I've been going more to discover more parks of Pakistan, which obviously… any curious person would want to do. So I think that's… what was the question…

Yeah, so destination attributes… So, the research is about push and pull factors, so the push factors are internal desires that made you want to go there and pull factors are like the things in the destination that attracted you to go there.

Well, the thing that attracted me to go there that was.. Pakistan is a very beautiful country. It's got a lot of history, a lot has happened over the past, not even just like recently in the past 100 years, but it's so fresh that it's just… I think everyone.. well not everyone, but it's just one of those countries I just really want to regularly visit. Plus, I always have family living there, so it's easier for me to do. And that's all I can really say about that.

Yeah, no that's fine. So, what are some considerations you make before you travel there. Like any risks that you considered?

Uhm… Obviously again, when I was younger not really, I did not know exactly what was happening. As I grew older, not so much again, because I've been inside of Pakistan and I've seen it.. I think. So, I didn't think there were going to be any risks personally. Yeah.. I didn't think there were going to be any risks or.. I didn't consider them at least.

Yeah. Yeah, so the next question; how do risks and uncertainties influence your destination choice also does not really apply to you then.

Yeah.

Then, what was your overall experience when you look back at your travels?

My overall experience is, at first when I used to go there, I didn't want to go there haha.. Because, I.. where I lived was a very small village and where my dad's side of the family lives. So, we.. when we were living there it was just a lot of nothingness. But then as I've grown older, like I visited more parts of Pakistan as well. So I think it has just pulled me back to going back there. So that's what has influences my decisions.

Cool! Anything else that you want to add to this?

Uhm, not really.

Okay, that's it then!

So, I'm just going to jump in with the questions, so which conflict destinations have you visited?

Okay, yeah I mean I read your definition so not to be difficult, I mean it's the description is pretty broad but I will say Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Somalia, I mean do you count… North Korea has obviously incredible repression, but I mean I don't know if you want that one so… North Korea.

So, these areas that you have visited, these conflict areas, what kind of conflict areas do you consider them to be?

So starting off with the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is a lot of civil unrest (…), challenges left over from the Rwanda genocide (…) perpetrated the genocide, living in refugee (…), general poverty as well as just (…), kidnapping, attacks etcetera. Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso are all poor countries, all kind of unstable but all three of these countries have been impacted negatively from the Libya civil war.. so… ISIS and Al Qaida type elements are operating in those countries. In the (…) are some.. you know native separatist movements in Mali for instance. (…) like Isis and (…) obviously more involved in criminal activities, some kidnappings, some civil unrest. And then do you want North Korea or not?

Yeah sure!

Well, looking at your definition.. I mean North Korea obviously falls under political repression, so I mean that might be the superlative in political repressions in North Korea.

Yeah. So, when did you make these visits to these countries?

Uhm, DRC and Mauritania were this year, so 2019. Mali was 2018, Burkina Faso was 2017 and again in 2018. Iraq was.. what year was this.. let's say 2017. Let's say Somalia 2016 and North Korea 2013.

Okay. And when you made these travels, did you consider them as being risky?

Yes.

And were you aware when you went there that these destinations were located in a conflict area?

Yes.

And did you then also consider any alternative destinations to these?

No.

Then what made you decide that you still wanted to go to these destinations?

Yeah, so I am trying to go to every country in the world. So if you're going to every country in the world there can't be any alternatives. You have to visit every country.

Okay, yeah. So were there any destination attributes that pulled you to these destinations?

That attracted me?

Yeah.

Yeah, all of them.

Can you specify for me please?

Okay, so Democratic Republic of Congo to track gorillas. Mali to see the grand mosque of Djenne. Mauritania time in the Sahara desert and the old city of Chinguetti. Burkina Faso to see the town of Bobo and to see the painted village of Tiebele. Iraq.. I mean… just in general country.. you know.. that (…) of civilisation goes back thousands of years. North Korea for being a unique country, nothing really like it in the world. Somalia.. I mean.. same thing, something that I've read about for years and years in the news and being able to go there was a unique experience.

And were there also any internal desires that pushed you away from home?

Uhm… I mean I live in the US three months a year so it's not that I've left the country for good and don't go back so.. it's just a balance in my life that I try and travel as much as possible while still being able to go home and visit my home and family and friends.

And what are some considerations that you made before travelling to these countries? So any risks that you considered or..?

You mean how do I ascertain the security situation?

For example yeah.

Okay, so Democratic Republic of Congo you know I'll do something like go to the US State Department travel advisories, that will be one. Two, I'll read general media. Three I'll go to 'Thorn Tree' forum or TripAdvisor forum and read previous threads and possibly make a post myself. Next up I will reach out to the community of travellers who are going too every country in the world to see if they have any insights, recent insights into where I'm going. And then.. also try and reach out to any locals in that area that are visiting to get their insights. And reach out to some Facebook groups again with some travellers who are doing extensive travel.

Yeah. And what are the specific risks that you considered when you were taking these measures?

So again, if we're using DRC as an example, when I was there just the other month, I mean there is a lot of news taking place with regards to the Ebola virus. So, that's obviously of great concern, I don't want to get Ebola. In a nearby park, National Park, there were a bunch of murders and kidnappings of foreigners so I was trying to… well actually I was going to go to that park first, but due to the kidnappings of foreigners, that park was closed. So, I did have to choose an alternative park.. due to what happened at the initial park I was interested in. So looking at violence or kidnappings in the park, also in DRC there was a recent election that caused some civil unrest and violence and you know.. killing sprees etcetera etcetera… so these things were of concern in all my mind as I reached out to do an analysis of the security situation.

Yeah. And how did these risks or uncertainties influence the destination choice?

Uhm… well, it didn't influence the destination choice because I ended up going to all these places after doing my security appraisal.

Yeah, so except for maybe like the park, where there is a specific threat, then it influence in a way that you go to a different park?

Well, I mean technically it was closed, so that kind of narrowed down the selection process because of it being closed..

Okay. And looking back, what was your overall experience with these travels?

Excellent.

Why?

Well, I'll just use one example.. So, I recently drove in West Africa for 3,5 weeks and my last stop was Mali. And one of the most impressive, famous things you can see in Mali is the grand mosque of Djenne. And originally it was not on my itinerary because it's… it's.. technically it's too dangerous to visit, but I was doing… as I was doing this road trip, I was talking about it more and more with my friend and we decided that we should consider going to Djenne. So, again we started doing somewhat of the same analysis of whether we should risk going to Djenne or not. And in the short of it, going to Djenne, is an unbelievably magical place and experience to be able to go to that town and to see that mosque.

Yeah, so you do talk about how high the risk is there, when do you say the risk is too high?

Uhm, well I haven't really had that situation. So again, it's just.. it's weighing the pros and the cons, so if we're looking at Mali… So I reached out to two people in the tourist industry in Mali. One guy owned a hotel and he said "don't go there", he goes "we had some guests get kidnapped there the other year, we advise everybody not to go there". Then, I spoke to a Dutch woman who runs a travel agency and we said "hey, what's the situation in Djenne", she's like "it's okay, you should feel safe to go". Then, I reached out to a friend of a friend, this woman who was.. who ended up going to Djenne the week before me. So then I reached out to her and I was like "what was your experience like in Djenne?" "No". Yes or no… but then I reached to some other travellers who said "you should probably skip it". And then the day we were driving from Burkina Faso to Djenne, there's many police checkpoints. The last police checkpoint, which was like two or three hours from Djenne, the police man goes "hey, where are you going", we are like "Djenne", and the police man says "don't go there, it's too dangerous"… So, I mean the reality is that… for me at least, since I'm not that brave, that's very sobering when you have a local police man at the last checkpoint advising you not to go. And I sat in the car for five minutes like, what am I going to do? But.. I mean haha, part of it was I had been driving for like eight hours and I'm like "screw it, let's just push on and let's go".

So, how was that in the end?

It was awesome.

Did you notice any of the risks that any of those people talked about when you were there?

No. because… When you go there… it's a very… It's almost like a big village or small town. And in general, I would say the people are really, really hospitable and really nice. But you know.. I can't remember if it was the week after… but I read the week after, a team of French special forces attacked a nearby town to kill Islamic fundamentalists, so… Basically, what it comes down to, any given day. So, on the day I went there, there were absolutely no issues. Great people, you know, fantastic experience. But haha, I also have like a strategy that I use maybe to make myself feel good, but that might not be totally logical… My strategy is the 'get in and get out' strategy. Meaning I say to myself "oh, I'm only going to spend 24 hours there, by the time I leave there, no one even will know". I'll like get in and get out before anybody knows. But the reality was.. when you drive into Djenne, it's this small walled town. You drive in and you're driving in sandy.. you know there's no paved roads, it's sandy and basically a half metre from the car are the locals sitting on the street. So, in other words, I stick out like a sore thumb. Within 30 seconds everybody in the entire town knows I'm there. There is only one hotel… so, let's say 99,999% are good-hearted, hospitable people, but there is one dude who has a cousin who is in Isis, and that cousin is told "for any foreigner, you get $1000 if we kidnap them". So my strategy of getting in and getting out before they know it, was a very false strategy for something like Djenne.

Yeah. So, you also talked about using the State Department advisory, like travel advise. So, how do you take that into account? Because I also use our national travel advise kind of in my research, but I don't know exactly how it works for the United States.

Yeah, I think.. I mean, what most travellers will tell you is the travel advisories are so broad and general that they are not of value. Uhm, so you know live in Chicago right.. Chicago is a very violent city, but the reality is it's a city of 10 million people, meaning some areas are very violent and dangerous and I don't go to those areas.

Yeah, exactly.

But I live in a neighbourhood where I've not been subject or experienced to violent and to me it feels pretty safe. So, same thing when you're like.. like Mali, there's areas of Mali that are much more insecure than other areas. If you at DRC, it's a country of 80 million people, so same thing, there's areas… it's like the same thing. If there is Ebola in Texas, does that mean you're not going to go to New York City. You know, that's 200 miles away.

Yeah, so the travel advise in the US, how does that work? Because we have like maps, that say even within the country they have different advisories. We have green, yellow, orange and red, which is like the severity of the risk and even within the country this can differ.

Yeah, so I know for the US… I'm trying to look it up to remind me… that they rank it like 1 through 4. 4 simply being 'do not travel',

Yeah, that is what red is for us.

In Mali… Yeah, so Mali… I can't find it here off hand… So Mali is a 'do not travel to' country, so… I don't know.. I can't remember off hand.. let me see if they do have a map. Yeah, so travel advisory April 9th of this year 'Mali level 4, do not travel'. Oh oh… hahaha, I remember this other thing! When we were going to Mali… let me see if I can find it, cause it's pretty depressing. It basically says "if you go to Mali", it goes "please draw up your will"

Ahaha

And, a bunch of other things like that. Like "get your will in order", "tell you loved ones" etcetera etcetera.

Wow…

So.. again, that is pretty sobering.. you know, to do that. And other things, like the State Department is like "oh, we can help you in Bamako, the capital", but they're like you know "Outside of that area, we can't lend any support. In many high risk areas, we cannot help you. This may be because of lack of functioning government and effectiveness of policies of local authorities on conflict or poor governance". So… Bit again, you look at Mali and up north, it's the most insecure area, I wanted to go there but I did decide to skip that area. Djenne was more on the bubble and again, after I did my analysis so to speak, I think it's safe enough you know.

Yeah, I find it so interesting. Because, actually I have recently been to Chicago as well. Because I did my minor in Canada, close to Toronto and afterwards I started travelling with one of my friends and we went to Vancouver and on the way back we also went to Chicago, because we really wanted to see the city. And there were so man people saying "but isn't that really dangerous, it's a dangerous city" blablabla. But actually I haven't experienced one moment where I felt like I was in danger or anything.

Aha.

So, it's really a misconception that.. what you talked about, going to the right places at the right time and stuff, makes so much difference.

Yeah, so much of it is just based on pure luck and timing.

Yeah… So, that were my main questions, do you have anything else to add to this?

Uhm, I mean I can give you more examples of other countries of you need it.

Well, if you have time to do that, that would be great!

Uhm.. so, Iraq was also kind of interesting. So, it's changed a little bit compared to the present. So, when I went a couple of years ago, the work around to visiting Iraq more safely was going up north, to the Kurdistan area. So I went to visit Erbil, the regional capital up north. So, Baghdad was a lot more.. you know, central and south Iraq were a lot more challenging during the time period when I went to visit. So I flew into Erbil, and again just fantastic people, I'm by myself, no tour guide, felt very secure. But the kind of irony moment is, I'm walking around in Erbil and there is a sign 'this way to Baghdad 800km', 'this way, that way', and there is one sign and it said '80km to Mosul'… And at that time, this was when ISIS was at its height and there was a you know.. literal war taking place 80km from where I was. So, very surreal that if technically you drive the wrong way for one hour, you are on the border of the ISIS califate. So, again you can overview Iraq here and say "the south and central are too dangerous, I'm going to skip that and go up to Kurdistan" and then if you (…) in Kurdistan, even 80km away… Erbil is this fully functioning city, you would never not know it is not safe per se. but, you would go 80km in this direction and then that is the frontline. Uhm.. have you interviewed anybody on North Korea?

Uhm, somewhat yeah. One has been to North Korea but hasn't really specified on it.

Do you want any further questions on any of those other countries I gave you or…

Uhm, well I think I actually have quite a lot, so it's okay. Because I focus a lot on the push and pull factors that make people go to these countries. So that's the most important thing, identifying these factors that make people go to conflict areas.

Yeah, so for me it's a very binary situation that I have to go to all of them.

Yeah, the other person has the same thing that he went to all the countries and that made him go to these places as well.

Who is that?

(…) He also lead me to your page of the 'counting countries' podcast.

Well, there is a… I can't remember, are you Danish or are you Dutch?

Dutch.

Who are the Dutch guys.. there is a bunch of Danish guys who have done it. Do you need other people to speak to?

Yeah, for sure!

I'll.. well, have you seen my website or..?

Yeah, I have also contacted some people through there, the ones that were on the podcast.

I'll send them an email encouraging them to get back to you.

Perfect thank you so much and thank you for doing this!

Okay, so I don't know if you already went through the questions a little bit that were in the email?

Yeah, just a quick look, I didn't see all of them.

Okay, no problem.

I usually get many questions and I can reply instantly I think, so.. we'll see.

Yeah, no perfect. So, my research is about conflict tourism and now I am looking for persons, like you, that have been to a conflict area. So, my first question is what conflict destinations have you visited?

Uhm, I have been to all the world's countries, so… (…). So, obviously I have been to some countries with conflict, but within each country there are areas that are more as conflict than others and there are also some areas in countries at war where you can actually visit it safely. So, if I think about some areas that would be Kabul, Afghanistan, Yemen, it would be Syria, it would be the Central African Republic. So, there are several areas that I have been with conflict.

Yeah. And what kind of conflicts were these?

Uhm, Syria there was war, however the capital, Damascus, was controlled by the government, so it was not like super dangerous, but it was still a country at war. But no actual fighting going on in the city centre. So, it was mostly on the way to Damascus, I could see smoke from bombs from a distance, but there were no bombings in the area I was visiting in Syria. In Yemen it was like a political unrest, probably the.. Yeah, in Yemen the political unrest.. it is probably the country in the world with the biggest risk of getting kidnapped. And then you have Central African Republic, which has been probably the most, or one of the most unstable countries in the world for a long time. I would probably (…) for Somalia, Somalia is more unstable I think, but it is really a country that I was pretty afraid of visiting. I had a.. planned a trip earlier and I was too afraid to visit it. Many of these places it is all about timing, about when you should go to a place of conflict. So there might be an opening where you say "okay, now it is time to go because it is not too dangerous".

Yeah. So when did you make these visits, to these countries?

Uhm, mostly.. if you talk everything that had potential risk probably between 2012 and 2016. Because the first country of such, so called 'dangerous', on people's mind 'dangerous' countries would be Iraq which I visited in 2012 and then the last country I visited in the world was 2016. However I don't think any of the countries I visited in 2016 were really of conflict, so between 2012 and 2015.

Okay. So, when you made these travels, did you consider them as being risky?

Yes, definitely. It's a big risk and sometimes I wonder if what I am doing is worth it to just visit every country, to just go into dangerous countries. For me it was the matter for Syria, I waited for years, I don't know how many, I can't remember, but I waited for years for the war to end but it never ended… So.. and I was getting towards the end of my project of visiting all countries, so I decided just to go because I wanted to complete my project. So I did a lot of research, got the right contacts, through a Danish journalist that had done reporting in Syria and I felt okay about doing it. Like.. I knew things could happen, so it was like.. it was a risk I was willing to take because I had.. I felt a lot of responsibility to sponsors, to (…), but to complete my project. So, yeah I knew there was risk, but

it all depends. I mean, I obviously did not go into areas where there was actually bombings because that I would not have done.

Yeah. So, do you think these areas meet the characteristics of a conflict area as mentioned.. I don't know if you have read the definition, but I also have it in front of me so I can also read it to you.

Oh, it would be good if you read it to me.

Yeah, that's fine! They are "areas identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people [and] may include areas of political instability or repression, institutional weakness, insecurity, collapse of civil infrastructure and widespread violence."

Oh yeah, definitely. If you take a country like Central African Republic there was so much political unrest. You had the airport area, I think it was.. was it a refugee camp.. if you google it there was something about the airport, lots of people there and also a lot of bad cases with foreign soldiers actually doing bad things to children, absolutely horrible. But also the living conditions there, if you talk about infrastructure, many of the words you mentioned, they would fit even more destinations. I mean it would be like South Sudan where there is just limited area of the country I think has just asphalt, what is the word in English, is that the word?

Yeah!

Yeah, so I mean in terms of infrastructure, I mean obviously, I've seen many countries which we can say horrible infrastructure so… But in terms of actually risk to my life, it has been just a handful of countries where there it would be.. a risk. But then again, if I did those trips a thousand times, still nothing might happen to me, but that's what people don't realize when a high risk zone, where every foreign agent or foreign advise advises you not to go there, even if you go there a thousand times, you probably will be fine. It is just because of the slightest risk that something might happen it means that it gets in the west on the map. So, that's why I think so many people are willing to still travel to these places. It's not like you have a 50/50% chance of surviving the trip, it's more like you have a 99,99% maybe chance or something to survive the trip and then if you go other places in the world, you have a 100 or almost 100 you know.. it's just.. it's a small little difference and you have to be careful about what you do.

Yes, exactly. So, when you went to these places, you were aware that they were located in a conflict area?

Uhm, yeah I definitely knew I had risk, I didn't know if it.. if I was thinking about it.. I didn't know your criteria for it being a conflict area before, I just knew that they were high risk based on you know, foreign agencies. Something (…), what's it called, foreign affairs or.. you know the advise there, then the website that advises people about where to travel and not to travel. So, I have been to several places where you are advised definitely not to travel. Like Libya, I forgot Libya as well. Obviously when you have been to every country… Libya was on of the most risky, but there I got help from.. the responsible for foreign press, and I also got to meet the prime minister in Tripoli, so I think that if you have the right contacts, you can make yourself have a much lower risk of something happening.

Yeah. So, you mentioned these advises that the ministry gives, does this have any influence of where you are going?

Nowadays it does, because I have completed my quest of visiting every country, so for me it is about timing. I would like.. I am doing like.. How do you say, more like a hobby project now, because I cannot take it too seriously. If I took this new thing too seriously, I would not have much other things

in my life than travel, and I like this little different life now after all this travel. So, but this is about visiting world regions, a list of 1281 world regions, so obviously there are some dangerous places on this list. So, what I do is I look at timing. It is much better for me to wait five, ten, maybe fifteen years with an area if it's completely safe in five, ten or fifteen years. So, with conflict areas, where if you are a traveller and you are not in a rush to complete something, it is much better to look at the situation and timing and don't go when it is dangerous.

Yeah, exactly. So, now you do consider alternative destinations?

Oh, yeah definitely. I mean, there are so many places in the world that I would like to see. I have been to all countries, but in terms of regions, there are many places that I would like to go that are completely safe to visit, so why not visit those now. I mean, in the future, those might be risky, so it's all about timing, about going at the right time.

Yeah. And, so I am also looking at the push and pull factors, so what are some destination attributes that pulled you to these countries?

I'm afraid there were some words in there that I did not quite understand, can you explain it in a different way.

Yeah, of course! So, I am looking at the push and pull factors that make people go to conflict areas. So, push factors are the things push you from home, like internal desires that make you want to go somewhere. And pull factors are things like destination attributes that make you want to go to these destinations specifically.

Yeah, I think you first and foremost can (…) a group of people probably between 500 to 1000 that would like to visit al the world's countries. So, they are willing to put themselves at risk to complete that quest. So far, I think a little under.. approximately 200 people have completed every country in the world.. but then you have a group of people of maybe 500 to 1000.. I don't know how many, but that's I guess the people that want to visit every country. So, first you can take those, they do it because it is part of a quest or a project. Then you have a group of people that probably like adventure travel and you can probably get those kind of experiences by going into countries that are at conflict. Like for example Americans, you know.. they don't have the best relationship with Iraq, but still Iran is probably Iran is probably one of the best countries in the world to travel in terms of sights, in terms of people, really.. probably the friendliest people in the world. So, I think it's like, if you look something different, there are some countries that have facilities, things to offer that you can find maybe in other countries. And then it's probably also besides the people that try to visit every country, also just generally well-travelled people that would like a very well experience and know how to handle situations in those places. And then you have a group of business people that are willing to go into the areas because of money. For example Africa, several areas because they are big industries that make billions. Then people are willing, because obviously there is a lot of money involved, people are willing to do that. And then you have other people, you know.. that are soldiers and here to help, or missionaries or people that want to volunteer or make a difference for other people, help out you know.. charity organizations. So, there is a big group of people that drive them to go into conflict areas.

Yes. So, what are some considerations that you made before you travelled to these areas? Like any risks and uncertainties specifically that you considered and how did you weigh these?

Yeah, about having.. finding local contacts. So, it is really important to find people you can trust. So, it is a lot of emails and you have to understand.. I mean you have to say to yourself "okay, I might need

to send an X amount of emails before I find the right contacts", so you might end up emailing many, many people before someone decides to help you , or you finally decide "okay, this is the right contact, this guy can help me out", which first and foremost (…) have visited these countries, because many places of conflict are really difficult to visit, and they don't want people from the outside to visit. For example, when I got a tourist visa, or a visa for Syria, I was told I was the only tourist there by the taxi driver. I think he said "you're the only one here for tourism", or "you're the only tourist here", something like that. And I got a number on my visa and it was a very low number, meaning that they had not issued many visas so..

Wow, yeah..

So, that's another thing. So, really.. research is the main words. You have to put in a lot of research before you go to these places. Because of you just go and go as a tourist like you would in Europe or America, you are more likely to run into big trouble. And it is not nice to be in a situation where you have no contacts and they want to put you in prison and you can't explain why you are there. It is really, really important with contacts and with research.

Yeah. So, how did these risks and uncertainties influence, maybe not dest8ination choice in your case, but the area within the destination that you went to?

Uhm, if you mean how I decided which (…)

To go to certain areas, yeah.

Yeah, I tried to go to the areas that is the most safe for the purpose of my trip. So, when I visited every country, it was to visit every country, it was not to visit every area within that country, like every region. So, for example if you go to Somalia, you can go to Somaliland, which is in United Nations part of Somalia. So if you visit Somaliland, it is much, much safer than visiting Somalia. If you go to Iraq, you can visit the north part, Kurdistan, where you don't even need a visa. I'm not sure if you need it today, but when I visited in 2012, you didn't even need a visa, you just arrive and you get a stamp. And that's obviously completely different than visiting the south part, or Baghdad, or Basra. So, I would go where it would be safe and I would put those things into consideration. However, for Afghanistan I think there is a border town that is probably safer to visit than Kabul, but it is probably more difficult to find good contacts in that area. So, I decided to visit Kabul, because I had a really, really good contact that I trusted. So, it all depends what kind of contacts you get and if you base it on feedback from other people, about people that have done the trip. Like, what I did.. I wrote to everyone at the time, or almost everyone I think on TripAdvisor that had posted a review of Serena Kabul hotel, which is the best hotel in Kabul. Just to get insights you know.. to get insights about what.. how it is to be in Kabul, or can I trust.. can I go there as a tourist. I can't remember the specific question, but something like that.

Yeah. So, overall what was your experience going to these areas?

Mostly surprising, because even if a country is at conflict, you have often a really a unique experience because you don't see many tourists around. So, for example if you had gone to Damascus maybe many years back, you would have seen many other tourists. But, I went there and I got I remember a strange look, because.. from another person, or other people, I can't remember how many, if it was one or more, but I think he was surprised to see a really white guy there that looked different from them during a time the country was at war. So.. but obviously there have also been really uncomfortable situations where I felt at ways.. like in Central African Republic, walking the street, had a hard time convincing a soldier to let me go. He wanted from me just to walk the street, I think

he was just trying to get money out of me. There was other situations where.. it felt really bizarre and strange to walk in that specific city. So, I had also some different experiences that not.. you can say "just because a country is at war, it will be a nice experience or it will be a bad experience", every experience is different.

Yeah, perfect. So, that were my in depth questions, is there anything else you want to add?

Yes, please think about what you are doing because when I think back, I think I was probably young and naïve, things could easily have… something bad could easily have happened with me. So, it all depends and please use the advice about timing. If you have time to visit a specific destination, it's much, much… it might not be the better story, but it might be much, much better for yourself and also a lot less time consuming. And if you go at a time where it is safe to visit, where you don't need to go through a lot of bureaucracy to visit a country and you don't put yourself at risk. So, use common sense and let's say only go if you have to, that would be my recommendation. Or if you feel you have to.

Yeah, okay. So, thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions.

You're welcome!

Welke conflict bestemmingen heb je bezocht?

Nou, Israël.

En wat voor conflict gebied was dat?

Ja, weet je.. Nou ja, de Palestijnen tegen Israël, dus de Arabieren. Ja, het is natuurlijk heel lang geleden hahaha, maar goed dat was niet (…) wat er allemaal later kwam, maar uhm.. Ja, het was gewoon toch de Palestijnen tegen de Israëliërs…

Ja, en wanneer heb je het bezoek gemaakt?

In 1978 hahaha, heel lang geleden.

Hahaha, ja daarom als mensen nu naar Israël gaan is dat niet meer, want het is nu geen conflict gebied.

Nee, nee.

En beschouwde je die reis als riskant, toen je dat ging doen?

Absoluut niet.

Hoezo niet?

Ik was misschien wel jong en onbezonnen en ik wilde gewoon naar Israël, want je kon daar natuurlijk.. ik wilde dus naar de Kibboets, en dat was een dubbel iets om sowieso dat land te leren kennen en vanuit daar, omdat je toch een veilige omgeving had, he de kibboets, je weet wel wat een kibboets is natuurlijk.

Ja.

En dan vanuit daar kon je Israël bezichtigen, tripjes. (…) Waar waren we ook alweer?

Of je de reis als riskant beschouwde.

Toen, nee. Ik heb daar toentertijd niet zo bij stil gestaan dat ik wel eens in een gevaarlijk land zou zijn. Dat is misschien heel naïef geweest..

En toen je die reis ging boeken zeg maar, of plannen, dat komt straks ook nog weer, maar heb je dan ook bijvoorbeeld met het reisadvies van de overheid iets gedaan?

Nee, ik ben wel via een organisatie gegaan, dat vonden mijn ouders sowieso fijner en ik ook wel, want dan heb je nog iets achter de hand in ieder geval. Zeker omdat ik in februari ging, en de kibboetsen nog geen mensen nodig hebben, want als je dan via een organisatie gaat, die verzekerde mij dus van een kibboets plek. Wat achteraf niets was, maar dat is weer een ander verhaal haha. Maar die hebben me nooit gewezen op.. wat ik me kan herinneren.. op het gevaar dat er mogelijk iets uit zou kunnen breken.. nee.

Dat is ook wel apart eigenlijk.

Ja. Nee, ze hebben daar nooit.. nee, niet dat ik me kon herinneren.

Nee. Maar voordat je wegging was er dan in principe ook niet echt iets.

Nee, in '76 zijn er toen aanslagen geweest en toen is er wel gerotzooi geweest. Als je naar Israël kijkt.. Israël is wel.. ja, het is eigenlijk nooit veilig geweest, maar ik heb dat niet zo ervaren voordat ik ging van "oh, god ik moet oppasss, want ik..", nee ik wild gewoon weg. Ik wilde weg uit Nederland, ik wilde weg uit mijn veilige omgeving, ik wilde in ieder geval weg haha. En dan, kibboets is dan toch een veilig iets.

Ja. En toen je daar was en het ging wel allemaal mis, vond je toen dat het gebied aan de karakteristieken van een conflict gebied zoals in de definitie voldeed?

Ja, dat vind ik dus een beetje moeilijk. Want ik zat dus een beetje boven, in de top van Israël, dus tegen de Libanese grens aan. Ja.. ik weet het niet echt goed.

Ja, dus niet iets met.. gewapend conflict?

Nou, weet je wat wel zo was, als je.. dat is nu nog en dat is altijd geweest in Israël… Als je in Israël binnenkomt, zie je overal soldaten rondlopen. Overal, maakt niet uit welk tijdstip van de dag je.. of in de bussen, kom je altijd soldaten tegen. In de kibboets waren ook altijd soldaten, de grens kibboetsen, van in Libanon, daar waren altijd soldaten want die konden dan de eerste klap opvangen als er vanuit Libanon aanvallen waren zeg maar. Dus je was wel gewend aan dat er dus mensen met wapens rondliepen. En het is zelfs zo geweest, een periode bij mij dat als je geen soldaat zag, dus dat was nadat ik dat meegemaakt had, voelde ik me niet veilig. Dan had ik van "o, waarom is hier geen soldaat, waarom..", want toen was een op de vijf.. als je met een clubje was met meer als vijf mensen, kreeg je sowieso een soldaat mee. Ik heb natuurlijk wel trips gemaakt met meerdere mensen, kregen we steeds twee soldaten mee als we dan met ongeveer tien mensen waren. Dat gaf je natuurlijk wel een bepaald veilig gevoel, maar aan het begin was het echt zoiets van "waar slaat dit op", weet je. Ja, we mochten ook een aantal dingen.. die raadden ze ook af.. ik zit maar wat te ratelen hoor.. niet meeliften met soldaten, we mochten niet over dozen gaan rijden of lopen, of plastic zakken of over.. als er een dood dier op de weg lag, er niet naartoe gaan, niet aanraken want er kan een bom onder zitten. Weetje, dat was wel, dat heb ik nu nog steeds, dat zou ik nog steeds niet doen, dat is een trauma die ik mee heb genomen van toen haha. Als ik niet kan, dan ga ik zo van "oeff".

Ja, maar dat had dus wel te maken met een gewapend conflict wat daar gaande was dus?

Ja, ja.

En ook politieke instabiliteit of repressie or institutionele zwakte, onzekerheid of instorting van civiele infrastructuur en wijdverspreid geweld?

Hahaha, ja. Ja, weet je dat wist ik niet zo goed, toen. Ik zat in de kibboets en dat was veilig, men praatte ook tijdens die.. dat we aan werden gevallen, dat we cartouches over ons heen kregen, extra bewapening was, mochten we ook niet uit de kibboets. Want daar was het veilig en "ach, het zijn onze jongens". En wat er verder in Israël.. Naja, we kregen natuurlijk ook geen.. naja wel iets van buitenaf te horen via de BBC, maar zeg maar de bovenste top van Israël was gewoon afgesloten, daar kon je niet meer in of uit zonder de road blocks. Sowieso road blocks overal. Maar hoe dat verder.. ja, dat heb ik toen niet zo bewust meegekregen nee. En dan kan ik nu wel iets gaan verzinnen, maar voor toen, nee.

Nee, precies. En ondanks dat je je dus niet bewust van dat je eigenlijk in een conflict gebied terecht zou komen, heb je ook alternatieve bestemmingen overwogen?

Nee. Nee. Dit was gewoon mij ideale.. dit moest ik doen, het maakte me verder niet uit, nee.

En waarom wilde dan precies die bestemming bezoeken? Want er zijn twee soorten factoren, de bestemmingseigenschappen die je naar het land trokken en innerlijke verlangens die je weg van huis dreven.

Ja, sowieso het land Israël wilde ik wel leren kennen. Dan kwam omdat ik toen ook mensen heb gesproken die op de kibboets hadden gewerkt, ik heb zelf ook een.. hoe noem je dat.. voor mijn eind examen heb ik een stuk geschreven over de kibboets, dus ik heb heel veel gelezen ook over de kibboets. Ook uiteraard ook over oorlogen en zo, maar (…) zijn geweest. Ja, Israël trok me gewoon aan, trekt me nog steeds aan eigenlijk wel hoor, maar.. niet omdat ik nou iets met het jodendom heb, maar ik weet niet.. Ja, en dat was voor toen.. het was ook wel iets wat 'in' was, heel veel mensen gingen naar de kibboets. Als ik mensen van mijn leeftijd spreek dan "ohh, ben je ook naar de kibboets geweest, oh ik ook", weet je. Het was ook een bepaalde.. het was de jaren 70 was het, een bepaalde vrijheid opzoeken. Weg uit het.. ik wel eerst een diploma gehaald, de verpleegkunde opleiding afgerond voordat ik weg ging. Maar, ja de vrijheid, andere culturen, andere ja..

Dus dat was ook een soort innerlijk verlangen?

Innerlijk verlangen, ja. Rust. Het niet moeten, het was hier allemaal voor mijn gevoel "je moet, je moet, je moet, je moet", gejaagd, dat is nu alleen nog maar erger geworden in Nederland als toen. Maar daar had ik toen ook al last van, het benauwde me gewoon. Ik wil weg, ook onder de ouderlijke macht vandaan hoor haha. Heel erg mijn eigen ding doen.

Ja. En welke overwegingen heb je allemaal wel gemaakt voor je vertrek? Dus of je wel met risico's iets hebt gedaan voordat je weg ging.

Nou het enige wat ik wel weet, is dat ik in ieder geval genoeg geld op mijn rekening had staan, dat als ik naar huis moest, dat ik naar huis kon. Weetje, zo. Dat is het enige wat ik echt.. ja. Zoals mijn ouders of wie ook, ook niet zouden moeten betalen of iets. Omdat ik zelf ook helemaal zelfstandig.. dat was mijn keuze, ik ging daar heen dus ik moest genoeg geld achter de hand houden in geval van.. nou ja.

Ja, dus welke risico's had dat precies mee te maken?

Nou, sowieso als er iets thuis zou zijn en als ik eventueel het land uit zou moeten. Vanwege toch misschien wel dreiging van iets. Maar dat is niet echt heel bewust geweest van dat ik er uit zou moeten vanwege een dreiging.

Nee, dus als je naar een andere bestemming was geweest had je waarschijnlijk hetzelfde…

Had ik het ook gedaan, ja. Dat heb ik eigenlijk met mijn andere reizen ook gedaan, in ieder geval genoeg geld achter de hand. Dat ik in ieder geval op mijn eigen kosten naar huis kon gaan.

Ja, precies. Dus die risico's en onzekerheden hebben die nog wel invloed gehad op je bestemming keuze?

Nee.. nee.

En als je er dan op terig kijkt, wat is dan je algemene ervaring?

Ja, geweldig hahaha. Nou ja, weet je de conflicten tussen de Palestijnen en de Joden zeg maar, dat is wel duidelijker geworden. Ja, ik heb de tijd van mijn leven gehad. Toch de vrijheid die je had, de kibboet zien, leren kennen. Het land leren kennen. Alhoewel het nu heel anders is hoor haha.

En de risico's die erbij kwamen toen dat uitbrak daar heeft daar verder niet zo veel invloed op gehad?

Nee, ik heb later.. zou ik nog een keer naar Israël gaan met (zoon), in de kerst periode en toen waren ze ook vreselijk bezig met terroristische aanvallen zeg maar. Maar ik had mijn ticket al geboekt en ik had zoiets van, "ja, ik ga", weet je wel. Maar toen belde een vriend op uit Israël van "hé, ja ik zou niet komen want het wordt te gevaarlijk". En toen heb ik het gecanceld omdat ik (zoon) mee had, anders was ik wel gegaan. Want dat risico zou ik gewoon nemen voor mezelf, van ja "het zou zo toevallig moeten zijn dat..", maar ik wilde dan dus mijn kind niet belasten met eventueel kans op.

Ja, dat is wel grappig want een ander persoon die ik heb geïnterviewd zei precies hetzelfde. Hij zei "ja, ik zou alles zo weer doen maar niet met mijn kinderen".

Nee, nee, nee. Ja, dat is dan toch.. ja, ik weet het niet. Het is je eigen iets, je wil dat heel graag zelf en dan sleep je een kind erin mee. Kijk, als ik jou daar nou in mee zou slepen, jij bent volwassen genoeg om te zeggen van "ik doe het niet". Maar mijn enthousiasme, mijn joh.. het is.. en dan dat risico, nee, nee, nee. Dat is wel grappig ja, dat anderen dat ook zeggen haha.

Ja, haha. Dat waren de inhoudelijke vragen, heb je nog iets anders wat je wil toevoegen?

Nou, nee. Ik zou alles zo weer doen zelf en ik hoop dat het jou allemaal lukt en succes met je laatste stuk van je opleiding en dat je hier voldoende aan hebt.

Ja, nee natuurlijk. Bedankt hiervoor!

What conflict destination(s) have you visited?

- **What kind of conflict area was it?**
- **When did you visit them?**

I have visited a very large number of conflict zones during my multiple travels. Though my visits to places like Syria, Yemen and Libya, which are now conflict zones, were done before these places descended into violence, I would say that I have visited the following well-defined conflict zones

Somalia (Mogadishu, Kismayo, Puntland) – visited twice in November 2011 and November 2018

Iraq (Baghdad, Babylon, Nasiriyah, Basra) – visited in December 2012

Afghanistan (Kabul and Herat) – visited in October 2003 and February 2013

The above were all active conflict zones, with frequent suicide bombings or other violence.

I have also visited a number of places in Africa, such as Central African Republic (Bangui, Bossangoa, Berberati, Ndele), Mali (including Gao and Timbuktu) and Niger (including Zinder) which could be considered conflict zones in that there was a constant threat of insurgency.

My visit in Nigeria in February 2018 including a driving tour around the whole country, including the restive north in areas such as Maiduguri where there was a real threat of kidnapping and/or suicide attacks.

I have also visited a number of de facto independent areas, such as South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh etc. While the conflict here was more political rather than daily (i.e. the risk of an attack was minimal or zero), these are still 'conflict' zones in the general sense of the word.

Did you consider this travel as being risky?

Of course this travel is risky! No doubts about that. In fact, the risk is what makes this fun.

Do you think this area meets the characteristics of a conflict area as mentioned in this definition?

- **"[areas] identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people [and] may include areas of political instability or repression, institutional weakness, insecurity, collapse of civil infrastructure and widespread violence"**

Obviously yes to many or all of the above.

Were you aware that this destination was located in a conflict area?

- **Did you consider any alternative destinations?**

I would consider travelling even deeper into conflict zones if this were possible. For example in Iraq I had really wanted to visit Mosul (this was before the ISIS days) but the fixer ruled this one out. Similarly in Afghanistan, I would have visited Kandahar and other areas to the south, and done this by road, if this was sufficiently safe, which it wasn't.

What made you decide that you wanted to go to this destination?

- **What destination attributes pulled you to this destination?**
- **What internal desires pushed you away from home?**

I am an international traveller who aims to go everywhere. Therefore, this includes everything, from 'boring' and safe places to places where there is an absolute breakdown in law and order. I cannot say there are specific attributes that makes a place desirable or not, for me, if a place exists, I want to see it.

I don't consider I have a home in the classical sense, the world is my home, I belong nowhere and everywhere.

What are some considerations that you made before travelling there?

- **Are there any risks/uncertainties that you considered?**
- **How did you weigh the pros and cons of going there?**
- **How did you act on the potential risks/uncertainties?**

I usually research destinations before going there in terms of safety. I am not suicidal nor reckless and I am aware of the dangers and try to protect myself against them through good planning. Pros and cons are weighed by how possible it is to be reasonably safe in a place without exposing oneself to obvious danger: while one cannot predict a suicide attack (these happen in 'safe' Europe too and one can also not be protected against all-out warfare, in many conflict destinations there are local fixers who know the terrain and can judge whether a place is doable or not (i.e. they would also not go somewhere where they perceive the danger is too big). Therefore, consulting them and agreeing itineraries with them is usually the best strategy to minimise the dangers.

(How) did these risks/uncertainties influence your destination choice?

- **Did these have an influence on the factors that you said influenced your destination decision?**

Ultimately yes, in the sense that certain places are no-go zones or permits to get there are impossible. These influence not only going to a place but also the method of travel (air vs land) and the style of travel (a longer stay versus a very quick visit).

What was your overall experience of this trip looking back?

As mentioned above, there have been many trips. When travelling to a conflict zone, the general feeling is an extreme adrenalin high which is constant and relentless, and which makes visits to such places unique in a sense that other places are not. Upon return, there is a mixed feeling of success (I survived!) and awe (I really dare to go this) coupled with a feeling of uniqueness (I am one of the few who have done this); similarly a slight feeling of disappointment at being back at a relatively safe destination.

Do you have anything else to add that we didn't speak about?

Nowadays, we see conflict in a varied way. I live (when I am not travelling) outside London, and every time I am in London, I am actually very much aware of my surroundings, especially on the underground, in a way that I can't say I am anywhere else, not even in so-called 'conflict' destinations. I believe we need to address the fact that our 'safe' places are also becoming 'conflict zones'. To a certain extent, given that I have fixers in many of the dangerous places, who are almost like 'baby sitters', I can say I sometimes feel safer in these conflict zones than I do in the so-called safer places.
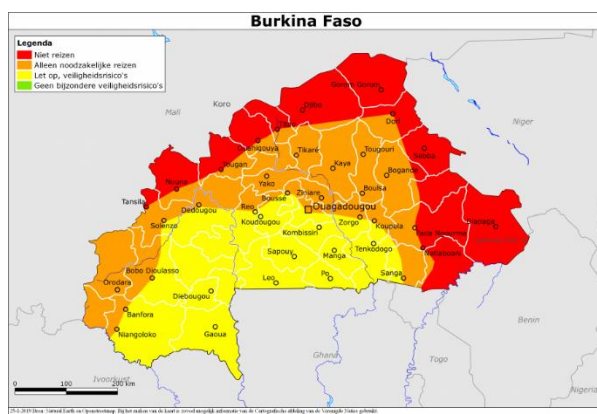
Appendix II: Travel advice maps

<u>Note</u>: The travel advice maps of Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019) as exhibited below were valid between 08-05-2019 and 06-06-2019.
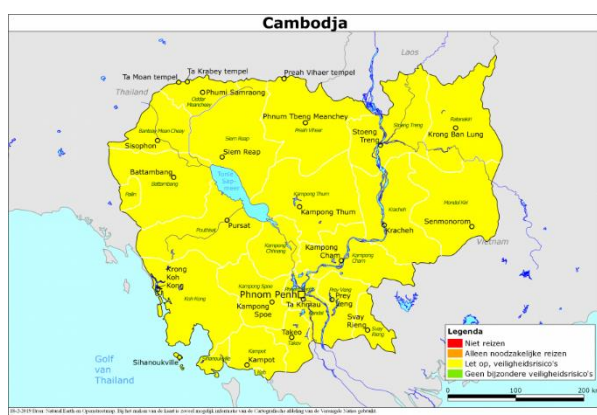
Afghanistan
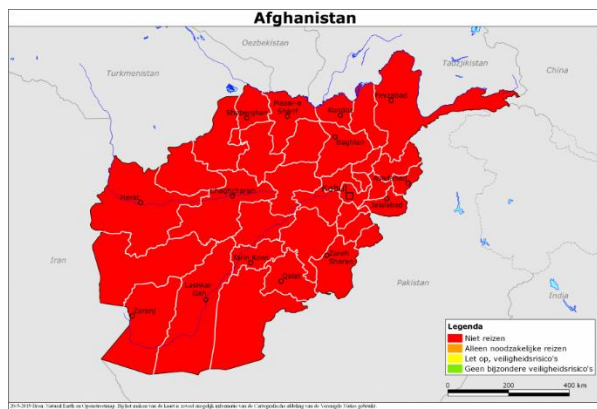
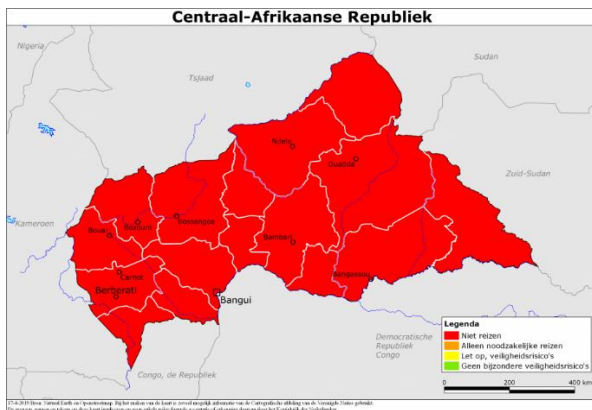*Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)*

Burkina Faso

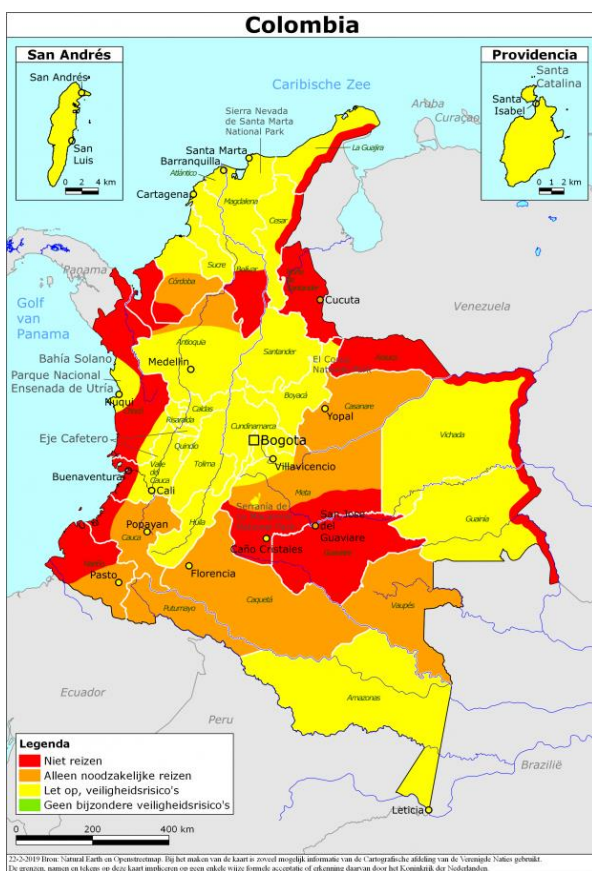*Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)*

Cambodia (visited when violent)

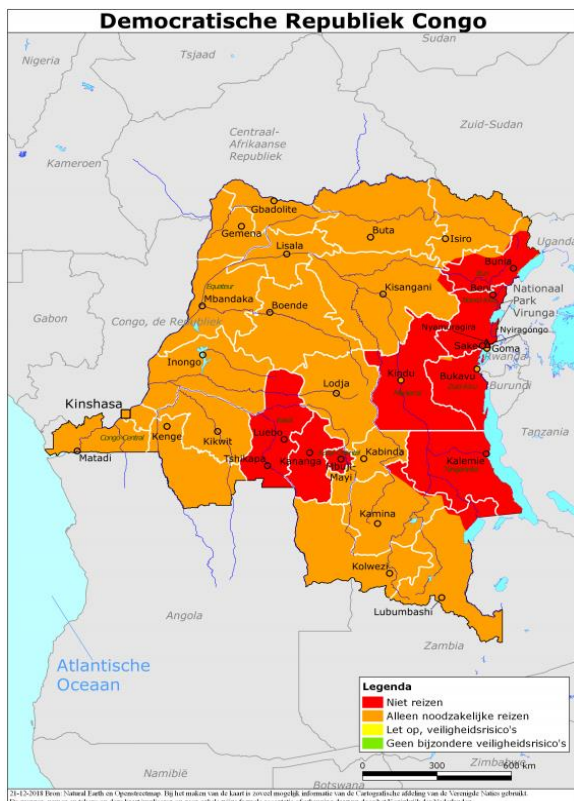*Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)*

Central African Republic

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Colombia

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)
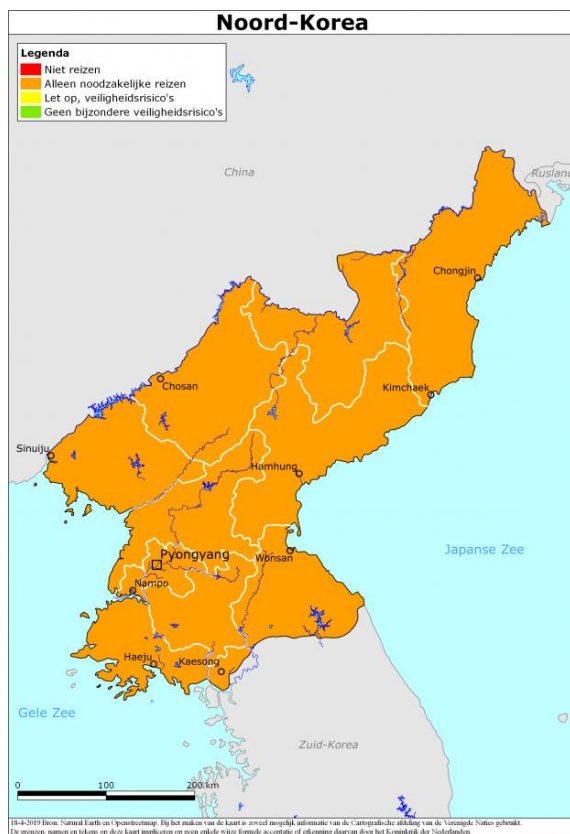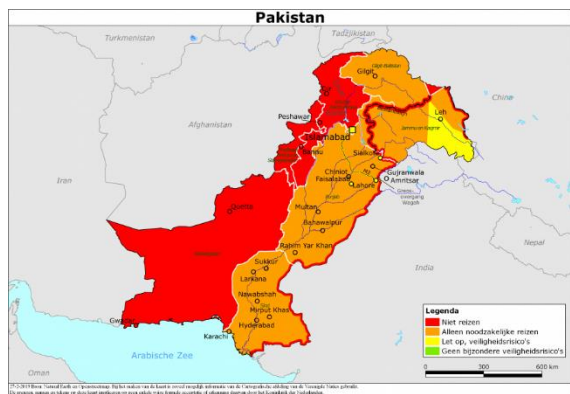
Democratic Republic of Congo
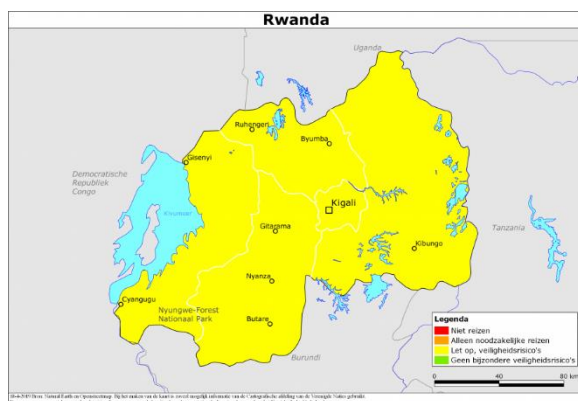

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Ethiopia
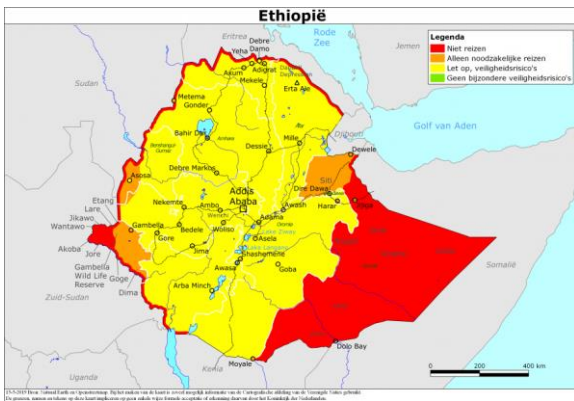
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Iraq
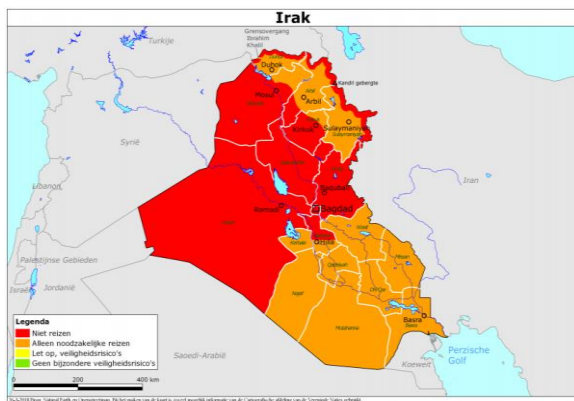
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Israel (visited in 1978 when Operation Litani, the invasion of Lebanon, was commenced)
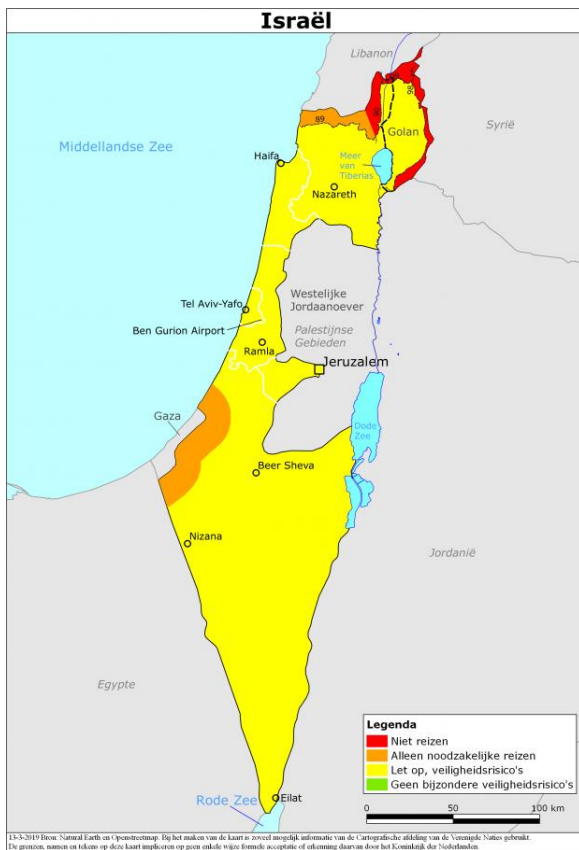
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Ivory Coast (visited during terror attacks)

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Kenya
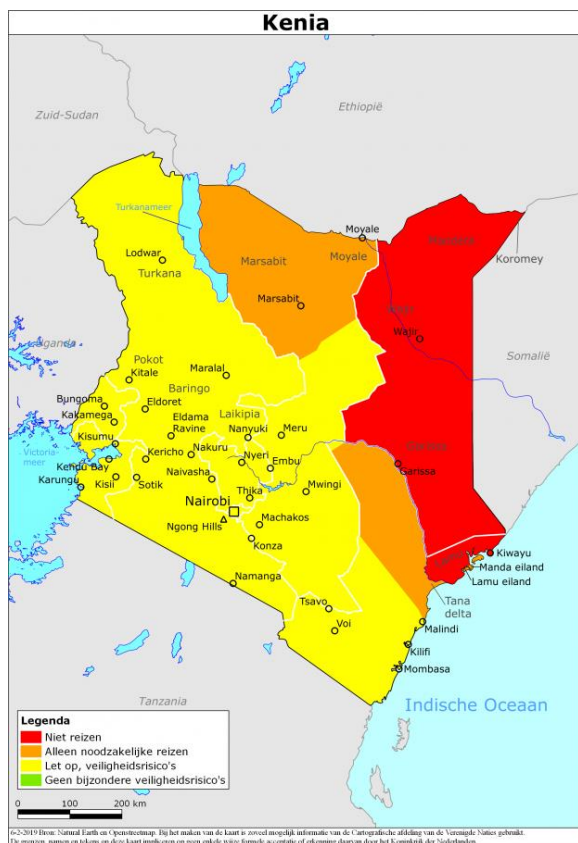
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Libya

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Mali
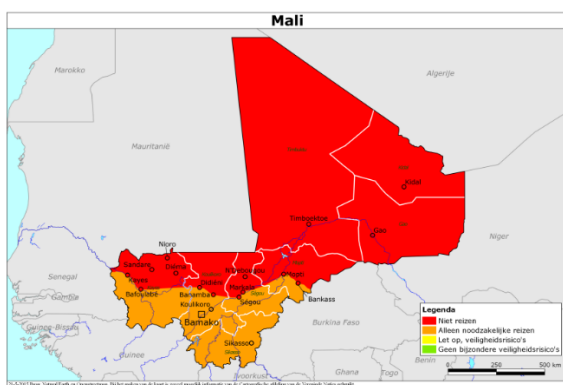
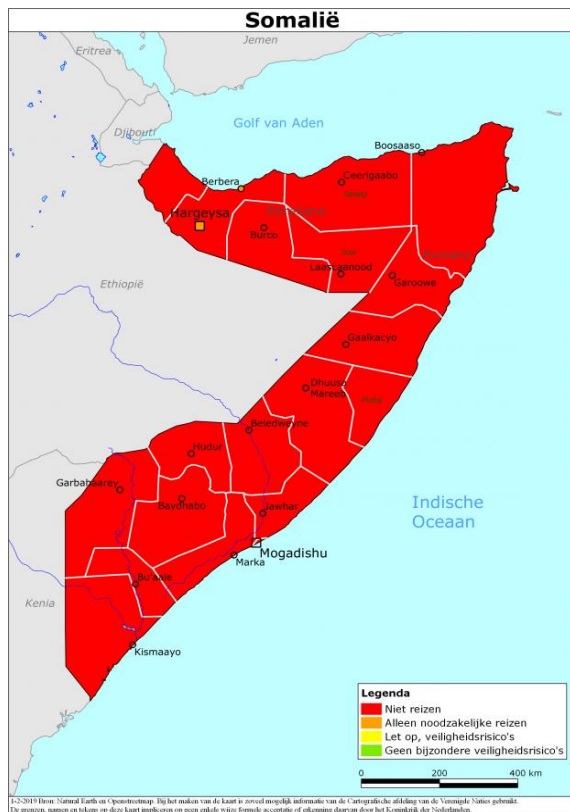*Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)*

Mauritania
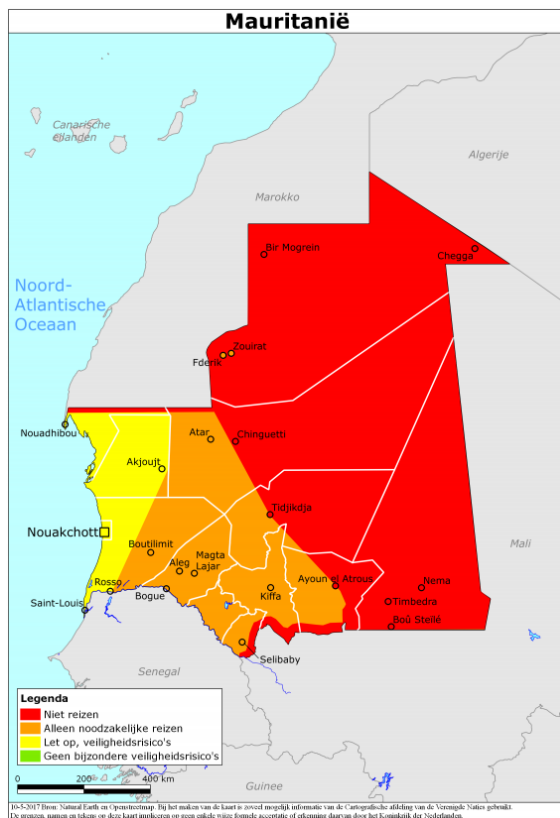
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Mexico (visited in 1994 during drug wars)

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Nigeria
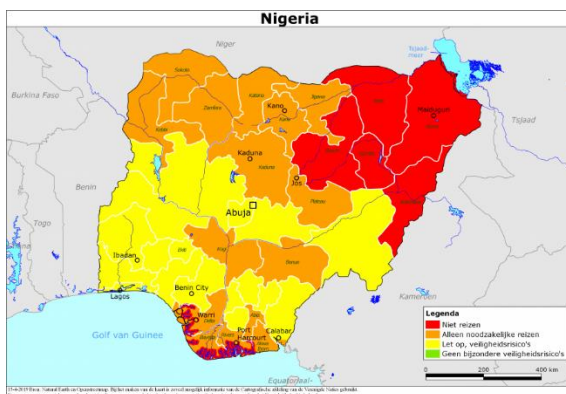
Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

North Korea

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Pakistan

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)
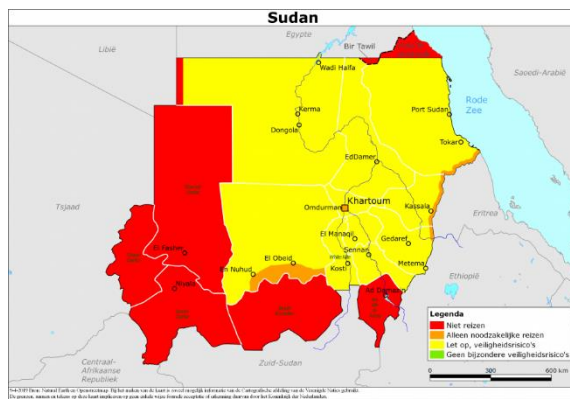
Rwanda (visited in 1992 during genocide)

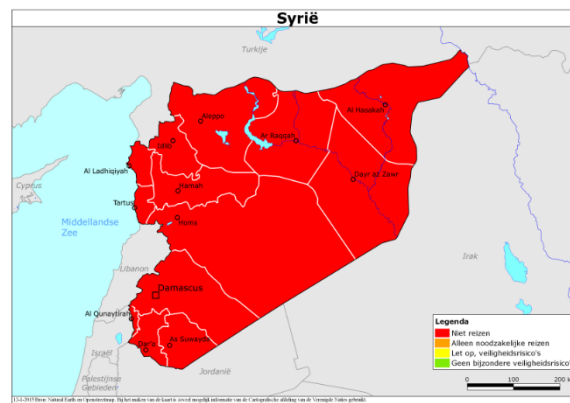*Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)*

Somalia

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Sudan

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)
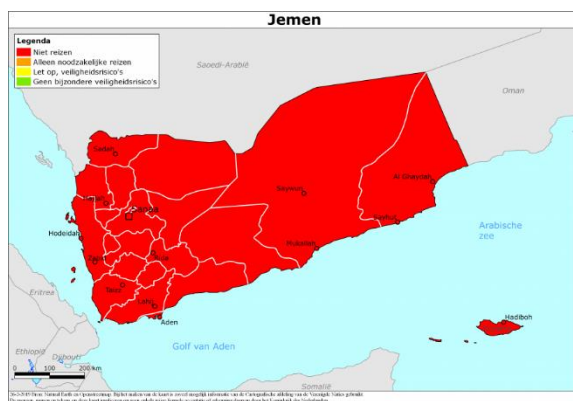
Syria

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Venezuela

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)

Yemen

Source: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (2019)