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*School of Education and  
Communication*

# Hero Holiday

Swedish Voluntourism and the White Savior Complex

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**AUTHORS:** *Elin Hultman, Felicia Lanevik*

**SUPERVISER:** *Åsa Nilsson Dahlström*

**EXAMINER:** *Johanna Bergström*

**SEMESTER:** *VT20*

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ABSTRACT

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Elin Hultman, Felicia Lanevik

**Hero Holiday; Swedish Voluntourism and The White Savior Complex:**

A qualitative study examining the phenomenon of voluntourism

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons and motivations behind voluntourism in reference to working with children, and how these can be understood and analyzed within the framework of voluntourism research. A qualitative approach was used, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews and then evaluated with the use of a thematic analysis. This data was then analyzed in correlation to previous voluntourism research and through the theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism and neocolonialism. Eight interviews were conducted, with six voluntourists and two representatives from voluntourist organizations. Our findings were that the respondents had well-meaning intentions, along with complex and nuanced thoughts in relation to culture shocks, reflections, relationships with the children and rules and regulations given by the voluntourism organizations they traveled with. The conclusions drawn from these findings were that while intent does not trump impact, this phenomenon should be examined in relation to power dynamics and the privatization of development work.

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**Key Words:** Voluntourism, voluntourist, neocolonialism, postcolonialism, White Savior Complex, development work

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## Definition of Terms

*Family-based care*- Kinship, extended family, or foster care (Save the Children, 2014).

*Global North and the Global South*- While these terms suggest a geographical connotation, it is not limited to this generalization. We have chosen to use the understanding of the Global North as opposed to the Global South as developed countries in contrast to developing countries (Williams, Meth & Willis, 2014).

*Institutional care*- Care provided in a hospital, nursing home, or other facility certified or licensed by the state primarily affording diagnostic, preventive, therapeutic, rehabilitative, maintenance, or personal care services. Such facility provides twenty-four-hour nursing services on its premises or in facilities available to the institution on a formal prearranged basis (Save the Children, 2014).

*Orphan*- UNICEF and global partners define an orphan as a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death (UNICEF, 2017).

*Poverty porn or disaster pornography*- Any type of media, be it written, photographed or filmed, which exploits the poor condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers or increasing charitable donations or support for a given cause (Burman, 1994).

*Voluntourism*- An industry that combines traveler's plans with volunteer work. Such combined trips are often short-term (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d).

*Voluntourist*- People who participate in volunteering projects in foreign countries, in combination with holiday travels. These are primarily young people, between the ages of 18-26. Voluntourists are primarily from developed countries such as USA, Australia, Canada, UK and other European countries (Torres, 2017).

*White Savior Complex*- A Western belief that white people have a superiority and "know best", thereby have a duty to pass this on to the Global South. This complex also works to portray other countries, cultures or people as incapable of caring for themselves and therefore in need of saving. The "help" is often self-serving (Bandyopadhyay, 2019).

# 1. Introduction

We never said no white people, we just said that you should not be the hero of the story. - (No White Saviors, 2020).

The generalization of Africa as inferior has been perpetuated through the Age of Imperialism, postcolonialism and now seeped into the structures of neocolonialism. While development work has long been considered a solution to alleviating the damage done to developing countries during colonial times, the development world has become more and more privatized. This, in turn, has led to a capitalization and creation of a “development market”. This sequence of events has led to the birth of the voluntourism industry. The phenomenon of voluntourism has been largely focused on child-care (Mostafanezhad, 2013). This begs the question as to what the reasons and motivations are behind the individual’s involvement in voluntourism endeavors working with children. This study seeks to investigate this, as well as how these reasons/motivations can be understood and analyzed within the framework of voluntourism research. To achieve this, representatives from organizations with voluntourist operations and several former voluntourists are interviewed to share their thoughts and experiences.

Using a postcolonial and neocolonial framework this study explores the contemporary, individual-based development work of voluntourism and how good intentions are not always enough to justify involvement in voluntourist practices that maintain colonial legacies.

## 1.1 Background

The problem is this persistent narrative that passion and good will are enough to solve complex problems in communities we know so little of. - (No White Saviors, 2018).

The *White Savior Complex* was first spoken of in relation to the African warlord Kony. The brutality of his actions, like exploiting children to be his soldiers and forcing people to inflict violence upon each other, became worldwide news when the founders of an organization named Invisible Children made a documentary about the situation, called *Kony 2012* (Invisible Children, n.d.). After having watched this movie, Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American novelist, made a post on Twitter about what he found problematic with the movie and the ensuing activism it stirred in the Global North. He stated that the White Savior Industrial Complex is the fastest growing industry in America and elaborates that it is not about justice, but rather about having “a big emotional experience that validates privilege” (Cole, 2012). The privilege he speaks of refers to white privilege, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) as “the fact of people with white skin having advantages in society that other people do not have- the concept of white privilege explains why white people have greater access to society’s legal and political institutions”. Cole’s tweet alluded to the often-problematic discourse and portrayal of Africa being in need of help or saving from Westerners. And thus, the concept of the White Savior was born (Cole, 2012).

Historically speaking, relationships between the Global North and the Global South have been tainted by power-wielding and control (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). The power struggles are now expressed through depictions of those in the Global South as in need of saving, and for those in the Global North to do the saving. While the White Savior Complex can be discussed in relation to trade, travel, entertainment, among others, it is commonly examined through the lens of voluntourism.

The concept of voluntourism is fairly new but has grown rapidly and dynamically. It has developed into a diverse, complex, and professionalized activity that has become a predominant alternative to conventional tourism. Each year, an estimated 1.6 million people participate in voluntourism and it has become an industry worth an annual 2.6 billion dollars (Save The Children, 2017). Approximately 80 percent of voluntourists are female, making it a female-dominated industry (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Voluntourism is defined as utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to participate in a period of engagement and contribution to the local, national or world community (Hammersley, 2014).

## 1.2 Problem Formulation

You can mean well, do some good and still cause harm. This idea that good intentions would absolve someone from accountability or responsibility is truly wild. – (No White Saviors, 2019).

Voluntourism is a new concept that has created concerns regarding the ethical consumption of the experience of tourism and existing power dynamics. It is an unregulated industry and is driven by profit. It is argued that those who participate in voluntourism endeavours are predominantly unskilled individuals from the Global North, traveling to the Global South in the name of “helping” (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). These concerns are rooted in the ethical framework surrounding humanitarianism, development work and morals within tourism (Mostafanezhad, 2013).

One of the most popular forms of voluntourism is child-care voluntourism, often in the settings of a school or institutional care, such as orphanages. There is an argument to be made that some of these settings are solely created to meet the demands of the voluntourist industry. This demand for voluntourism opportunities in orphanages, for example, has resulted in the exponential creation of new orphanages, some of which host children who are not actually orphans in order to attract visitors and donors (Save the Children, 2017). Furthermore, the debate against this institutionalization of children highlights how orphans are being used as “commodified objects for intervention” and how the image of orphans is “being manufactured to meet the demands of child rescuers” (Torres, 2017, p. 12). As a result of this increasing demand many orphanages, as well as schools, are now foreign-founded and in many instances fuelled by donors. One reason behind the acceptance of voluntourists to these child-care settings is financial gain (Ibid.).



Children of the Global South, whether in school settings or orphanages, are often the subjects for aid organizations and aid appeals, and voluntourism is no different. The term *poverty porn* or *disaster pornography* was created in relation to the grim fascination with commercially benefiting from the suffering of people, especially children. The spectacle of *the suffering child* is a phenomenon often given attention in different media forums, providing a link between commercial exploitation and the disaffirmation of subjectivity in poverty porn (Burman, 1994).

Children's rights advocates and human rights advocates have raised questions about the real effects of voluntourism in the host communities and in the local communities it strives to help. The phenomenon of child-care voluntourism is complex and has raised a debate about ethics in relation to this.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the voluntourists's accounts of their experiences and motivations for working with children, and to provide a critical analysis of voluntourism. Throughout this study, voluntourism as a growing phenomenon will be discussed through the lens of postcolonialism and neocolonialism, as well as previous voluntourism research.

#### Research Questions

1. What are the reasons and motivations of an individual's involvement in voluntourism endeavors working within child-care?
2. How can these reasons and motivations be understood and analysed within the framework of voluntourism research?

### 1.4 Delimitations

As the White Savior Complex is such a broad term that includes multi-faceted dimensions there was a need for a narrowing of the topic. In addition to this, the phenomenon of voluntourism is also quite broad. As voluntourism incorporates a wide range of projects, we wanted to focus on child-care due to recent debate about the potentially questionable outcomes of voluntourism in regard to children. While the intentions behind this are good, we feel it is important to critically examine the focus on children within voluntourism.

This paper will seek to limit the focus of research to Swedes that have participated in voluntourist projects. The motivation behind this is that Sweden is a country of the Global North that participates in voluntourist expeditions in the Global South. Further delimitations also include voluntourism that has been conducted in Eastern Africa, specifically in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Originally, our intent was to focus solely on Uganda, as the term White Savior Complex stems from a conflict that took place there. We quickly found this to be too narrow, hence the addition of Tanzania and Kenya.

## 2. Previous Research

To understand the concept of voluntourism a literature study was conducted to further broaden the knowledge and motivate the research of this field.

### 2.1 Motivations

In recent years, discussions regarding the motives behind voluntourism has dominated research within this field. The debate in question is centered around voluntourism as it adheres to “self-interest vs. altruism” in reference to intentions (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Research has found that some of the diverse motivations for voluntourism include enjoying new experiences, exploring a different culture, “giving back”, and “helping where there is a need” (Pastran, 2014). One common motivation, often used in student recruitment to voluntourist projects, is that of an experience that makes for a positive impact on one’s Curriculum Vitae. By marketing it as a useful commodity for one’s future career, along with helping those in need, this motivation seems to indulge altruistic intentions as well as those based on self-interest (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Other authors argue that this ‘absolute dichotomy’ of intentions being posited as altruistic or for self-interest oversimplifies the possibility that voluntourists are able to have a multitude of complex motivations simultaneously. According to Söderman and Snead (as quoted in Guttentag, 2009, p. 540) “Altruism was often part of the motivation, although usually in combination with benefits for oneself, and thus more in line with ‘reciprocal altruism’”. Reciprocal altruism is based on the idea of doing something for altruistic reasons yet getting something in return, thus showing that intentions of altruism or self-interest within the voluntourist field are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Certain studies have found motivations differ depending on demographics. The younger demographic of voluntourists have been found more likely to list intentions in relation to self-interest as primary motivators. The older demographic lists motivations such as seeking camaraderie, an opportunity for cultural immersion, or giving back (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

The privatization of the developmental field, along with globalization, has paved the way for an influx of voluntourists. Other incentives may include mainstream media positing voluntourism as an alternative consumer product by way of celebrity engagement. The influence of celebrities may shed light on the correlation between celebrity humanitarian efforts in Africa specifically, and the startling 87.5 percent of voluntourists who have chosen Africa as a voluntourism destination (Mostafanezhad, 2013).

While the majority of research shows that voluntourist motives are based on good intentions, these intentions may still result in negative consequences. Berlant (as quoted in Mostafanezhad, 2014, p. 116) explains that “We do not like to hear that our good intentions can sometimes said to be aggressive, although anyone versed in, say, the history of love or imperialism knows volumes about the ways in which genuinely good intentions have involved forms of ordinary terror...and control”. It is argued that the best intentions, and the needs of the communities that are receiving aid, can often be obscured by the desires of the voluntourist in combination with the desire for profit by the voluntourist organizations (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). It is also of significance to mention that there are social ills in the voluntourist’s own communities that

should perhaps be a priority rather than traveling to another country to help “those in need” (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017).

Hammersley (2014) argues that voluntourism is the “public face of development that creates simplistic, consumable and ultimately do-able notions of development”, (p. 857). As a follow-up to his seven-part tweet about the White Savior Industrial Complex, Teju Cole wrote an article for *The Atlantic* where he continues to explain the full-extent of the concept. The article began with a powerful statement which is as follows, “If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement” (Cole, 2012).

McGloin and Georgeou (2016) argue that the discussion surrounding whether voluntourism acts as a help or hindrance to poverty alleviation and development, has instead focused its concern to the ethics of voluntourism and the motivational aspects. They suggest that the conversation focuses on whether “privileged westerners should judge other privileged westerners for wanting a development experience” (p. 411). This diverts attention from the central issue of development and the lingering colonial relations of power (Ibid.).

## 2.2 Stereotypes & Otherness

Previous research shows a distinct contention of voluntourism reinforcing unequal power relationships between the Global North and the Global South as well as upholding cultural stereotypes (Pastran, 2014). The conversation also centers around a consistent discourse regarding the rigid dichotomy of *us* and *them*. In addition to this is the concept of *Otherness*, which was first introduced by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* (1978). He emphasizes the importance of awareness regarding the reproduction of stereotypical ideas of the Other, and to see the Global North as the hegemonic culture towards which other cultures, especially the Global South, are measured and always found inferior. Stuart Hall (1997) elaborates on various explanations and different ways to approach the concept of Otherness and in creating a “difference”, in this context, between the Global North and Global South. Moreover, stereotyping correlates with power inequality and this reiterates Said’s (1978) argument that one culture, often the Western culture, is considered the norm and thereby that which other cultures are measured against. Power, in this context, does not solely refer to coercion of physical power but rather “the power to represent someone or something in a certain way” (Hall, 1997, p. 338).

Stereotyping is an essential part of this power structure as it provides the foundation for the one in power to reproduce a discourse in which the Other is reduced to a stereotypical and racialized Other, characterized as “without opportunity” and “without a voice”. This discourse further establishes a construction of the voiceless Other. One reason behind the continuous spread and use of stereotypes can be traced back to it providing a sort of reward, regardless of it being political, moral, or emotional for those in power of the discourse. “The norms which are reinforced by stereotyping, emanate from established structures of social dominance” (Pickering, 2001, p. 5). An example of this is the “happy-go-lucky” stereotype of black people. This stereotype was able to persist for a long period of time due to its simplicity and because it legitimized the colonization, and in correlation to this, the exploitation of black people. The

stereotypes were constructed in such a manner where black people were considered unable to care for themselves and take responsibility, thus unable to develop their own countries, which justified their subordination (Ibid.).

### 2.3 The Vulnerable Child

Previous research highlights a predominant portrayal of children in the Global South, and in child-care settings, as happy, beautiful, and grateful. Holmberg (2014) argues that although the majority of stories portray this positive image, the construction is still about a child who is different in comparison to Western children. Mostafanezhad (2013) explains how the image of the Third World child has become a signifier for modern day humanitarianism, furthermore, how this stereotypical image has become widely accepted, to the extent of being used by voluntourist organizations and companies for marketing purposes. This image of the Third World child stems from a postcolonial aspect of stereotypical identities of us and them, and their attributed differences. Previous research emphasized a connection between postcolonialism and how voluntourism mirrors these stereotypes and can contribute to the perception of what is considered best for the child in this context. There is a common belief in the voluntourist industry that posits the placement of children in institutional care settings as the best choice, and often the only option. The lack of dialogue regarding community-based solutions creates the notion that the child is fully dependent on both the financial support as well as the emotional support from the international helper (Johnson, Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2006).

Torres (2017) and Johnson, Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis (2006) argue that institutional care of children should be seen as a last resort, it should only be considered after options such as family-based care within the extended family, kinship care, or foster care. Furthermore, institutional care should only be a viable option for the shortest period of time, due to the increasing risk of both physical harm and psychological harm. Prevention of effect on the psychological development of the child, or the development of attachment disorders, also needs to be considered if the child remains in such an environment for a long period of time. Simultaneously, efforts directed towards children being able to either return to their families or other more suitable options should be put in place. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a UN Convention put in place to protect the human rights of the child. The CRC General Comment No. 5 states that if children are put into institutional care, they have the right to be cared for by trained professionals. Furthermore, Article 27 of the CRC explains the right of development as “a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The fourth Sustainable Development Goal of Agenda 2030 also refers to the rights of the child as it is based on ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015).

According to Manzo (2008) the Third World child is the primary object of the Western voluntourist’s compassion and serves as an iconography of the Global South. She further elaborates that “stories of social suffering have become stories of humanitarian intervention”

(p. 638). Therefore, the image of the suffering child has become a way to market crises, referred to by Polman (2010) as “donor darlings”. This could explain how some humanitarian crises gain more attention and money than others, for various reasons, such as marketing strategies. Marketing can also frame this to show the positive impact one individual can have on this suffering child. Thus, the helper avoids criticism for a one-sided portrayal and for presenting the child as a passive and helpless victim, thereby glorifying oneself (Holmberg, 2014).

### 2.3.1 Images of Suffering

The use of images of the suffering child provokes a “sympathy for passive suffering rather than support for active (including armed) struggle” according to Burman (1994, p. 241). The child has become the “universal icon of human suffering”, for instance the “Ethiopian child” during the 80’s and the “Biafra child” of the 60’s used as images of a stereotypical suffering child. This comes at the cost of dehumanizing children and reducing them to body parts, rendering them into passive objects of a Western gaze (Ibid., p. 238).

The portrayal of the suffering child brought to us through media coverage underlines the debate regarding the role of social media and highlights how children appear to be the central focal objects onto which attention is focused as the signifiers of distress. This is referred to as poverty porn, or disaster pornography, and is a recurring theme. Porn, or pornography, is characterized in its essence as dehumanizing, where bodies are represented as parts and displayed as available for consumption without the regard of participation or consent. This notion is adopted in explaining media’s exploitative ways of reporting on suffering in the Global South “. . . film crews . . . rush through crowded corridors, leaping over stretchers, dashing to film the agony before it passes. They hold bedside vigils to record the moment of death . . . Reduced to nameless extras in the shadows behind Western aid workers or disaster tourists, the grieving, hurting and humiliated human beings are not asked if they want to be portrayed in this degrading way “ (Burman, 1994, p. 246).

Manzo (2008) explains how images of the suffering child have been widely used by mass media and NGOs to prompt emotional responses in both viewers and readers- from pity, empathy and sympathy to indignation and anger. This is mostly done to capture attention or gain donations (Ibid.). Furthermore, Wearing et al. (2018) and Sin and He (2018) discuss the frequent practice of photography and how it plays a role in voluntourism. They argue that there needs to be more research through this perspective as there is a clear inequality in the relations between a photographer and the photographed within the context of voluntourism.

## 3. Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, the theoretical frameworks used for this study are presented. Postcolonialism and neocolonialism are relevant to this study as they contribute to a foundational understanding of the emergence and propagation of the voluntourism industry. In previous research the use of postcolonialism as a theoretical framework is prevalent. This study incorporated an addition of neocolonialism as a theoretical framework, as one main focus is the privatization of development work as a form of simply redefining colonial tendencies.

### 3.1 Postcolonialism

So, postcolonial is not the end of colonization. It is after a certain kind of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation—in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it—it is what it is because something else has happened before,...– Stuart Hall (as quoted by Bandyopadhyay, 2019, p. 329).

Postcolonialism refers to the state or period representing the aftermath of Western colonialism according to Britannica Encyclopaedia (n.d.). Furthermore, it is a term that seeks to explain the current rethinking and reclaiming of history, and the notion of people who have been subordinated under different forms of imperialism. The term postcolonialism displays the possibility of overcoming colonialism. However, new forms of colonialism and domination could possibly be a result in the wake of such changes. Despite the possibility of change, the concept of postcolonialism should not obscure the reality that the world we live in originates from colonialism (Ibid.). The chosen literature for this study has recurring themes of postcolonialism.

Postcolonialism is a theoretical framework that focuses on how colonial legacies still play a part in how global economics, politics and development are shaped. Hence, postcolonial theory can be viewed as a critique of these power structures and a way to highlight power dynamics dimensions of postcolonial processes and activities, and a way to challenge the dominant ways of North-South relations (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). Postcolonialism as a theoretical background can refer to the use of an unequal power dynamics as taking advantage of the suffering of people and representation of suffering, especially without consent (Burman, 1994).

The postcolonial theoretical framework is useful and applicable for the analysis of this study as it provides a link between voluntourism and colonial structures and power dynamics rooted in a colonial past. Postcolonialism demonstrates how practices and power dynamics are still maintained and reinforced through voluntourism as a privatized area of development work, and how these practices and structures are simultaneously failing to include the voices of the marginalized. By creating awareness of history, power dynamics and power relations, postcolonial theory is a part of shifting present Western-centered power dimensions and hierarchical structures of the current development paradigm. Social and political strategies that focus on the rights of those characterized as inferior can lead to a more democratic dialogue in the developing world and incorporate the voices of the marginalized (Kapoor, 2008).

### 3.2 Neocolonialism

...‘the continuation of external control over African territories by newer and subtle methods than that exercised under formal empire’ [...] defined aid not as a ‘gift’ but rather as a short-term payment that would denude African empirical sovereignty. - (Buba, 2019, p.135)

Britannica Encyclopaedia (n.d.) defines neocolonialism as the new form of exploitation of less-developed countries “through the operations of international capitalism rather than by means of direct rule”. Developed countries continue to use power to exploit less-developed countries

even after the end of the Western colonial era (Ibid.). This becomes evident as voluntourism has become a multi-million-dollar industry (Mostafanezhad, 2013). In this sense, Western capitalism continues to exploit the Global South, thus upholding colonial visions of a *superior* and *inferior*. These visions are constantly reiterated through commercial marketing for voluntourism traveling (Edvinsson & Moen, 2015).

Wearing et al. (2018) refer to the “neocolonial aura” as a trend in many of today’s development programs as well as in the voluntourism industry. This is also examined through the lens of consequential racial elements presented in the image of the Westerner as superior (Sin and He, 2018). Voluntourism is, in many ways, presented as a way to “right the wrongs of colonialism” but instead tends to represent trends of neocolonialism (Ibid.). McGloin and Georgeou (2016) argue that there will continue to be an increase of opportunities within the voluntourism industry as long as neoliberal capitalism persists in generating further inequalities.

Through this framework one could question whether the historical colonial structures of power, oppression, and privilege are simply redefined throughout contemporary development work. This approach would argue that voluntourism may not be transformative within development as it remains too close to the history of colonialism. It may simply reinforce cultural stereotypes and unequal power dynamics (Pastran, 2014). Neocolonialism is relevant to this study as a theoretical framework as we seek to examine the thoughts and experiences of voluntourists and their perspectives of this industry that has redefined colonial tendencies.

## 4. Methodology

In this section we will present the method of choice, the process of creating the interview guide and transcription, as well as sampling. Furthermore, research quality, ethical considerations, and adaptations to the COVID-19 situation will be discussed.

### 4.1 Method of Choice

A qualitative approach is relevant as this method seeks to “gather detailed, rich data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of individual actions within the context of social life” (Giddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 50). A common reason for using a qualitative method is to view the world through the eyes of someone else and this is relevant to the purpose of this study (Bryman, 2011). Within a qualitative approach, we chose to use semi-structured interviews in gathering data. This granted us an opportunity to create questions based on chosen themes within our subject. In addition to this, it was an appropriate choice in allowing the interviewee to speak freely.

In addition to our interviews we chose to use secondary sources, mainly peer-reviewed articles, and Master’s and Bachelor’s theses on voluntourism. We also used primary sources, such as UN documents and certain books on the topic. Social media was another source that was beneficial to this study, as voluntourism and voluntourist activities are usually marketed via these platforms or used by voluntourists to document their experiences.

## 4.2 Interview Guide

In accordance with a semi-structured method we created an interview guide. In creating our interview guide the intention was to create a focus or a theme that provided guidance for the interviewees within the subject. While this allowed for the interviewees to have space to freely discuss their perspectives, it also provided flexibility for us, as interviewers, in asking follow-up questions that were not included in the interview guide if an opportunity for this presented itself or was of relevance. The importance of an interview guide was also made clear as we had several respondents and there was a need for a frame of reference that allowed us to compare and acknowledge correlations between their answers (Bryman, 2011).

As our respondents included representatives from two voluntourist organizations as well as six voluntourists, we chose to have two interview guides (see Appendix 1 in reference of the former and Appendix 2 in reference to the latter). While these were comprised of related themes, there was a need for differentiating between the narration of those who were in charge of organizing voluntourist trips and those who sought out these organizations to participate in voluntourist trips.

The questions chosen followed six themes: motivations and intentions, relationships with the children, reflections, social media, culture shocks, and rules and regulations. These had been established prior, based on what we felt served our purpose of this study. The interviews were conducted in Swedish as all of the participants were Swedish.

## 4.3 Transcription

At the beginning of each interview we asked for permission to record the interview. Each of our interviewees granted permission. Our interviewees have been given aliases to protect their anonymity. Emma and Barbara are representatives from two small-scale voluntourist organizations. Susan, Karen, and Rachel voluntoured in Tanzania. Donna and Anna were at an orphanage in Uganda. Lastly, David was a voluntourist in Kenya. Previous research has shown that voluntourism is female dominated (Mostafanezhad, 2013), which is reflected in our respondents as we were only able to get in touch with one male voluntourist, and the rest were women.

The task of transcribing the interviews was divided between us. To avoid any misinterpretations, we reviewed each other's finalized transcriptions. There are nuances to be considered however, such aspects that cannot be conveyed into written texts. This may include intonations, sarcasm, or body language. In terms of pauses and slang that an interviewee may have used we tried to be as meticulous to such details as possible. This is also true for occasional laughter or for a distraction by a third-party.

Our transcription process led to a thematic analysis of our interview material where we could identify common themes. These were congruent with our pre-established themes in our interview guide and thereby laid the foundation for our coding scheme that is the basis of our results (Bryman, 2011).



Our thematic analysis allowed us to select quotes from our respondents that we felt were appropriate to our study. As the interviews were in Swedish, we translated these to English with careful consideration so as not to change or affect the significance or context of the quote. We also removed colloquial terms such as “like”, “sort of”, “yeah”, and “kind of” for the purpose of clarification and simplifying the quotes.

#### 4.4 Sampling

The respondents that were included in this study were selected by using non-probability sampling. This is a method used to get in contact with a smaller group of appropriate respondents and through them gain access to additional appropriate candidates for the study (Bryman, 2011). To get in contact with these respondents we sent out emails to organizations that we had found after a search of Swedish-based voluntourist organizations via the contact information provided on their websites. Furthermore, we used non-subject sampling and snowball sampling because of the nature of this study and how the aim is to research special conditions rather than generalizing results. This means that we pre-selected candidates that we considered possessed knowledge or experiences that are of relevance for this study (Bryman, 2011). The sampling process consisted of contacting participants through Instagram, Facebook, and email. Furthermore, the two organizations that participated helped us by reaching out to previous voluntourists that were interested in participating in this study. This study includes data collected from eight participants consisting of two representatives from two organizations and six voluntourists, all of them were done as individual interviews.

The intention was to interview individuals and organizations who have been participating in voluntourism work in childcare in either Uganda, Tanzania, or Kenya. We were actively choosing participants that were involved in short-term voluntourism, which for this study, was defined as less than six months. We also chose to limit our study to Swedish voluntourists and Swedish-based organizations. This was done in relation to the aim of the study to examine the thoughts and experiences of Swedish voluntourists and their motivations for working with children.

#### 4.5 Research Quality

When assessing qualitative studies Bryman (2011) introduces two fundamental criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity as an alternative to reliability and validity. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria's; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ibid, p. 354) Credibility refers to the validation of the respondent, establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible from the perspective of the participant in the research. Semi-structured interviews and their flexibility allowed the participant to express their perspectives (Ibid.). This is also the purpose of the study, to examine the individual motivations and experiences of our respondents. Transferability is one way of creating external validity, this can also be described as generalizability. The transferability of this study is somewhat limited as the participants were chosen based on their voluntourism work in childcare and within the selected countries of Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. However, our purpose was not to conduct a study that would be possible to generalize but rather aimed at the participants personal

experiences to gain an understanding of a small-scale picture of our research topic. Dependability refers to every step of the research process being documented; this is done in the methodology section. Furthermore, the criterion of conformability refers to the need for transparency, this is so that the study can be confirmed or corroborated by others. This section also highlights the difficulty to reach full objectivity in the study, that we, as researchers have not intentionally let bias and personal values influence the performance and conclusions of the study (Ibid.).

#### 4.6 Ethics

When conducting the research for this study, ethical consideration was of utmost importance to respect the rights of the participants. For this we have based our ethical implementations on the protection requirements, based on four principles, for each individual as stated by the Swedish Research Council. The first refers to the participants being provided with enough information, which assures their right to decide the circumstances of their participation. This is followed by the second principle, consent. The third principle is confidentiality which is related to their right to be anonymous, especially in regard to ethically sensitive aspects. This is especially important for this study as the voluntourists may not be willing to refer to specific organizations or persons in relation to their experience. The fourth principle of useful claim is in regard to how the material will be used and assurance that it will not be used for commercial or other non-academic purposes (Swedish Research Council, 2018).

In accordance with this we created consent form (see Appendix 3) in which we stated the aim with the study, how we intended to use the material, our wish to record the interviews, and the individual right to full anonymity. It stated the right to discontinue their individual participation at any given point during or after an interview and that this would not lead to any negative consequences on their part. This form of consent was sent out to participants prior to their interviews and included a choice to either sign the form or give verbal consent. Seven out of the eight voluntourists gave verbal consent and the last provided a signed consent form.

#### 4.7 Adaptations to the COVID-19 Situation

The COVID-19 situation affected our study as several Swedish voluntourist organizations responded saying they were unable to participate as they had to manage and adapt to the current situation. This also impacted our snowball sampling as they were not able to refer us to their previous voluntourist participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted through online platforms such as Facetime, Skype, Facebook video calls and Microsoft Teams Meeting. The aim was to conduct as many personal, face-to-face interviews; however, the circumstances did not allow for this and therefore we chose these platforms for the wellbeing and safety of ourselves and our participants. Bryman (2011) states that conducting interviews in person or via digital platforms does not affect the outcome. We agreed and did not feel that this affected our interviews or collection of data, as all interviews were conducted like this and therefore there was a consistency.

## 5. Results

Table 1.

The result section has been divided into categories, based on the six themes of the interview guides (see Appendix 1 & 2). These themes have been modified and renamed.

Original themes	New Main themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Motivations and Intentions	Theme 1: Altruism or Self Interest	a) Voluntourist Logic
Theme 2: Relationship with the Children	Theme 2: Saving the Children	a) Teaching b) Relationship with the Children
Theme 3: Reflections	Theme 3: Dear Diary...	
Theme 4: Social Media	Theme 4: To Selfie or Not to Selfie	
Theme 5: Culture Shocks	Theme 5: The White Elephant in the Room	
Theme 6: Rules and Regulations	Theme 6: Rules and Regulations	

### 5.1 Altruism or Self-Interest

At an orphanage you get to meet children who need love and attention just as all children do. Just your presence will be strongly appreciated. (Amzungo Volontärresor, n.d.)

Travel to the wild and mighty Africa and explore life on this mighty continent. (Projects Abroad, n.d.)

Here's your opportunity to contribute with your involvement, and you are needed to make these children visible. (Volontärresor, n.d.)

These abovementioned excerpts are from the websites of some of Sweden's most prominent voluntourist organizations and provide an insight into the marketing aspect of voluntourism from larger organizations within this industry.

There were two representatives for different and smaller voluntourist organizations who participated in interviews. When discussing child-care institutions, they were both in agreement that orphanages are a last resort. One of them, Emma, reflected over the growing voluntourist industry in relation to child-care institutions:

...I've understood that some orphanages make a lot of money on volunteer operations and want there to be volunteers there all the time and I have even read an article that you...that you would rather...you don't try to reunite the children with their family but rather want the orphanage...that the children are gathered so you can accept volunteers [...] for a lot of European and American youth to come (Emma)

Barbara, representing the other voluntourist organization, described what she considered the different purposes of a voluntourism program to be, the most "obvious" of which was the difference it made to the voluntourists. She continued to say that something happens to those who embark on voluntourist trips- they become "humble" and it is an enlightening experience for them. This was reiterated by the voluntourists as there seemed to be an air of personal growth that was a conclusion following one's trip.

Throughout the interview process there was a definite ambiguity concerning reflections as to why one was motivated to participate in a voluntourist project. Donna, for example, mentioned feeling influenced by images and videos on television. Six out of the eight respondents described motivations for participating as wanting to experience a new country, or to gain perspective:

...I also felt that I wanted to put myself in such situations where you really are...Yeah well in the worst conditions ever or that you experience brutal treatments against children. Or this...extreme culture shock that you can get. So, I have always valued seeing it in person. Because that's when it...or that's when I feel that it affects me. So that's also something that I have felt that I wanted to expose myself to so to speak. (Susan)

All six of the voluntourists reported feeling a desire to participate in a voluntourist venture for quite some time, and Donna joked about almost feeling a responsibility to help others:

...And so...just doing something like this was something I've always wanted to do. For as long as I sort of...can remember I have just always thought that I wanted to do something like this. I don't really know where that comes from if it is a bit of my Messiah Complex [laughter]. 'Oh, I wanna help, I wanna save kind of'. (Donna)

When asked why they chose to travel to the chosen country, the common answer was the fascination for Africa and the African countries. For some it was more of a coincidence, as their decision was more influenced by the reputation of the organization and project rather than a preference of a specific country. Another reason that seemed to attract some was directed more to the tourist aspect of voluntourism. This metaphorical carrot was an incentive that could affect one's preference of location of the project one wanted to participate in. Whether it be Tanzania, Kenya or Uganda, there was a range of potential sights to be seen, activities to be

done or experiences to be had. Both Susan and Karen added that the reason for the significance of this when choosing their voluntourist project was for an opportunity to relax on weekends should the workweek prove to be tough work. Karen continued to say that they spent the last week of their trip vacationing in Zanzibar.

The most commonly stated reason for working with children was the understanding that children are the future and there may be the most impact to be made with children. Both Susan and David alluded to the fact that child-care was the “easiest” voluntourist projects to be accessed, that there was a larger figurative market for working within child-care.

The interviewees appeared to agree on a number of aspects, such as the urge to continue to support less-developed countries, in terms of sponsorship of a child, collecting donations for specific causes, or to repeat their commitments to such projects. Four of the voluntourists mentioned aspirations to work within projects regarding child-care again, and Rachel even has hopes of starting her own orphanage in Tanzania. Donna mentioned that she felt her trip lived up to her expectations and a newfound desire to help in a larger scope:

...I feel quite different now and more that I’ve seen sort of another part of the world and that...like oh my god. You get this, ‘Oh I want to help even more, I want to help the whole country, build up like the whole thing more on a structural level’. (Donna)

What seemed of importance to many was the aspect of what their tasks would be. There was a unanimity amongst the voluntourists for their work or contributions to have meaning and purpose. While not all felt that this was fully achieved, it remained clear that their personal interest in going was to have meaningful impact on their surroundings. Many went on to state that they felt they had accomplished this. The word “grateful” was used on numerous occasions to describe the local communities’ reception and response to them and their work.

### 5.1.1 Voluntourist Logic

While there was a certain amount of concern and scepticism exhibited by the voluntourists, four of them legitimized their endeavors with the conviction of the exchange being mutually beneficial and reciprocated:

I felt that it was an exchange from both sides that we learned from the students and the teachers and the locals in Uganda but also that there was an exchange from both sides so you don’t forget that it’s not like we come to pat their heads sort of without really learning from each other. (Anna)

Emma’s organization had a policy in place that ensured that no voluntourist was to come down to take the place of a staff member. This was in part to protect the children. While this was a conscious choice on behalf of the organization, one voluntourist, Donna, who traveled with their program felt that it made it difficult for her to find her “place”. She describes feeling a bit lost as there was “no real place that was empty, they had quite a lot of staff, they had teachers for everybody”. This made it difficult for her to know what tasks to take on. Donna goes on to express that her help might not have been all that necessary:

...But it...always felt good when I did that but it wasn't like if I hadn't done it then it wouldn't have been done because then they would have done it but that you could still sort of help with something. (Donna)

Other voluntourists were not given specific guidelines as to what roles they could take on at their placement. Several report having taught English or Math and participated in the children's education in this way. Susan describes feeling that one teacher at their placement wanted to learn new ways of teaching and thereby would observe what they were thinking and how they taught. She also describes identifying potential problems the children may have when struggling in school. "[We] discovered that one boy had dyslexia for example. He wrote everything upside down, I was just like huh? Hasn't the teacher understood this?"

All six of the voluntourists, as well as the two representatives from the organizations that were interviewed, felt that the presence and contributions of voluntourists was really needed. Two respondents describe acting as the 'eyes and ears' for organizations. Anna found that there was a sense of responsibility in ensuring that the child-care institution was running smoothly. Susan and Karen, whose placements were at the same school, state that they took on the role of project managers in a venture to build a playground for the children. Their fundraiser for this project enabled them to make such a contribution. Despite admitting to being a little in over their heads with little to no idea of what they were doing - making decisions about planning, ordering material, and the general logistics that come with building - they wanted to ensure that it would be done. Susan stated that "thinking things through, planning, is not exactly their strong suit maybe. But they build fast [laughter]. They were very good at that. They were effective with that you could say".

The narrative continued to show that these voluntourists felt they could identify potential problems that the locals could not:

...And that you were actually needed there. You weren't just a money bag, but you actually contributed with your own knowledge [...] the playground is in a big sandbox so they wouldn't hurt themselves. But then they wanted to put bricks turned upwards with the edge here [motions up], I was like but what are you thinking? They can fall and just crack their skulls. Or just...something like that, they wouldn't even reflect over. After all it was me who had to come there and make sure that they changed everything. (Susan)

Their account of this undertaking was that it left them drained and tired, as they were the first ones there in the morning and the last to leave, even working through lunch breaks.

## 5.2 Saving the Children

The underlying message of the voluntourist's testimonies is that the children are in need of help and that the voluntourists are there to meet this need. This contradicts the portrayal of children as consistently depicted as happy, grateful, and willing to learn. This perception is repeated in six testimonies, and in descriptions of their experiences with working with children

found in our collected material. Susan explains how “...you sort of saw the beauty in the filth. Or you saw so much...when you were down there, I only saw happiness and love”.

There are less references in regard to hardship that the children have experienced but when mentioned it tends to be referred to something that happened in the past and only affects them in a subtle way in the present. However, seven out of eight respondents made an account of poor living conditions, in combination with how, in spite of these conditions, the children seem very happy. This was mirrored in a statement made by Karen “So it ended with us...like this pre-school was super-duper basic. It was a lot they...they had just gotten toilets that they were so happy about”.

The narrative of the voluntourist focuses on the happiness of the children, and for many the act of giving is described as an important part of that encounter. In many stories told by the voluntourists they describe the joyful gratitude of the children for the smallest gifts such as toys and sports gear.

### 5.2.1 Teaching

Teaching is often a part of the voluntourist experience and a task many who participate in a voluntourist project highlight as a way to give back and a way to provide the children with the possibility of a better future. Many voluntourists discussed having taught English or math, and other subjects such as sports.

Regarding the education, the portrayed characteristics of the children are profoundly positive. Children are described as thankful for the opportunity to learn and obtain an education as well as eager to do so. Furthermore, the attitude of the children is expressed as positive and curious in relation to the education, as is their attitude to activities such as sports and games. This is put into contrast to Western children by several voluntourists and how they see that Western children are not as enthusiastic and interested in learning:

...they still made the best out of the situation and it was also nice to see that when they were gonna play and stuff, it really gave you this notion that Swedish children have so many things that they get bored of having, so many things and toys while there it was the fantasy that got to create the play environment... (Anna)

For many voluntourists the teaching task is often highlighted in connection with the feeling of having made a positive difference. Some voluntourists, like David, identified a problem in how they felt the children needed an outlet for their energy:

...you have to move your body to stimulate the brain and everything like that and they received higher grades that semester, all the children because they were allowed to go out and run around and then go back in the classroom and could focus so that was actually very good... (David)

### 5.2.2 Relationships with the Children

When the voluntourists explain how the experience was to meet the children for the first time all of the respondents convey an overwhelming and warm experience:

...and that they were so happy that I came. Because for them it is also that they have this collaboration and know how many Swedes who donate. That they were so grateful that someone wanted to come and visit them...(Donna)

The reiteration of words and phrases such as “like a family”, “love”, and “grateful” are common when the voluntourists describe the characteristics of the children and staff at the child-care institutions. The voluntourists describe how they took on the role of someone that gives the children affection and love. One statement made by Karen was that their role was to “just give them love, as much as possible”. This is something that all of the voluntourists focus on as they saw a lack of it:

...so the opposite would have been that they did not get this love. Because I was sort of surprised by that [...] These matrons that help them, that's not somebody that goes and hugs or talks about what they feel and stuff. There I can still feel that I was a link. There was an adult they could talk to...(Donna)

The voluntourists emphasize the reciprocity of their relationships with the children who are not viewed as passive recipients of help, but rather how the children have taught the individual new ways of thinking. They describe a stroke of insight in seeing what is really important in life and how this has led to a life-changing experience for them. In all six voluntourist's testimonies, this caring and loving relationship with the children is the most prominent feature. Barbara, a representative from one of the voluntourist organizations, also reiterated this:

Adults in Tanzania do not...they don't play with their children that much and...they are there and they are loving and stuff but they don't engage with the children, the children engage themselves. So when volunteers come and care for them, and they do soccer tournaments, go on excursions. They love that and they get something extra that is very much appreciated. And the children get some extra love so...so that is very nice. So there are different purposes with the whole thing. (Barbara)

One of the most common statements made by the voluntourists is how they feel like their time away has been such a rewarding and life-changing experience as they feel they have contributed to the children's lives, as Karen put it “For this little child...that he got to hold my hand this day was sort of...you saw the happiness in his whole face the whole day”.

The voluntourists speak about a feeling of privilege and a sense of being humbled by their experience and the chance to get to know the children then have spent time with. This implies an authentic and selfless aim to do “the right thing” by others and an honest wish to be of help, and not for the approval of others. Most voluntourists stress how they are aware that their contribution is small but important for the children and the goal to provide them with a better future. In doing so, they receive so much in return.

### 5.3 Dear Diary...

Two interviewees mentioned feeling anxious with the word voluntourism, that it may be laden with negative association today, more so than it has been in the past. While not every



voluntourist had an issue with the actual terminology, most did seem to deliberate with themselves about the concept of voluntourism as something good or bad. This topic was mainly broached in discussions about tips or suggestions for other voluntourists. Five of the respondents were quick to recommend that others should question their own intentions before participating in similar voluntourist projects:

...maybe ask yourself why do I want to do this really and also maybe accept that it is not about me wanting to do something good and I'm a good person but I absolutely am doing this with egotistical reasons and that's how people are wired and that you do things because you know that it feels good for yourself and your own feelings as well...(Anna)

Some voluntourists emphasize the wish to stay longer at their projects and acknowledge the limitations of staying for a shorter period of time. Nevertheless, they consider their input "better than nothing". Whether voluntourism is beneficial for the children involved was also a reflection that was raised. Karen questioned, prior to her travels, the effect a voluntourist expedition may have on the children in the school she was placed at. The concern was that the attachment would lead to a goodbye that would have made it much harder for her to leave and return home:

...before we left I was like...okay, we are going down as volunteers to...to do volunteer work is to help. And I was...I thought about...is it really so nice? To travel down, establish a relationship with these children, get close to them and then just leave? That's not really so nice. At the same time, you tried...you had to try to see it as we're traveling down to help them long-term and then you might have to kind of take that hit. (Karen)

Due to her hesitations regarding the impact on the children she made a conscious effort to avoid excessive attachment between herself and the children. While this was her intention, she quickly realized once present and surrounded by all the "love" that the children gave her that it was difficult to refrain from building relationships with them. She goes on to say that the attachment did not form as strongly with all children, a sentiment echoed by three other voluntourists, as "special connections" with some were unavoidable. The feeling of uncertainty surrounding the effect on the children was reiterated by Rachel, who reflected on it more after her homecoming:

...and especially now after I've been there and worked as a volunteer, I've thought a lot about this that...well, are you doing it for your own sake or are you doing it for the children? And this kind of...of course it's tough for children that there's people who come that they grow attached to and then they disappear suddenly. That people come and go all the time. (Rachel)

While there was no conclusion as to whether Karen and Rachel felt like voluntourism in itself was good or bad, the question lingered, and there was an ongoing internal debate that they still seemed to struggle with. Despite this, most voluntourists maintained the notion that the downside of not going would be that the children did not receive this love.

All eight of the respondents, including the two organization representatives, touched on and described the feelings of culture shocks, be it the growing irritation with language barriers, or

simply the strain one might experience from hard work that requires emotional investment. This was, more often than not, quickly succeeded by a proclamation of how lovely the experience was, the beauty of bonding with people, and the joy that comes with giving.

In reflecting over their experiences, it seemed commonly specified whether one's travels were done as a joint venture with one or more persons, or if one embarked on this trip alone. Three of the voluntourists traveled with others and two found accompaniment while at their placement. This unforeseen accompaniment was often due to larger voluntourist organizations that may have sent several voluntourists who overlapped each other, or living quarters shared with voluntourists at other placements. Those who went with a companion, as well as those who found social communities in place, all expressed a feeling of gratitude towards having someone to exchange thoughts with and act as an emotional sounding board. Donna went entirely on her own and describes the hardships and alienation she felt because of this. She expresses that in hindsight, she wished she would have had someone with her. It was clear that the aspect of mutual support provided by a companion was important as it often came up in discussions referencing homecomings. The hardest part for all of the voluntourists seemed to be returning home and feeling like those near and dear to them could not understand their lived experiences:

...and I also avoided talking about it because I didn't want to talk about it with someone who didn't absolutely give me 100% of their attention and really appreciated what I said because it meant so very much to me so if someone didn't show me that respect back then I just felt like no I can't...I almost started crying sometimes because I couldn't handle to talk to you if you didn't really think that this is important. That's how I felt. Because it was something that was...it was very close to my heart and it was very emotional. (Susan)

All the voluntourists, as well as the representatives from two organizations, discussed the aspect of personal growth that comes from an experience like this. Many acknowledged their newfound perspectives of life, such as learning to appreciate what they have, creating a heightened awareness of their own privilege, and a realized appreciation for their friends and family:

...then there's a lot of these clichéd things like life is short, you shouldn't take things for granted and of course that you should be happy for your near and dear ones. But it was also nice to see them make the best of the situation because they had no one, or like these children had each other as security...(Anna)

This culmination of thoughts, displayed by all six of the voluntourists, showed that they were pleased with the experience and delighted in having participated. Susan even went so far as to say that everybody should do something similar, as everybody feels good when giving. Despite the convictions of positivity towards their own experiences there remained some questions around the voluntourist industry. The internal dialogue surrounding this has been more significant for some, and not quite as much for others. Yet, the indecisiveness prevails.

## 5.4 To Selfie or Not to Selfie

When questions regarding social media and the role social media platforms play in the voluntourist experience, the feeling towards it was ambivalent. Many highlighted how it was hard to find a balance regarding social media and the photos they posted.

Few guidelines were given about social media and how to use it in a proper way by the organizations, this was a common statement among the voluntourist despite them traveling with different organizations and to different countries. The main guideline provided by the organizations was to highlight the good part of the experience:

...what they said to us the first day was that almost all the places that accept volunteers don't want it to be perceived in social media...because they were like you can post things on Instagram and stuff but it is important that you make sure to...to only give it love and simply be positive. To not give it a bad name...(Karen)

For many voluntourists decisions regarding what to post or not was at their own discretion, and therefore their responsibility to represent and construct their Global South experience. However, one organization did create a document stating some guidelines about how to take photos and how to present them. This was done due to experiences of voluntourists and visitors not always being capable of discerning what was appropriate to post in reference to privacy of the children, consent, and overall mindfulness of the surroundings. The representative of one organization, Emma explained that “some don't really have the ability to feel what is okay [...] that led to us having to write a document so that you know what is okay”:

...for example, we've had teachers [...] who work in Swedish schools where it's very strict with integrity and the spread of everything but it's almost when they come down to this school they let go of everything and it becomes okay to share and take pictures and write names and background [...] and it can be very personal things and it's just like all common sense flies out the window when you land at the airport. As if it becomes too abstract and anonymous for them and it's so far away that you don't consider that these are also school children with integrity and private lives that you have to be careful with and protect. (Emma)

David mentioned that in addition to using social media for private use it has provided a platform in promoting organizations and the work they are doing. Social media is increasingly employed for marketing purposes by organizations and by voluntourists for private fundraising with the purpose of buying toys, construction material, creating activities and starting other forms of projects on site.

Six of the respondents did raise a critical question about the use of social media in the context of voluntourism and the importance of being aware of how and what they post. A common statement among the voluntourists was that if one is vigilant about content and representation of posts, social media is a good way to highlight the organizations and projects as well as show their own experience:

...yes, the balance is hard and it is a bit about what you portray when you take the picture and that is a problem that has existed for a long time in small and big organizations and even now amongst individuals and the individual part is I guess the new thing... (David)

However, despite finding it hard to balance the pros and cons of using social media platforms, some voluntourists highlighted that it would have been impossible to raise the money they did to benefit the children and orphanages without it:

...it is the only way to get money for the projects that I have, and have done, for example to build a new floor for this orphanage and that would have never happened if I didn't use social media...(David)

The voluntourists are typically conscious about their posts on social media and how they are perceived by others and what the images represent. The way that others perceive the posts is a recurring theme, whether it refers to local staff, locals they have befriended, or friends and family back home. One voluntourist, Rachel, explained how the critical thinking in regard to social media first came after she was back home and how she, today, might view social media in a different way, in the context of voluntourism:

...I have had some divided thoughts in regards to this with posting children on social media without any form of consent really and...I have to say that, I just didn't think about it in the same way I might today. (Rachel)

Many voluntourists agree that it is difficult to find balance in using social media and how it can have both positive and negative outcomes. However, this depends greatly on how one uses it. If one would follow the few guidelines provided and act in a mindful way about the content of their posts, most voluntourists see social media as something that can bring positive change through fundraising and telling a positive story about the experience.

## 5.5 The White Elephant in the Room

Culture shocks are common when traveling to a new environment, and for this group of voluntourists it was reportedly no different. The main cultural shock discussed was the extreme poverty they witnessed. This poverty was also discussed in relation to the severe contrasts one could see. Rachel gave an example of a luxurious hotel on one side of the street and a slum area on the other. All the voluntourists mentioned doing some sort of prior research or receiving helpful information before leaving for their voluntourist project. Despite this, they all state that there was nothing that could actually prepare them for what they were about to see and feel. The shock was unavoidable. The differences described were in terms of everyday attire, food, means of transport, the ways in which to handle different situations and how the systems work. The main cultural difference that many had been warned about prior to their travels was the potential use of violence as discipline in certain schools.

Anna mentions how it was “dirty everywhere” and the intensity of this sudden exposure to a new culture. Donna reflected over the feeling of sadness that overcame her when she saw that it is “very far back in the development” and that “they haven’t come further”. She also found

it difficult to accept that so many lived under such poor conditions. This reflection was reiterated when discussing the point of view she felt the locals and the children had regarding ethnicity and skin color. Donna expressed being taken aback when the children asked her why white people were the “good” and black people were the “bad”. She also felt an irritation over how “they” were so far back in their development that they viewed her as different because of her skin color.

Being viewed as “the Other” was a sentiment echoed by all the voluntourists, as well as Emma, having once been a voluntourist herself. It was also described as one of the more difficult aspects of their experiences. While the abovementioned voluntourist expressed feeling irritation because of this - along with some others - Karen simply said that one must try to adapt to the culture as best one can, but there might be “limits” referencing the punishment that was sometimes administered in schools. There was, however, a resounding agreement that it was difficult to be white:

They looked at us in a certain way which is understandable sort of but it was this that generated so much emotion of being aliens kind of and that you really just want to do right thing and you understand that they have a different outlook on the situation. (Anna)

There was mention of being “discriminated against” and Emma, representing a voluntourist organization, described the hierarchical aspects and elevated status that comes with being white as “almost a form of reverse racism”. She elaborates that “there’s a very distorted view in Uganda of white people in general. So we work a lot with that there to erase prejudice that way”.

The majority of the interviews showed one common word that related to their culture shocks. That word was ‘Mzungu’, commonly used in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, which translates to ‘white person’. This was how they were referred to while on their travels. While most of them found this almost offensive, Karen had the understanding that it meant ‘white person who is here to help’. This seems to be a different, more positive comprehension of the term than what the others declared. Their Mzungu status meant that they were treated differently. Susan described it as being treated with “respect” and just simply being treated better. Others also mention being prioritized, for example being put in the front seat with more space in Dala-Dalas (a local form of taxi) or being offered a chair while everyone else sat on the ground. The Mzungu status also seemed to have some inconveniences as several voluntourists described the assumption often made that they, as white people, were well off:

Because where I was there was very few whites there. That’s what they saw ‘oh Mzungu’. A lot of people saw me, there I am, white and that’s like...money. Because everyone wants to sell. I get disgusted by that. Like I’m not rich. I have just spent all my money to come here. (Donna)

Despite the culture shocks the voluntourists experienced, and the many emotions that followed, there was a unanimous appreciation for the locals who could alleviate the language barrier that they often faced.

But they owned this place and he had been in the military, so he had traveled around the world a bit, even been in Sweden. The U.S. a bit [...] Even if he could speak....He knew better words than I did [laughter]. I was like... 'oh okay' [laughter]. But yeah, so he could speak good English. (Susan)

## 5.6 Rules and Regulations

The voluntourists stated that when applying to their voluntourist projects, few demands of previous experience or competence was asked of them. Some organizations did emphasize that it would be good and of benefit to the voluntourist if they did have some previous experience, but it was not a prerequisite to participate. In many instances emphasis was placed on personality rather than previous experience. When addressing the previous experience, it was done more for the sake of the voluntourist, for them to be able to handle situations that might arise or to get the best out of their experience. Recommendation of period of stay is sometimes done but can vary from two weeks to three months depending on the organization. Furthermore, some rules regarding age were present where some wanted their voluntourists to be at least twenty years of age, while the majority required them to be at least eighteen years old.

Forms of documentation prior to the trip were not commonly required of the voluntourists, as per their own testimonies. One anomaly of this was a background check to provide proof of no existing criminal record. This was something all voluntourists in this study had to provide before they could get accepted to the voluntourist project. One organization, however, requested that voluntourists provide references before getting accepted. References could include friends, previous voluntourists, family members or colleagues. Other documentation regarding rules and regulations were scarce according to the voluntourists. Five out of eight voluntourists, including Susan, spoke about the difference in rules and regulation when on site than the information they had received beforehand. She states, "it is much stricter on the website than it is on site".

A document that acts as a sort of Code of Conduct is provided to the voluntourists by one organization. It contained information about what to expect, how to handle some situations, how to dress and how to act on site. It was a document not based on international guidelines, but rather specialized after each placement. This was a common similarity regardless of the placement or organization, as they were designed to fit one placement and did not base information on international standards, but rather their own experience. Therefore, the rules and regulations vary from voluntourists to voluntourists. Regulations and guidelines were underlined by the representative Emma from one organization that the role of a voluntourist should not take the place of an employee:

...but not that just anybody can come and just hold lessons at the school because these teachers who work at (organizations name) are after all university educated teachers and then it can be very strange and tricky if a high school student comes to (organization's name) and suddenly takes over lessons. (Emma)

## 6. Discussion

In this section, the findings of this study will be discussed through a postcolonial and neocolonial lens. Previous research will be used to further analyze the recounts of the respondents. Subcategories were chosen based on what seemed relevant and appropriate to clearly discuss the findings from the thematic analysis within the framework of voluntourism research. These themes are made up of the White Savior Complex, Explore Without Exploiting, Representing the Global South, and The Rights of The Child.

### 6.1 White Savior Complex

The White Savior Complex within the context of this study refers to the self-serving aspects of voluntourism. The Western assumption of a duty to pass on one's idea of an exceptional way of living to the Global South is problematic in and of itself but is also perpetuated as a business industry. Marketing within this industry has, perhaps unwittingly, taken on a role of maintaining colonialist views under the guise of altruism. In selling voluntourist experiences large organizations commercialize the notion that one's presence is "needed to make these children visible" (Volontärresor, n.d.) or that one is essential in providing children in the Global South "love and attention" (Amzungo Volontärresor, n.d.). Such rhetoric in marketing legitimizes the aspect of the White Savior Complex, known as poverty porn or disaster pornography. This marketing has influenced our respondents as they reiterate this through statements implying that the children do not receive love, attention, and visibility these already.

Prior research substantiates the popularity of Africa as a voluntourist destination (Mostafanezhad, 2013), as seen through marketing strategies perpetuating the idea of a "wild and mighty Africa" (Projects Abroad, n.d.). References to "Africa" illustrates the wide generalizations of a continent that is often stripped of the complex and multi-faceted dimensions of each individual country within this continent. Yet, this generalization was often used when voluntourists were describing their choice of destination for their voluntourist experience. We must not underestimate the influence of celebrity humanitarianism and the role it plays in the growth of the voluntourist industry and the popularity of Africa. Mostafanezhad (2013) examines this as an alternative incentive that is depicted in mainstream media as an "alternative consumer product". Donna mentions media's influence on her decision to participate, signifying the part media can play in contributing to the growth of this industry.

An excerpt of Teju Cole's concretization of the ambiguous White Savior Complex states that White Saviorism is not about justice, rather about "having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" (Cole, 2012). This is exemplified through the evident sentimentalities which the voluntourists exhibit. Susan describes an aspiration in wanting to expose herself to the "worst conditions ever" or "experience brutal treatments against children" as this is when she feels she is affected. This statement could be considered the embodiment of the abovementioned excerpt and deeply problematic. This could also be argued to be the very height of privilege - feeling an entitlement to witness other's suffering for the sake of one's own personal growth. It also indicates that her motivations for participating were largely based

on her own self-interest, not uncommon in younger voluntourists (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

There is a resounding echo of personal growth followed by a newfound awakening and perspective of appreciating what one has, those near and dear and not taking things for granted. Donna jokes about her reason for participating as stemming from her Messiah Complex. While it would be unfair to interpret this comment without acknowledging the laughter that ensued, it does indicate a problematic perspective exhibited by not just Donna, but some of the other voluntourists as well. The undertaking of an assumed responsibility in assisting others, however well-intentioned it may be, can also be a perilous venture. Previous research has alluded to good intentions not being enough and often aggressive in nature, yet that people do not often like to be questioned regarding their intentions (Mostafanezhad, 2014).

Another proclamation made by Donna was a subsequent feeling of wanting to help more, “help the whole country, build up like the whole thing more on a structural level”. Voluntourist projects are for the most part short-term and rather small acts of charity that often do not take into account larger issues on a systematic level or the historical background that has laid the foundation for current circumstances in developing countries. As mentioned in previous research, there are social ills in voluntourists own communities that could be tended to rather than traveling to another country to “give back” (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017).

Yet another aspect of white saviorism, is the judgement based on Western standards and beliefs of how things “should” be. This projection onto the Global South is especially damaging as it upholds the narrative that the people of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, in this case, are in need of their help. Western individuals are given the opportunity to insert themselves in an industry of privatized development, thus aiding in creating neocolonialist tendencies. Susan describes that when building a playground for the school she was placed at her way of thinking was needed as “they wouldn’t even reflect over” placing bricks a certain way to avoid the kids falling and cracking their skulls. “It was me who had to come there and make sure they changed everything”. This quote reveals an assumption that her ideas and ways of thinking are superior. While she acknowledges that “they build fast”, she does so following an almost condescending remark about how thinking things through and planning are “not exactly their strong suit”. In addition to this, she states that she discovered and identified that one pupil suffered from dyslexia and questioned why the teacher had not discovered this sooner. Through these statements, she indirectly implies that her presence is needed as the people who have been running this school for years, without her four-week trip, have failed to do things according to what she considers to be the right way. It may also be of significance to note that Susan admits to not having - and not being required to have - the competence to manage a project such as building a playground, not much experience in working with children, and no relevant educational background to substantiate her claim of diagnosing a child with dyslexia. If voluntourists attribute themselves as in possession of skills that might contribute in a particular way, or expertise, the knowledge of the local community is disregarded (Hammersley, 2014). While her reasoning alludes to an altruistic aspect of intentions, upon closer inspection it



simply allows her to justify her presence as being needed and useful, thus demonstrating egotistical motivations.

Altruism in combination with benefits for oneself has been referred to as “reciprocal altruism” (Guttentag, 2009) and this seems to be the asserted description that many voluntourists portray in defending their trips as mutually beneficial, and based on a mutual exchange between themselves and the children. Prior to her trip, Karen struggled with the idea that the children may grow attached to them and then they just leave, that this might not be such a “nice” thing to do. While this reflection is of absolute relevance and indicates a critical thought process, she follows it up by saying “you might have to kind of take that hit”. This can only be likened to selfish intentions as the children are the ones who will suffer from this, but she places her own aspirations of traveling and participation in a voluntourist project over the needs of the children. This could be an example of white privilege that is demonstrated, as the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) definition refers to white people having certain advantages in society that others do not have.

## 6.2 Explore without Exploiting

Globalization has paved the way for travel and exploration of new countries and cultures. It has also paved the way for voluntourist organizations to capitalize off of the growing tourist industry and the privatization of the developmental field (McGloin & Georgeau, 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2013). Perhaps one understanding of voluntourism should be in relation to a transaction between a paying customer and those providing that service. By commoditizing a voluntourism experience, the individual, who pays for this endeavor, theoretically becomes a customer. With this position there may be expectations.

Pastran (2014) discusses that diverse motivations for voluntourism are largely based on “helping, where there is a need”, “giving back”, and “exploring new cultures”. As already touched upon, motivations of voluntourists - good-intentioned and altruistic as they may be - will have an egotistical and self-serving element (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Anna alludes to this by explaining “that's how people are wired” and “you do things because you know that it feels good for yourself”. Susan urges everybody to do something similar as giving makes everybody feel good. The question remains, however, at whose expense? The exploitation of the “host” communities, and especially the children, is an inevitable downfall of voluntourism as is today. Torres (2017) discusses the creation of a market for voluntourism based on unnecessary and unsolicited charity. Pastran (2014) questions whether voluntourism can truly be used to morph and progress development, or if it simply remains too close to colonial history.

Exploring new countries can be extremely beneficial for the “guest” and the “host” if there is a mutual exchange. One can travel, be exposed to new countries, learn about and appreciate new cultures without the exploitative aspects that have a tendency to be associated with voluntourism. One such example of exploitative tendencies is the use of social media. Emma, working for an organization with a voluntourist operation, mentions the claim to integrity and privacy that children in Sweden have and how some voluntourists do not apply or extend this

sentiment to children in the Global South. In an article written for the Atlantic as a follow-up to his Twitter rant where the conceptualization of the White Savior Complex came to fruition, Teju Cole (2012) states that “if we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement”.

An example of direct exploitation is the use of voluntourist expeditions to upgrade one’s CV. This has, disturbingly, been used as a marketing strategy to incentivize potential voluntourists, by marketing it as helpful to one’s future career (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). In other words, the short-term minor act of charity, which voluntourism often is, remains to the detriment of local communities in Uganda, Tanzania or Kenya who are temporarily or permanently affected.

One could argue that both the voluntourist and the “host” community are being exploited by the capitalist operations the voluntourism industry has built. The former, exploited for monetary gain - as it is estimated as an annual 2.6 billion dollar industry (Save The Children, 2017) - and the latter, for being posited as in need of help to lure those who have the privilege of being able to pay for such an experience. In doing so, large voluntourist organizations employ a selfish utilization of vulnerable children to market these unwarranted endeavors under the guise of a crucial responsibility and a life-changing experience. Voluntourism is marketed towards individuals, selling the idea that they can make long-lasting change, without consideration for the unequal power structures that are being upheld in doing so. Nevertheless, this culture of exploitation has the most impact on the children, who are more often than not the targets of voluntourist projects, vulnerable, and are those who stand to lose the most from the maintenance of people coming in and out of their lives.

### 6.3 Representing the Global South

As shown in the result, the voluntourists portray the children as happy and grateful. While this is well-meaning, it is also stereotypical. This narrative could be considered uncomplicated and positive, but instead has parallels to a postcolonial discourse that can be traced back to the happy-go-lucky primitive (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). This reinforces existing cultural stereotypes and perpetuates us and them and the Other, arguing the superiority of the Westerner (Said, 1978).

In the context of voluntouring it is important to acknowledge and understand the uneven distribution of power, and that good intentions are not enough to ignore these power dynamics. It is vital to understand one’s own role and position within this context. An example of this can be shown through the voluntourist’s testimonies of teaching English without a teaching background or managing projects without any leadership or management background or experience.

Othring has been mentioned as a way to legitimize the unequal world order and the assumed responsibility of some to care for others who are “less developed”. While this process of Othring is of great significance when analyzing the systematic power dynamics that has led to this, no voluntourists seemed to reflect on this aspect as part of a greater picture rather on an

individual level. This can be shown through reflections over feeling Othered themselves as Anna explains feeling like an alien and says that it is “understandable”.

The power-relations are highlighted through the construction of subjects and objects in the statements of the voluntourists. Through this narrative the voluntourist is constructed as the active subject, this includes the power to describe and thereby construct and define reality, while the children are reduced to objects of care (Holmberg, 2014). The discourse of making a difference for those without opportunity and/or without a voice is problematic at its core for a variety of reasons, one of which is the construction of the voiceless Other. This results in host communities being denied their agency as it creates an image of a helpless Other in the need of saving and the voluntourist acting as this savior. Furthermore, voluntourists acting as “the voice”, is based on a neocolonial notion that the helpless Other are unable to speak for themselves - nor should they, but rather that a Western voluntourist should speak for them and embody their space on their behalf (Pastran, 2014). Through our interviews we can see a tendency of this as the voluntourists mention using their social medias to share their experiences and also to market their fundraising endeavors to contribute to the local communities or the children.

A postcolonial approach can be used to analyse voluntourism and critique and deconstruct the discourse behind the well-meaning voluntourist. Part of the discourse that brings voluntourists to developing countries in the aim to help is underpinned by a postcolonial assumption that an unskilled and inexperienced Westerner can and should bring development to the Global South. This is made evident as none of the voluntourists had a relevant educational background when engaging in these endeavors. The voluntourists participated in these projects abroad with little to no knowledge of the local contexts such as language, culture, or social norms. To start confronting these structural problems, voluntourist organizations and individual voluntourists must be more critical of their own discourse and challenge their own perspectives to avoid inadvertently reproducing a neocolonial construction of Western superiority (Pastran, 2014). This unequal relationship cannot be amended in the short time frame that the voluntourist usually venture. In the words of McGhee (quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 49) “this relationship in itself shatters any notion of human emancipation, and in fact can perpetuate inequality”.

Mostafanezhad (2013) references the portrayal of the Third World child as the perfect combination of poor while still being happy and grateful which creates the optimal marketable resource, a commodity for voluntourist agencies and organizations. This representation of the child is dualistic in its core and is a key factor in making the voluntourist experience so attractive. If the representation of the children were one-dimensional - either as suffering and poor or as grateful and happy - it would be more difficult to package the voluntourist experience as life-changing and highly rewarding. Therefore, the portrayal of the child as needy but equally appreciative of the help the voluntourist offers constructs a narrative that by spending time and giving affection to the children it is possible for individuals to make a positive impact in the lives of the children (*Ibid.*). Donna refers to her own role as an adult that the children could talk to as she viewed the relationship that the children had with the adults did not include hugs and talking. Thus, her testimony centers on her participation as making a positive change

in the lives of the children. This statement suggests that the child does not have anyone else to rely on. This part of the discourse is important as it works to legitimize the relationship between the voluntourist and the child. It provides the individual voluntourist with an emotional argument as to why their help is truly needed (Holmberg, 2014). Furthermore, researchers within the field argue that the perception of the authentic and reciprocal relationship between the voluntourist and the innocent children works to normalize the unequal relationship. Mostafanezhad (2014) further highlights how this “genuine” relationship with the children is interpreted as a depoliticized and individual issue. If the negative connotations often associated with children of the Global South were instead interpreted as a structural issue, individual solutions such as voluntourists would not provide such a convincing narrative (Holmberg, 2014).

### 6.3.1 Social Media

The use of social media in the voluntourism industry is ubiquitous. People who have traveled to developing countries to voluntour have used photographs where the narrative is framed with them as the “hero” (Wearing, 2018; Sin & He, 2018). Thus, social media creates space for credit and praise to be bestowed upon, and centered around, those who participate in these minor acts of charity. The use of images of children in child-care institutions, also referred to as poverty porn or disaster pornography, are one of the many problematic aspects of voluntourism. Previous research has discussed whether there is more focus on creating a nice feed of pictures on one’s social media accounts and more concern with perceptions of themselves, rather than representing a reality from the perspective of the local communities. An aspect of posting these pictures is also self-serving, much like the common reasons for participating in the first place. It is almost as if social media has become a platform to showcase one’s good deeds.

Polman (2010) argues that there are “donor darlings”; popular crises that attract substantial money and international attention. Testimonies from David and other voluntourists in this study reinforce this argument by highlighting the importance of social media to gain funds for projects and how it has to be attractive to the viewer. Therefore, one can argue that “Aid is a lottery” won off the back of the images of the suffering child (Ibid.). Thus, the portrayal of the needy and innocent child is used by organizations, and further conveyed by the voluntourists, to attract funding and raise awareness. Manzo (2008) explains how this gives a false impression that the child is dependent on external help, in this case from the voluntourist, and those who contribute to their fundraisers, for care and protection.

Scholars have identified that certain constructions of images of the suffering child has consequences. Humanitarian intervention is based on stories of social suffering, such as the “Third World child” that has become a predominant object of compassion. This compassion, and the aim to provide help to those less fortunate, is often expressed through social media platforms. These platforms allow voluntourists to, not only document their travels, but also provide their online audience with what they have done and achieved. Few guidelines are provided by organizations, and voluntourists are free to construct their experience as they see

fit. For instance, Karen explained that the only guideline they were given was to use social media to portray love and positivity. As seen in other testimonies by voluntourists, asking for consent was one guideline provided to most of them, that in order to photograph children they had to get their consent beforehand.

Article 16 of The Convention of The Rights of The Child states the Right to Privacy and Respect for Confidentiality. This includes the notion of consent, that the children should have control over the spreading of their personal information (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). However, in conjunction with a postcolonial approach it is vital to critically reflect on the previously mentioned inequality within power dynamics and that the child may lack real agency to give consent.

Some of the respondents showed a sense of heightened awareness regarding social media and photographic practices. David, for example highlighted the importance of how you portray and represent individuals. This discourse was echoed by Rachel, who explained reasoning differently about social media posts now than she did prior to her travels as a voluntourist, and how she might view social media in the context of voluntourism in a different way today. Due to the lack of guidelines and supervision the question remains if the representation of the Global South by voluntourists is responsible at all. This is not to argue that the voluntourists' experiences were not real or valid. However, when voluntourists are responsible for the representation of the Global South on their social media, difficult questions have to be asked, such as whether voluntourists simply favour aesthetics and self-celebratory aspects (Holmberg, 2014).

#### 6.4 Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provide international standards for the protection of children. In reference to the phenomenon of voluntourism, Article 27 is of relevance as it states that children have the right to a “standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Previous research has shown that a child’s psychological development is affected when placed in institutional care and that they can develop attachment issues (Johnson, Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2006). This can be exacerbated when they are continually exposed to voluntourists coming and going, which our respondents had reflected on. This is also true for child-care voluntourist projects within school settings.

Family-based care, kinship care and foster care are to be primarily explored before placing children in institutional care. Both Barbara and Emma, as representatives of voluntourist organizations, were adamant that orphanages were a last resort. Emma expressed her disapproval of orphanages that capitalize off gathering children for European and American youth to come as voluntourists, instead of trying to reunite children with their families.

According to the CRC General Comment No. 5, children in institutional care have the right to be cared for by trained professionals (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). In addition to this, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of Agenda 2030 seeks to ensure a quality

education for all children” (United Nations, 2015). Some voluntourists refer to having participated in the teaching aspects while at their placements. This goes against the abovementioned SDG guidelines and the CRC, as they are unqualified and not trained professionals within the field of teaching.

This issue of the right to be cared for by trained professionals is indirectly raised in the testimonies of the voluntourists and by the representatives of the organizations. Emma emphasizes the importance of children not getting too attached to voluntourists and therefore having staff members that they can rely on, such as university-educated teachers and matrons who care for the children. However, simultaneously the emphasis is put on how the most important role of the voluntourist is to provide the children with “love and affection”. This is pointed out as the most important feature of the voluntourist by several respondents and is therefore a contradiction of not wanting the children to get too attached to the voluntourists. This depiction of the relationship forged between the voluntourist and the children seeks to legitimize voluntourism in its essence as it implies that the children would suffer without them. Child rights organizations argue that this is rather seen as proof of indiscriminate friendliness that can instead result in the feeling of repeated abandonment for the children because of the constant flow of short-term voluntourists (Torres, 2017).

However, at first voluntourism might not imply children rights violations; on the contrary, the act of voluntourists is fundamentally meant as an act to contribute to help improve the life of the children in disadvantaged situations and communities. However, good intentions are not enough, therefore it is vital to explore the dynamic relations between the charitable intentions and the international standards of the rights of the child and their right to protection (Torres, 2017).

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to contextualize the accounts of the voluntourists that have participated in voluntourist projects in order to examine how their discourse relates to a bigger perspective, that has contributed and enabled the phenomenon of voluntourism. Furthermore, this study sought to explore how these reasons can be understood and analysed within the framework of voluntourism research.

This study has argued how the phenomenon of voluntourism should be critically analyzed against the backdrop of colonial history. There are inherent limitations of voluntourism work used as a tool for development in the Global South. Voluntourism in this study has been analyzed through a postcolonial as well as a neocolonial perspective to investigate how some development discourses have prevailed since the end of colonialism, but also taken new forms, as in voluntourism discourses.

The findings of this study have indicated that a majority of the respondent voluntourists were aware of the positive outcomes and consequences that voluntourism can have. However, some were more likely to highlight potential negative outcomes as well as the limitations of using voluntourism as a tool for development, while others still felt that their endeavor was

legitimized and essential. Findings of this study show that the discussions about voluntourism are evolving into a more critical perspective of motivations. Hopefully, this phenomenon will be further explored with a narrow centering of the voluntourism industry and the systemic issues that play a larger role, rather than just that of individuals who are under the impression that they are “doing their part”.

By examining the thoughts and experiences of the voluntourists, this study has focused on the reasons for participating in voluntourism and how these narrations can be understood and critically analyzed within the larger framework of the voluntourist industry and its post- and neocolonial connotations.

This study has found that the voluntourists had good intentions, and the responsibility and criticism surrounding voluntourism cannot solely be placed on, or directed at, individuals. These voluntourists are merely participating in a system that has been built on a colonial heritage that has always, and still does, benefit them. To conclude this study, we have found that intent does not always trump impact.

## 8. Future Research

Based on the findings in previous research, as well as the results, a need for additional research can be identified about the risks pertaining to the voluntourism industry. This industry can have a negative impact on developing countries and contribute to the exploitation of vulnerable children. Further research into the voluntourism industry, and its reproduction of post- and neocolonial attitudes towards people in developing countries, is therefore significant in creating positive change. This phenomenon should also be further discussed in relation to the privatization of development work and power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South.

An area of future research that would be of importance is to conduct research on the parents and relatives of the children who are placed in institutional care settings and examine potential alternatives that would allow for them to care and provide for the children. Perhaps to retract focus on Westerners, and placing blame, research could focus on host communities that are directly affected by the growth of the voluntourism industry. Thus, further research is welcome and necessary to investigate how this phenomenon originated, has been maintained, and how we can work to do better.

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## Appendix 1.

### **Interview guide for organizations**

- In which countries do you offer the volunteer programs? How long do most volunteers stay?
- What kind of volunteer projects are you involved in within child-care? Within these projects, what are some of the tasks volunteers participate in?
- Are there any universal guidelines organizations like yours have to follow? If no, do you have internal guidelines and regulations you follow?
- Is there a recruitment process?
- Are there any requirements of the volunteers? Age, education, skills?
- What is the preparation process for a volunteer? (Does the organization have a set of rules/regulations/guidelines or a code of conduct/code of ethics?) (social media, blogs, etc.)
- Do you prepare the volunteers for the potential cultural clash that may happen? (being the “other”) How so?
- What does your participation and collaboration look like within the country you are active in? (Do you feel that this relationship is mutually beneficial for you and the host country?)
- Is there an evaluation process implemented to follow the progress and/or effect that child-care volunteer programs may have?
- There is a lot of new criticism to the concept of voluntourism, is this something you’ve reflected on? (has this had some sort of impact on your work or the volunteers who apply?)

## Appendix 2.

### Interview guide for voluntourists

- When did you travel as a volunteer? And where did you go? How long were you there for?
- How did you find out about the organization and their program? Why did you pick this specific one? Did you know what country you wanted to volunteer in and how did you come to make this decision?
- What made you want to volunteer? And what made you want to do so with children specifically?
- What did your trip cost? What was included in the price? Do you know how the money you paid was distributed (housing, food, orphanage)?
- What were your main tasks? Were you allowed to pick an area of interest beforehand?
- Were you provided with guidelines or rules to follow while there? (sociala medier, bloggare)
- Were there any requirements to be able to participate?
- Did you receive some form of prior knowledge about the language, culture, or tasks relevant to your trip before leaving? Did you do any research of your own?
- Was there a feeling of being “the other” in this new environment? How was your experience with that? (feelings, dealing with it)
- What were your expectations going into this? Did you feel that they were met? (How so?)
- What were your core lessons from this experience?
- How did you interact with the children? Can you give us an insight into the relationship you created with them?
- Do you feel like you were given adequate information before and during your trip? Any suggestions for future voluntourists?

## Appendix 3.

### Consent Form



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*School of Education and  
Communication*

The purpose of the following interview is to collect empirical data for a Bachelor's thesis by Elin Hultman and Felicia Lanevik, students at Jönköping University. This study intends to examine the phenomenon of voluntourism.

The duration of the interview is estimated to take 45-60 minutes. If consent is given, the interview will be digitally recorded in addition to written documentation. The collected data from the interviews will be handled with confidentiality and anonymity, should you, as the interviewee, request this.

The collected interview material will solely be used for the purpose of this Bachelor's thesis and will not be used for any purpose outside of this specific context. As a respondent you have the right to terminate the interview at any time without having to provide an explanation. It is fully within your rights to do so, should you wish to.

Your participation in this interview process is optional, but your experiences and opinions will be valuable to this study about voluntourism. Thank you for your contribution and participation!

*I hereby verify that I have received sufficient information about my contribution and consent to participating.*

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*Name and location*

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*Respondent's signature:*